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Journeying, Adaptation, and Translation:  
*Topeng Cirebon* at the Margins

by

Laurie Margot Ross

B.A. (New York University) 2001

M.A. (New York University) 2002

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Joanna Williams, Chair

Professor Penelope Edwards

Professor Mel Gordon

Professor Kathy Foley

Fall 2009

Journeying, Adaptation, and Translation:  
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by

Laurie Margot Ross

## Abstract

Journeying, Adaptation, and Translation:  
*Topeng Cirebon* at the Margins

by

Laurie Margot Ross

Doctor of Philosophy in South and Southeast Asian Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Joanna Williams, Chair

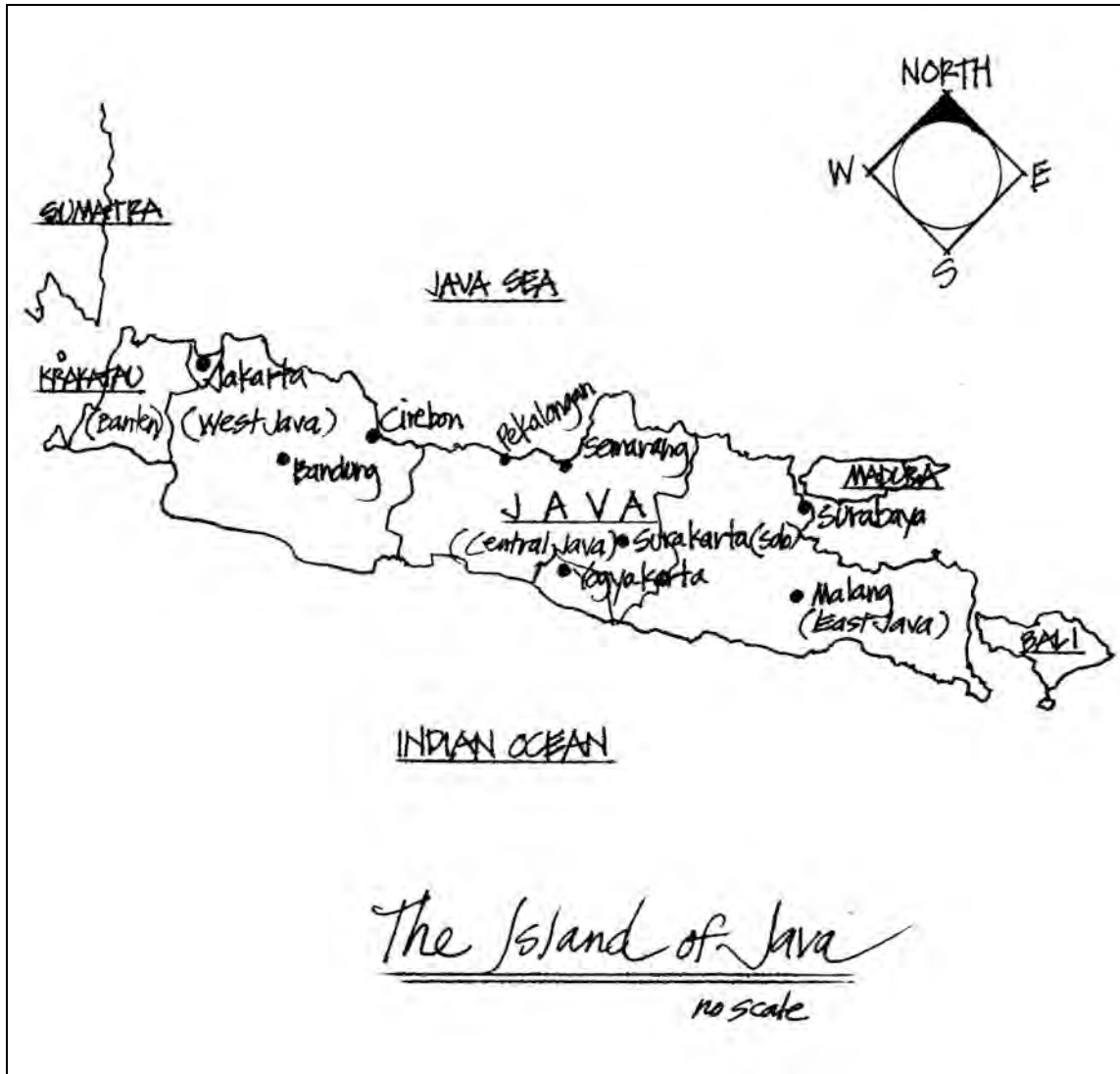
This dissertation concerns *topeng Cirebon*, an old, virtuosic masked dance that once flourished along Java's northwest coast, and the realities of today. It asks how the Cirebonese people reconcile the growing prevalence of conservative Islam in the region with the idea of public performance. The orthodox Muslim world's doctrinal injunctions on human representation have only recently impacted this gendered form, in which women may wear masks and portray male and female characters. Islam's resurgence has inspired a debate, with artists now questioning their allegiance to a form seemingly at odds with their faith. Some dancers have modified their costumes to suggest conformity with local views of piety. This seemingly radical shift, in fact, is consonant with *topeng's* long history of adapting to political and religious tensions that are traceable to Dutch hegemony in the region and later fortified under Indonesia's first two presidents, Sukarno and Soeharto. The eventual ban on itinerant performance in the region after

1965 depleted *topeng* of much of its interiority, while forging a secular landscape where it came to symbolize Indonesian nationalist identity, domestically and abroad. I argue that *topeng*'s sacred topography hinges on the master performer's fine-tuned capacity to translate and adapt to her surroundings, even when the conditions are inhospitable. The material culture associated with *topeng* is central to the story. *Topeng*'s longevity has been dependent upon its geographical and functional mobility. While this form has long been associated with ritual in the Cirebonese imaginary, the mask's trajectory in Java has enjoyed an even longer affiliation as a popular entertainment. This accessibility made the mask multivalent, as an entertainment and an instrument of proselytizing during conversions to Islam in sixteenth century Java. How this translation occurred and how it is understood today is the basis of this study.

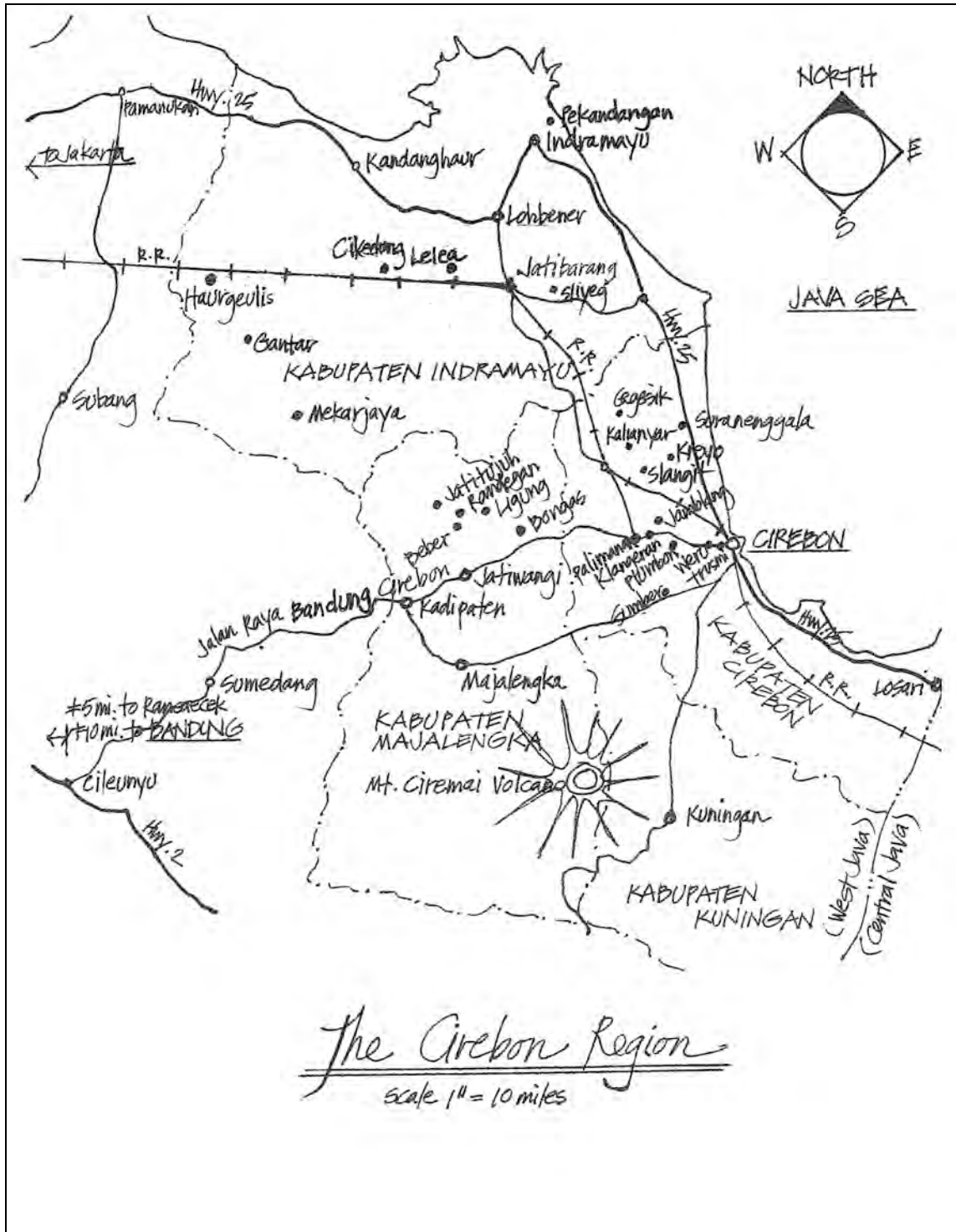
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## DEDICATION

*Sheldon Ross (1925-2000)*

*Robert Ross (1954-2005)*

*Dasih (nee Nesih) (d.1985)*

I dedicate this work to three immense souls: my father, my brother, and my guru. Shelly taught me to reach for the stars, but never at the expense of others. Robert modeled, by the example of his all-too-brief and fragile life, the importance of finding a home in our vulnerable bodies. Dasih demonstrated that human kindness is all it's cracked up to be. She also taught me that some secrets are worth sharing.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first encounter with *topeng Cirebon* was on a warm summer night in 1976 in Berkeley, when the American dancer Pamela Rogers-Aquiniga (nee Rogers) gave a *topeng* performance. I was struck by three things during that performance: the psychological complexity of the characters; a woman was wearing masks and portraying male characters (an impossibility in Balinese *topeng* and many other Asian theatre modalities); and, finally, I discovered that *topeng* dancers enter their prime during mid-life and, if able, continue dancing well into old age – an impossibility in ballet, and rare in modern dance. That these three factors could coexist in a religion which many believe proscribes human representation was stunning. It still is.

I wish to express my deep gratitude to artists, friends, and colleagues in Indonesia who welcomed me in their homes and shared the intimate details of their lives with me. Although I cannot mention each one here, the reader will become acquainted with them in the chapters that follow.

Many durable bonds were forged during my initial studies in Indonesia many years ago. I had only the name and address of one person, the Sundanese choreographer, Enoch Atmadibrata. I showed up on his doorstep unannounced. He opened the door, invited me in, informed me I needed a sponsor in Indonesia if I planned to stay more than three months, and volunteered on the spot. It was a *real* meeting. He arranged for me to study with his former teacher, *dalang topeng* Dasih (nee Nesih, d.1985). She was then approaching age seventy and infirm. We shared her bedroom at Enoch's home. Each night before turning in, Dasih sat at the edge of her bed and, facing mine, she

clutched her *tasbih*<sup>1</sup> and silently prayed. It filled me up completely. Dasih, who died in 1985, is the heart and soul of this dissertation; Enoch is my beacon who, at eighty-one, continues to inquire, gently nudge, and provoke me.

My 2005-2006 stay in Indonesia was enriched by my interactions with artists and scholars: Tursini, Sukarta, Merah, Inah, Erih, Miska, Astori, Inu, Rasinah, Sutini, Noor Anani, Ishak Herdjan, Nawi, Sujana Priya, Rawita, Endo Suanda, Toto Amsar Suanda, the late Maman Suryaaaimadja, T. D. Sudjana, Elang Djoni, Mamat, W. S. Rendra, Sonny Sumarsono, Toto Sudarto, Risyani, Jakob Sumardjo, Gerson Poyk, and my *topeng* “sibling,” Didik Nini Thowok.

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*Kyai Haji Abdul Razak* made space at his *pesantren* for a *real* meeting to occur.

My intrepid assistants and friends, Waryo and Rafan Saffari Hasyim (Opan), combined spiritual, aesthetic, and intellectual rigor to a rare degree.

To my teachers who are now gone. Their generosity and their lessons are omnipresent in the pages that follow: Sujana Arja (d.2006), Kalim (d. 2009), Kandeg, Suhari (d.2007) and Abah Acip (d.2005).

---

<sup>1</sup> A kind of rosary, wherein the Divine names are recounted.

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I have benefited greatly from my professors at the University of California, Berkeley. The members of my dissertation committee have enriched my thinking throughout this study and my development as a scholar. My dissertation chair, Joanna Williams, demonstrated in her understated, yet profound, way how the visual informs performance and vice-versa. Her vast knowledge of material culture and her kindness has been a great gift. Penny Edwards is an impressive force who came late to this project with tremendous brio, curiosity, warmth, and insight. Her knowledge of materiality,

performance, and the colonial imagination brought a unique angle to this process, including gently pressing me to rethink some of my assumptions. Kathy Foley, whom I first met in West Java a blue moon ago, has been a most present mentor at every stage of this process, expanding my knowledge of West Javanese arts ten-fold; Mel Gordon's expertise in actor training techniques is matched by his deep curiosity. He instilled in me the importance of discovery, of celebrating the marvelous.

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The most inclusive and inspired way to understand what makes Indonesia tick is to live with an Indonesian family, especially one as loving and effusive as my host family in Cirebon: Agus Jaman, Ellih and their splendid children, Omi and Atik. *Aku kangen.*

The love and support of family carry me through. Nancy Shalit, Larry Shalit, and Phyllis Ross believed in me always. Their trust sustains me.

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I have received superb guidance over the course of this project. Any errors in this dissertation are mine and mine alone.

## INTRODUCTION

Before embarking on my fieldwork in 2005, I planned to examine how religious and political tensions interfaced with *topeng*'s transmission. However, one of the simultaneously baffling and exquisite truths about fieldwork is that it is a circuitous journey. My purpose here, discovered two years after returning from the field, has been to understand the clash between public policy, religion, and the profundity of *topeng*. The shifting part of the triad is that *dalang topeng* have not been passive, but proactive players. Indeed, they have been highly adaptive in the face of famines, epidemics, colonial hegemony, violence and mass murder, economic downfalls, and rebuilding. All of these themes converge at the nexus of mobility (or its polar opposite: stasis). How ideas circulate is central to the story. Against the backdrop of *topeng*'s material culture, I piece this continuous anxiety about circulation into a most unlikely story: how a community of poor farmers who trace their lineage to a Sufi saint (*wali*) hold on tenaciously to their craft and their relationship to God.<sup>2</sup>

Live performance has historically served as a barometer of the zeitgeist. In order to understand *topeng* today, it must be examined retrospectively. Islamic contributions to art in the Islamicate world are often rationalized as a way of making animism palatable, rather than as a meaningful influence or synthesis of spirit worship. *Dalang topeng* (mask dancers of pedigree), however, understand *topeng Cirebon* to be grounded in mystical Islam. I have found considerable evidence to support the *dalangs*' claim.

It is important to note that the terms "Sufi" and "Sufism" are unknown to most *dalang topeng*. The destruction of authentic Sufi networks of transmission by the

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix I for the late *dalang topeng* Sujana Arja's version of the history of *topeng Cirebon*.

Wahhabis in the two Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina in the early nineteenth century resulted in regional isolation and the indigenization of practices among Sufi Muslims in Southeast Asia. Malays began to borrow from and influence one another and, in so doing, created indigenous practices.<sup>3</sup>

The term “Sufi” was further diminished during Indonesia’s reformist Islamic organization, Muhammadiyah’s heyday of influence in the 1920s and 1930s. At this time, “Sufism” was established in the public discourse as a negative term linked with “traditional” Islam, chiefly, *Nahdlatul Islam (NU)*. Muhammadiyah was less successful at making the same charge stick with the terms *tarekat*<sup>4</sup> and *tasawuf*,<sup>5</sup> whose tendrils extend too deeply into orthodox Islam as designations for mystical practices and philosophy.<sup>6</sup> There is precedence, thus, for understanding many of the mystical practices of *dalang topeng* in Cirebon as Sufistic, although *tarekat* or *tasawuf* are the terms attached to those practices and are often employed interchangeably. This connection to Sufism is supported by the fact that many *dalang* connect *topeng* philosophy to the prominent local mystic, often mentioned as one of the nine mystic apostles, or friends of God (*walisanga*) who introduced Islam to Java, *Seh Siti Jenar*. Due to this linguistic shift, I use the terms *tasawuf* and *tarekat* when discussing contemporary *topeng* and local mystical Islamic philosophy. The term “Sufi,” in contrast, is employed when discussing pan-Islamic and pre-twentieth century Cirebon-Javanese mysticism.

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<sup>3</sup> Hamid Algar, pers. comm., 21 April 2009. The Balkans underwent similar indigenization during this time. As a result of this blending, it is often the case that the practices of a given order are not in sync with the philosophy of its eponym. See, too, James L. Peacock. *Purifying the Faith: The Muhammadiyah Movement in Indonesian Islam*, (Bejamin/Cummings Publishing Co.: Menlo Park, 1978): 5

<sup>4</sup> *Tarekat* has two meanings: first it signifies the Sufi path or journey. The second meaning corresponds to a Sufi order.

<sup>5</sup> Mysticism in Java.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Stange, pers. comm., 27 June 2009.

Other key Sufi terms and practices associated with *topeng*, such as *ziarah* (pilgrimages to holy sites) and *dzikir* (remembrance of God) are both known and integrated into the religious practices of *dalang topeng*, though rarely discussed with outsiders. This is particularly true of *dzikir*, which *dalang* consider a secret system since they often infuse their remembrance of God with magic spells (an action, no doubt, frowned upon by many orthodox Muslims).

### **WHAT'S OLD IS NEW: CIREBON'S ADMINISTRATIVE CONTOURS**

As names go, *topeng Cirebon*<sup>7</sup> is slightly misleading. Cirebon refers to a large territory in the province of West Java. Today this region is administratively defined as *Badan Kordinasi Wilayah III Cirebon. Wilayah III Cirebon*, as it is generally referred to, encompasses the *kabupaten* (regencies) of Cirebon, Majalengka, Indramayu, Kuningan, and the *kotamadya* (city) of Cirebon. The borders of this administrative unit, so named under the Soeharto administration, can be traced much further back. According to the eighteenth century manuscript, the *Purwaka Tjaruban Nagari*,<sup>8</sup> these four regencies once constituted the independent kingdom of Cirebon. It became a residency (*keresidenan*) under Cirebon during Dutch hegemony. The four regencies that comprise the *Wilayah III Cirebon* encompass a large physical space and enjoy rich linguistic

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<sup>7</sup> *Topeng* exists in many forms in Indonesia, including Central Java, East Java, and in Bali, although each locale has a distinctive style. The form that is the subject of this study is endemic to this region.

<sup>8</sup> Tjarban, Pangeran Aria. *Purwaka Tjaruban nagari*. [Origin of the Cirebon Kingdom]. (Jakarta: Bratara, 1972). This cannot be considered a historically reliable source, however it is one of the few references available.

variety.<sup>9</sup> In spite of the regions' geographic isolation, *topeng* traffic occurred across these geo-political borders within its itinerant form, *bebarang*. The one exception to this story is Kuningan, of which little is known about its *topeng* tradition, hence, it is the only regency not included in this study. *Topeng Cirebon*, perhaps unfairly, is the name employed here to cover all virtuosic *topeng* traditions in the *Wilayah III Cirebon*. Locally one finds stylistic distinctions, particularly in Losari and Indramayu. In the region, the style of *topeng* is more often referred to by the *dalang*'s home district, e.g. *Topeng Majalangka*, *Topeng Indramayu*, or sub-district, e.g. *Topeng Slangit*, *Topeng Palimanan*, *Topeng Beber*, etc.

Shifts in *topeng*'s transmission were first noted during Dutch colonial rule. Not surprisingly, its malleability was repeatedly tested during the Japanese occupation (1942-1945), the fight for independence (1945-1949), Indonesian sovereignty, Muslim rebellions (1948-1962), mass murders (1965-1966), Soeharto's autocratic rule (1965-1998), the Islamic resurgence (the late 1970s) and, now, in building democracy (1998- ). *Topeng* has survived these ruptures, but not unscathed. The core meaning of this folk tradition twists and turns through history, yet its visual markers have proven remarkably durable. Drawing from the form's material culture, this study aims to decode *topeng*'s visual markers and construct its evolution from its ninth century pre-Islamic roots as a popular entertainment to its mystical effervescence in the nineteenth and twentieth

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<sup>9</sup> Sundanese is the dominant language in the southern part of Cirebon, as well as Majalangka and Kuningan; Javanese, alternately, is the dominant language in northern Cirebon and Indramayu, with considerable variation.

centuries. Finally, I examine *topeng*'s gradual return to its populist roots following Indonesia's 1965 "coup," *Gestok*.<sup>10</sup>

This project concerns the old, virtuosic masked dance, *topeng*,<sup>11</sup> which once flourished along Java's northwest coast. One performer, the *dalang topeng*, wears and embodies different masks (Cirebon Javanese: *kedok*; Indonesian: *topeng*) and their attendant characters in succession. Its streamlined troupe - comprised of one dancer, the gamelan orchestra, and one or two clowns who double as musicians - ensures portability. *Topeng* travels *but* there is no set script, no storyline to follow. Yet, most assuredly a story is being told. *Topeng*'s movement lexicon is understood as a manual for living. Each character (five in all), when performed in proper sequence, delineates how we grow against life's innumerable obstacles. It is a most intimate kind of journey that is mood and personality specific. Where each of us falls on this spectrum is a matter of perceptual acuity, emotional attunement, personal striving and, ultimately, choice: one may strive for the refinement exemplified by Panji, or succumb to avarice, as does Klana. These two characters comprise the life cycle's start and endpoint, concluding in the unenviable position of greed.

As such, the cycle is in a constant state of working through and renewal. Each character encounters its own transformation in a progression that begins with the

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<sup>10</sup> *Gestok* is an acronym for *Gerakan Sabtu Oktober*, or "October 1<sup>st</sup> Movement." It is more commonly referred to as the September 30<sup>th</sup> Movement, or *G30S/PKI*, the "PKI killings," and *Lubang Buaya* (literally the Crocodile Hole, named after the well where the captives' bodies were dumped), and *Gestapu* [acronym that translates as September 30<sup>th</sup> Movement]. By using the term *Gestok*, I am suggesting that the 'coup' in question was in fact what Soeharto did in the early morning hours of 1 October 1965. In contrast, the New Order's stress on *Gestapu* was their way of arguing that the failed coup of 30 September was 'the event.' These terms, thus, signal pro- and anti-Soeharto interpretations of what happened.

<sup>11</sup> *Topeng* has two definitions. It designates the mask proper and it also refers to the form of masked dance.

*dalang*'s face exposed before progressing into the masked portion of the dance. The dance concludes with the dancer's face again revealed, accompanied by the gesture of reverence to and for God, *sembah*.<sup>12</sup> Each character, furthermore, is a transformation of the one that precedes it and informs the one that follows. The five characters are muted, for the actor holds the mask in place by biting a piece of leather (hammered inside the mask) with her or his front teeth. The narrative is on the one hand obvious – it portrays the life cycle. On the other hand, we are dealing with a hidden matter that is dependent upon the spectators' capacity to extract meaning from the movement itself. Social and comic relief is the province of the *bodor* (clown), whose mode of expression is mimetic and verbal engagement.<sup>13</sup> The highly skilled *bodor* - part comedian, part dancer, and part musician - accompanies the gamelan orchestra.

How can a form that is seemingly simplistic at the performative level, be so intellectually, emotionally, and physically rigorous? Let's begin with the Indonesian word for "mask": *topeng*. The etymology of this well-worn Indonesian word is traceable to a Chinese (Hokkien dialect) word, *tò péng*, that translates as "reverse side; wrong side."<sup>14</sup> At first glance, this seems a peculiar association to the mask, an object so fully identified with its outer dimension. However, one must keep in mind that the mask is at

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<sup>12</sup> The gesture brings both palms together, with fingers pressed in an upward movement; the thumbs are brought in close to the nose. It is commonly understood as giving thanks to the audience. However, my late guru, Dasih, said that in her family's village style (Palimanan), the gesture was directed simultaneously inward and to God.

<sup>13</sup> Most of the clown masks are half-masks, which allow them to speak. Other times, the *bodor* perform sans mask.

<sup>14</sup> Jones refers to this as Amoy dialect; however, this term is outdated. Hokkien is the correct term. I am grateful to Penny Edwards for pointing this out. Russell Jones, ed. *Loan-words in Indonesian and Malay*. Compiled by the Indonesian Etymological Project, (Leiden: KITLV, 2007), 325. The large number of Hokkien-speaking immigrants in Cirebon likely introduced a rich lexicon of Chinese loanwords in the region, particularly those corresponding to art and handicrafts.



all times an illusory object. To test this theory, shut one eye and stare for a few seconds at the inside (verso) of any mask with the other eye. To do so is to confront a stunning optical illusion: the verso morphs into a false positive impression of a face. The “reverse side,” the “wrong side” is, thus, the hidden face and opposite of the persona we show to the world.

H. J. de Graaf and Th. D. Pigeaud contend that some stone reliefs on Islamic tombs along Java’s northern coast (*pasisir*) including Cirebon are linked to Chinese craftsmen, many of whom were Muslim.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, there is widespread speculation that Javanese *wayang* puppets and the full-body *berokan* (*barongan*) mask, which are both very old traditions on Java, may correspond to Chinese shadow puppet theatre and the lion masks with their large moveable jaws that are well known in the region.<sup>16</sup> The Cirebonese *berokan* is said to be the ruler of the sea, Sang Hyang Baruna, which has been fully absorbed into local mystical Islamic philosophy.<sup>17</sup>

The late *dalang topeng* Sujana Arja defined *topeng*, including the gamelan and dance, as “to live the Islamic way.” He derived this from the Cirebon Javanese expression, *Tongtonane para Pinangeran*, which roughly translates as “an attraction of the princes” or as “a form the royals are attracted to.” I argue that paradigms of internal/external attraction, e.g. “attract to” / “attracted one,” circumscribed in mystical

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<sup>15</sup> H. J. de Graaf, and Th. G. Pigeaud, trans. and commentary. *Chinese Muslims in Java in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries: The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*. M. C Ricklefs, ed. (Melbourne: Monash Papers of Southeast Asia, No. 12, 1984), 181.

<sup>16</sup> It is beyond the scope of this study to speculate on this matter; however, there is apparently a very old connection between Chinese craftsmanship and Cirebonese performing arts.

<sup>17</sup> *Berokan* is said to derive from *bebere rok-rokan*, which means to uncover the invisible, meaning the relationship between God and the individual through *tarekat*. In Cirebonese mystical praxis, *berokan* (a/k/a *barongan*) is the second stage on the path and is followed by *hakekat* (truth) and manifested in *topeng*. See Appendix 3 for stories and translations.

Islam, contributed to the mask's iconic durability in the Cirebonese imaginary. Likewise *topeng* is inextricably linked to early Muslim conversions in Java, and its fate was likely cemented with the indigenization of local Sufi orders in the nineteenth century. Other factors contributing to *topeng*'s longevity are rooted in its long history as a popular entertainment in Java, imbuing masks and puppets with a certain cachet as instruments of conversion (*dakwah*).

### **MATERIAL EVIDENCE OF MASKING ON JAVA**

Material culture is central to understanding the genealogy of the mask in Java, particularly the chthonic projections of the *kala* face that loom over archways at Dieng Plateau and Borobudur as early as the seventh and eighth centuries, respectively. These early examples tell us that those images associated with the face and its expression are very old indeed on Java.<sup>18</sup>

The person most responsible for our understanding of Indic influence in Indonesia is George Coedès. His major contribution to Southeast Asian history was the identification of the ancient Indonesian empire of Srivijaya. In *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, Coedès argues that Southeast Asia as a region was transformed by Indian culture at around the beginning of the Common Era.<sup>19</sup> The initial evidence of contact between India and insular Southeast Asia is in inscriptions dating from the early fifth-century CE found in West Java and Borneo (now Kalimantan). The Yupa sacrificial pillars of King Mulavarman of Borneo date back to c. 400 CE and comprise

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<sup>18</sup> The *kala* face is discussed in chapter 6: "The Geography of the Mask."

<sup>19</sup> G. Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*. Ed. By Walter F. Vellag. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1968).

the earliest evidence of the epics in the archipelago as well as the first indication of Indian influence there.<sup>20</sup> While obviously important, this information cannot reliably determine when Hindu ideas first came to the archipelago because no great body of art objects has been found from this period.

Epigraphist J. G. de Casparis published important data discovered in Indonesia including an 856 CE inscription detailing a Saiva temple complex that he connects to Loro Jonggrang.<sup>21</sup> This is important because it is usually dated at the beginning of the tenth century and regarded as the latest of the early Classical period temples. The inscription tells us that the complex already existed almost a full century before the end of this period.

Turning our attention now to the mask proper, epigraphic evidence suggests that masks had a place in pre-Islamic Java in the context of festivals and popular entertainment.<sup>22</sup> As early as 840 CE, copper plates from Jaha list a series of officials responsible for overseeing amusements or amusement halls that included prostitutes and clowns. In addition, though the translation is not quite clear, there may have been someone in charge of mask or puppet plays (*atapukan*)<sup>23</sup> in Java. These officials (the culture police of their day), were in charge of Java's earliest known brand of tourism, in which visitors, many of them servants, arrived from Champa, Kalinga, Aryya, Ceylon, Cola, Malabar and Karnataka. The other kinds of performers mentioned are *aringgit*

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<sup>20</sup> Ph. J. Vogel, "The Yupa Inscriptions of King Mulavarman from Koetei (East Borneo)," *BKI* (1918).

<sup>21</sup> J. G. de Casparis, *Prasasti Indonesia II: Selected Inscriptions from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> Century, A.D.* (Bandung: Masa Baru, 1956), 280-330.

<sup>22</sup> Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia. Continuities and Change*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 281.

<sup>23</sup> *Tapuk* translates as "to cover."

(actors), *abanol* (clowns), *winigle* (musicians), and *pawidu* (probably bards or storytellers.)

An 860 CE copper plate from Gedangan mentions *juru barata*, which Kern interpreted as actors or managers of plays. We also know that 901CE copper plates from Panaraga provide a rare, explicit mention of circular dancing in conjunction with a cockfight.<sup>24</sup> Finally, dances are mentioned during King Balitung's reign in a 907 CE charter from Central Java wherein spectacles (*ton-tonanan*) were accompanied by singing (*mamidu*), recitation (*macarita*), dancing (*mangigal*), and plays (*mamirus*). These activities were followed with gambling and some kind of entertainment in which two people were presumably masked.<sup>25</sup>

The first concrete mention of masked dance in Java is in the fourteenth century (1365) Hindu-Javanese panegyric about King Hayam Wuruk of Majapahit, *The Nāgarakṛtāgama of Rakawi Prapañca*,<sup>26</sup> wherein the festivities following the cremation rites of the reigning king's grandmother are described. Masked dancers are mentioned in Canto 66, stanza 5:

Every performance that might please the people the King held:  
See the storytellers and masked dancers taking turns with all kinds of  
singers every day!  
Not to mention the warriors shouting challenges – naturally the ones  
as loud as thunderclaps gave people a fright and made them laugh,

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<sup>24</sup> Holt, *Art in Indonesia*, 282.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>26</sup> This text is written in the Old Javanese literary style, *kakawin*, related to the Sanskrit form *kāvya* in which a long narrative is told in metric form. The text was first translated into English by Th. Pigeaud, and more recently, by Stuart Robson. Pigeaud's translation is so literal as to sometimes lack contextualization. See Theodore G. Th. Pigeaud (1960-63). *Java in the Fourteenth Century: A Study in Cultural History*. 5v. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff. [The English translation is in v.3 (1960)]. Robson's translation is an improvement, in which the title has been changed to that of the author, Mpu Prapañca's designation (*Deśawarnana*). See Robson, Stuart, trans. (1995). *Deśawarnana (Nāgarakṛtāgama)* by Mpu Prapañca, (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1995).

And in particular the constant donations to every kind of person begging alms cause everyone to be joyful.<sup>27</sup>

The first line of this stanza informs us that the performers were not part of the ritual; their purpose was to please the guests.<sup>28</sup> This concurs with Clifford Geertz's analysis, whose imaginative work on the pre-Dutch conquest of Bali delineates the performativity of kingship in Bali. For Geertz, statecraft *is* stagecraft; a ritual *performs* the state. This is likely to have also been the case for Java, long before large numbers of Hinduized Javanese migrated to Bali. Geertz cogently argues that the "extravagance of state rituals was not just the measure of the king's divinity . . . it was the measure of the realm's well-being. More important, it was a demonstration that they were the same thing."<sup>29</sup> Thus, nineteenth century Bali was still governed by a theatre state, for whom pleasing its members was imperative and accomplished through participatory spectacles.<sup>30</sup>

The early sixteenth century traveler, Tomé Pires, mentioned masked performance in Java as popular entertainment in his 1515 travelogue. Both men and women engaged in these masked dramas, followed by shadow puppet plays in the evening.<sup>31</sup> As Anthony Reid notes, Pires' account contradicts the Javanese perception that the first masks were produced by Sunan Kalijaga in the region of Klaten in 1586,

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<sup>27</sup> Translation by Robson, *Deśawarnana (Nāgarakṛtāgama)*, 73.

<sup>28</sup> The manuscript upon which Robson's new translation is based was found in Bali and is dated the equivalent to 30 September 1365. Robson, *Deśawarnana (Nāgarakṛtāgama)*, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 129.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* Cultural influences were brought to Bali by the Javanese in 1343, making the literature of the two regions inseparable.

<sup>31</sup> Tomé Pires *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*. A. Cortesão, trans. 2v. (London: Hakluyt Society, [1515], 1944), 177.

while confirming Th. Pigeaud's assessment that mask affiliation along Java's *pasisir* extends further back than Sunan Kalijaga.<sup>32</sup> As is often suggested, the masks' entrenchment in popular entertainments likely made them tantalizing instruments for proselytizing during Java's mass conversions to Islam during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century.

### THE EXTERNAL CONNECTIONS

The Dutch East Indies Company, *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC)*, was established in 1602 and dissolved nearly two centuries later in 1800 due to poor management, at which time Dutch governance began in earnest.<sup>33</sup> Cirebon, Pekalongan, and Semarang formed an important travel route of sugar production in the 1830s when Johannes van den Bosch established the Dutch cultivation system.<sup>34</sup> The regions were further connected by thriving Sufi networks along Java's *pasisir*, particularly in relationship to batik manufacture, industries that continue today. Pekalongan also became an important destination point for *dalang topeng* from Losari, Cirebon. Bordering Central Java, this route enjoyed considerable traffic by itinerant mask

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<sup>32</sup> Even more time lapsed before masks and puppetry became affiliated with the Central Javanese courts. Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, v.1: The Land Below the Winds*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 206; Th. Pigeaud, *Javaanse Volksvertoningen: Bijdrage tot de Beschrijving van Land en Volk*. Batavia: Volkslectuur, 1938), 39-52.

<sup>33</sup> Luc Nagtegaal, *Riding the Dutch Tiger. The Dutch East Indies Company and the Northeast Coast of Java, 1680-1743*, (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1996), 41. An analysis of Dutch ambivalence about greed that informed the VOC, see Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>34</sup> Robert Van Niel. *Java Under the Cultivation System: Collected Writings*, (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1992), 48-49.

performers and Chinese and Arab traders, many of them presumably Muslim, who supplied cotton and other supplies to the coastal guilds.<sup>35</sup>

By 1860, the Dutch colonial powers had effectively taken over the suzerainty of Cirebon. It is during this period that our earliest glimpse of *topeng* in colonial Java occurred in its itinerant form, known as *bebarang*. Protracted disruptions in transmission were likely since most of the artists were farmers. During times of failed harvests, epidemics, famine, and other hardships (*paceklik*), many farmers relocated in search of work.<sup>36</sup> Not surprisingly, then, acts of nature at times precipitated the migration of *topeng* practitioners to the periphery, to sites in or near Bogor. By the mid-nineteenth century, scholars were taking serious note of Java's performing arts. Descriptive documentation soon followed.

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Our knowledge of *topeng*'s development as an Islamic form in Java gains momentum with the nineteenth century Surakarta court epic, *Serat Centhini*. The decisive encounter between masking and mystical Islam is realized when two *dalang topeng* perform the character, Klana, which inspires an ecstatic response. We may assume that masking was actively contested among orthodox Muslims when the *Serat Centhini* was written, for it coincided with the indigenization of the Sufi orders in Java.

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<sup>35</sup> The batik trade was dominated by Indian traders until its collapse at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Chinese and Arab traders who were already active in the region selling raw materials related to batik production filled the void. They also functioned as money lenders. Harmen C. Veldhuisen, *Batik Belanda 1840-1940. Dutch Influence in Batik from Java: History and Stories*, (Jakarta: Gaya Favorit, 1993), 28.

<sup>36</sup> During the 1940s, many locals were quarantined due to malaria and famine. Indramayu and Cirebon were particularly hard hit.

Some scholars, including Cirebon palace officials, contend that *topeng* was originally a court art that eventually “withered” and “found a new home in the villages of Bagusana, Trusmi, Gegesik, Losari, Kreo, Slangit, and Palimanan.”<sup>37</sup> *Dalang topeng* understand this trajectory quite differently. The vast majority of these rural artists trace their lineage to one of the *walisanga* whose engagement was at the village (rather than court) level. Thus, for the majority of *dalang* (and *topeng* historians) *topeng* is understood as a village art imported to the court, not the other way around.

Our understanding of how *topeng* networks functioned during Japan’s occupation of Java through Indonesia’s revolution (1945-1949) is sketchy at best. We do know that the Japanese were diligent in banning performing arts they linked to their Dutch predecessors and that *topeng* escaped such classification. Hence, it continued. We also know that soon after Japan’s defeat and Indonesia’s emancipation, one of the first orders of business for Indonesia’s first president and vice-president, Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta, respectively, was the formation of Indonesia’s department of culture.<sup>38</sup> Cultural associations soon followed.<sup>39</sup> Sukarno eventually aligned himself

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<sup>37</sup> Sal Murgiyanto, *Dance of Indonesia*. Aspects of Indonesian Culture series, (New York: Festival of Indonesia Foundation, 1991), 9; Elang Djoni, pers. comm., 14 September 2005. In contrast, Enoch Atmadibrata considers Trusmi and Losari the earliest centers of *topeng* activity in Cirebon, with Slangit, Bagusana, Cirebon, and Gegesik. Pers. comm., 25 December 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Penny Edwards, in her examination of the cultivation of Cambodian nationalism during the period of French rule, elucidates the meaning of two kinds of nationalism: cultural and political. She cites Angkor Wat’s elevation during French rule and its pre-feudal continuation during the Democratic Kampuchea’s regime (1975-1978) as a national monument and site of nostalgia, or *cheu satearum* (“memory sickness”) even for Saloth Sar (Pol Pot). Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860-1945*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 1-8.

A similar logic – with very different goals – was employed in Indonesia with its continued elevation of Prambanan and Borobudur as the centerpiece of Hindu-Buddhist achievement, under Sukarno and expanded upon by Soeharto. These two episodes point to the meaningfulness of hybridity under colonialism, be it language, racial categories, science, the arts, or fears of contagion. Edwards, *Cambodge*, 2007, 245. See, too, Nancy Leys Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press,



with Indonesia's communist party, *Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI)*. Political tensions between Indonesia's main parties and organizations had been brewing for some time, including the *Darul Islam* rebellion in West Java (1948-1962), which aimed to establish an Islamic state governed by *shari'a*.<sup>40</sup> The movement was eventually suppressed when its leaders were either captured or killed in 1963. This was only a few years before Sukarno was ousted during Indonesia's 1965 bloody "coup." Intimidation, imprisonment, and mass murder followed throughout Java. We may never know if Cirebon region artists were also murdered. Their families are not talking. Several puppeteers, who have asked to remain anonymous, acknowledge having been imprisoned and tortured, some on multiple occasions.

Once Soeharto's *Orde Baru* (New Order)<sup>41</sup> was firmly entrenched, performers began rebuilding their careers. Those with *PKI* connections (imagined or real) rarely recovered: their family alliances were branded on their identification cards. Alternatively, a few choice *dalang* with impeccable credentials emerged as nascent icons of Indonesian nationalism, Soeharto-style. Concurrent with this, the first international *topeng* and *penca*<sup>42</sup> tour occurred in 1977 – no longer under the watchful

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2001). Stepan explores the aesthetic and political representation of disease and Otherness in the tropics by nineteenth- and twentieth-century travelers to Brazil.

<sup>39</sup> Tod Jones, *Indonesian Cultural Policy, 1950-2003: Culture, Institutions, Government*. (Np [Australia]: Curtin University of Technology, 2005), 111; Jennifer Lindsay, "Cultural Policy and the Performing Arts in Southeast Asia," *BKI* (1995) 151,4, 658; Parani, *National Culture and Ethnic Cultures*, PhD diss, 78-85.

<sup>40</sup> *Darul Islam* rebellions followed in Aceh and South Sulawesi, with regional and ideological differences in their expression.

<sup>41</sup> The Soeharto regime (1966-1998).

<sup>42</sup> Sundanese version of the martial art form, *penca silat*. The *penca* troupe (many doubled as musicians during the *topeng* portion of the program) was from Bandung. The performers of the U.S. / Canada tour were: *Dalang topeng* Sujana Arja. Bulus and Sandrut (clowns). *Penca* performers and musicians: Abay Subardja, Didi, Djadja, Holidin, and Abas Kohar (members of *Panglipur* in Bandung). Enoch

eye of the Dutch, the Japanese, or the nationalist and communist parties, but Soeharto's New Order. His feared security agency, *KOPKAMTIB*,<sup>43</sup> which had branded *topeng* a "communist" medium in 1966 was reborn a national treasure a decade later. Enthusiasm for *topeng* in the United States resulted from cross-cultural programs at Berkeley's Center for World Music in 1973-1974. The then intrepid head of Asia Society's performing arts department, Beate Gordon, sought to bring lesser-known regional art forms to a wider audience. A steady stream of exotic overseas adventures followed. The Indonesian government was now in the business of promoting Indonesian culture abroad. First stop: the United States of America. In late 1977, the *rombongan* (troupe) packed their bags and boarded a plane for the first time in their lives.<sup>44</sup>



Fig. 1. "The Sunda Mobile." Rear view of the truck that transported the gamelan instruments during Asia Society's 1977 *Penca* and *Topeng Babakan* tour. Photo courtesy of Ron Bogley.

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Atmadibrata was the troupe's *pemimpin*. Program notes: *University Musical Society*, University of Michigan, 12 November 1977.

<sup>43</sup> *Komando Operasi Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban*, or Operational Command for the Restoration of Security and Order.

<sup>44</sup> Although the *penca* troupe was from Bandung and unrelated to *topeng*, it was decided that some variety in the program was necessary.

## TOPENG CIREBON'S CORE CHARACTERS

*Topeng*'s assemblage of characters is comprised of Panji, Samba, Rumyang, Tumenggung, and Klana. They are usually, although not always, performed in this chronological order. No one character is said to be all good or evil. As such, with each mask, we volley between our capacity for wisdom and our negative potential. Most of the characters are composite types. Their symbolic composition delineates their psychological contours and malleability to multiple storylines, chiefly the Hindu epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and the indigenous Panji tales.<sup>45</sup> Although the dance drama form *wayang wong*<sup>46</sup> was often performed by *dalang topeng*, and some of the characters are discussed later in this study, it is a different genre.<sup>47</sup> *Wayang wong* is an ensemble form with distinctive storylines. Thus, I shall limit my discussion here to the basic features of the five main characters in the *topeng* pantheon, and their attendant clown servants.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> The Panji stories that were once (but no longer) performed in Cirebon, included *Jako Bluwo*, *Jako Buntek*, *Jaka Pengaring*, *Jaka Penyawak*, and *Jayang Gusuma*. *Jaka Buntek*, in which Panji (*Jaka*) is disguised as a fish, was revived in the late 1990s, but to the best of my knowledge has not been performed since.

<sup>46</sup> Dramas that tell stories from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

<sup>47</sup> In April 2009 *wayang wong* dance styles were introduced to *topeng* students in Slangit, Cirebon initiated by *Kraton Kecirebonan* to match Sujana Priya's efforts at *Kraton Kasepuhan* in recent years. Thus, *wayang wong* is making a comeback after a long absence.

<sup>48</sup> For discussions of *topeng* characterization, cosmology, and iconography, see Paramita R. Abdurachman, ed. *Cerbon*, (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1982), 113-14, 117-25; Kathy Foley, "My Bodies: The Performer in West Java"; Pamela Rogers-Aguiniga, *Topeng Cirebon: The Masked Dance Theatre of West Java as Performed in the Village of Slangit*. Master's thesis, (University of California, Los Angeles, 1986); Endo Suanda, "Dancing in Cirebonese Topeng," *Balungan* 3/3 (1988); Endo Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon: In its Social Context*. Master's thesis, (Middletown: Wesleyan University, 1983), Jakob Sumardjo, *Arkeologi Budaya Indonesia. Pelacakan Hermeneutis-Historis Terhadap Artefak-Artefak Kebudayaan*, (Yogyakarta: Qalam, 2002), 229-68; Maman R. I. Suryaatmadja, *Topeng Cirebon Dalam Perkembangan Penyebaran Dalam Masyarakat Jawa Barat Khususnya di Daerah Cirebon*, (Bandung: Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia, 1980), Willem Westerkamp, *Javaanse Maskers en Maskervertoningen in Cerbon en de Vorstenlanden: een Bijdrage tot de Kennis van Masker en Maskerspel in de Negentiende Eeuw*, (Amsterdam: Koninklijk Instituut. Unpub. PhD dissertation, 1987).

## Panji



Fig. 2. Panji. The Prince of Jengala,<sup>49</sup> Cirebon.  
Provenance: Enoch Atmadibrata, Cimahi, West Java;  
Dasih, Palimanan, Cirebon, West Java; Wentar,  
Palimanan, Cirebon, West Java.

*Topeng* is intimately bound to a mystical hierarchy today that begins, and is most fully expressed, with the *suci* (pure) Panji.<sup>50</sup> Panji is “born” from the womb attended by the musicians’ cries. Outside of *topeng*, Panji is known as the prince of Jengala. This, however, is a symbolic category in *topeng*. According to Dasih, the first character in the lexicon also signifies Damar Wuluan, Rama, Darma Kusuma,<sup>51</sup> Arjuna’s son Abimanyu, and Arjuna himself.<sup>52</sup> Panji has an aquiline nose, androgynous features and, in Cirebon, is consistently painted eggshell white - a color associated with semen.<sup>53</sup> Combined with Panji’s refined movements, it is not surprising that outsiders often assume Panji is a

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<sup>49</sup> Referred to as “Jengala” in Central and East Java.

<sup>50</sup> Panji is often referred to as Arjuna (from the *Mahabharata*), which signifies how fully blended these character types have become in the Cirebonese imaginary.

<sup>51</sup> The Buddhist king of Amarta is viewed as a transitional figure in Cirebon between Buddhism and conversions to Islam.

<sup>52</sup> Dasih, pers. comm., 23 March 1978.

<sup>53</sup> This is quite different from Central Javanese versions of the Panji mask, which are painted black and are associated with knowledge.

female character. The color of the mask, however, indicates a fertile, potent male. A circle or flower shape connotes the third 'inner' eye. Panji's face is often embellished with a series of black dots: one on each cheek, one at the center of the chin, and two clusters of three dots each, placed above each eyebrow. Taken as a whole, they signify the four cardinal points, with Panji's character occupying the lofty northernmost point.

Panji is also associated with *mutmainah* (calmness and refinement). His distilled movements are so slow as to go nearly undetected. His imperceptible migration from the rear to the front of the performance space is achieved through miniscule toe-heel pivots in a semi-circle, first right to left, followed by left to right. This continues until Panji is approximately six feet forward from where he began. His movements are concealed behind a long batik sarong draped like a long skirt in the front. It is only worn this way for Panji.<sup>54</sup> Kathy Foley and Endo Suanda have commented on his "otherworldly aura" as significant to the performer, though less engaging to the spectator.<sup>55</sup> The convergence of Panji's distilled refinement and inner strength stand in sharp relief to the loud, raucous hollers of the *nayaga* (gamelan musicians). This unlikely fusion of inner calm and musical dissonance parallels the temptations and distractions of *tarekat* (the Sufi path). These contrasting tensions frame the first dance in the *topeng* cycle and define it

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<sup>54</sup> After *Tari Topeng Panji* (Panji masked dance) is complete, the *dalang* lifts the elongated front portion of the batik between her legs and tucks it in the rear waist of the *topeng* knicker-length pants. This creates a loosely draped, shorter legging that affords the dancer greater freedom of movement. It also makes the dancer's legs visible.

<sup>55</sup> Foley, "My Bodies: The Performer in West Java," 67; Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis, 104.

as “birth.” In Chapter 4 of this study (“Engaging the Body and Senses”), I argue that it also signifies the *dalang*’s embodiment of silent *dzikir*.<sup>56</sup>

### Samba or Pamindo



Fig. 3. Samba (a/k/a Pamindo, or Mindo). Cirebon.  
Provenance: Enoch Atmadibrata, Cimahi, West Java;  
Dasih, Palimanan, Cirebon, West Java; Wentar,  
Palimanan, Cirebon, West Java

Samba is also known as Pamindo or Mindo, which literally means “the second.” It refers to the chronology of its appearance in the *topeng* cycle and, also, the second stage in the life cycle: adolescence. Whereas the name Panji is clearly indigenous, Samba is the name of Kresna’s son from the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. The epic is well known in Cirebon though it has little bearing on the *topeng* character of the same name. This mask is also identified with the character Gunungsari from Central Java in the *wayang wong*.<sup>57</sup> Palimanan village artists, alternately, refer to this character as the

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<sup>56</sup> For Panji’s meditative features and as performed in Slangit respectively, see Toto Amsar Suanda, *Tari Topeng Panji Sebagai Tari Meditasi*, 62-87; Toto Sudarto, *Tari Topeng Panji Gaya Slangit Cirebon*, (Surakarta: Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia, 1991).

<sup>57</sup> Gunungsari is Panji’s brother-in-law. In the *Damar Wulan* stories, Kencana Wunggu is the same type as Gunungsari and Samba. In *Damar Wulan*, the Panji/Arjuna mask is worn.

decidedly female Pamindo, who may represent Sinta (Sita) from the *Ramayana* and the willful Srikandi (one of Arjuna's wives) from the *Mahabharata*.<sup>58</sup> Panji's marked androgyny continues with Samba, whose cream or white face<sup>59</sup> is framed with coiled black hair and "inner eye" decoration, called *kembang pilis* (compressed flower). The face has refined features. The lower teeth are nearly always painted black, to conform to the power-based aesthetic of *sirih* (betel nut).

Samba's feminization is so exquisitely realized that *dalang topeng* Sujana Arja contended the character was female at least as far back as the 1960s. My late teacher, *dalang topeng* Dasih (d.1985), incensed by this, once asked the then junior *dalang*, "Why do you insist that Samba is female? Samba is Kresna's son." By the 1970s, Sujana had revised his thinking, stating that Samba could be either male or female since Gusti Sinuhun (alias Sunan Gunung Jati) dresses as a woman and is named Samba in one of the Panji tales.<sup>60</sup> Revisiting this topic near the end of his life, Sujana's position was firm: "Samba is male."<sup>61</sup> Within forty-five years, Samba's gender had metamorphosed three times in one *dalang*'s mind. The above anecdote illustrates how flexible the *topeng* "tradition" can be.

Samba is described as joyous, light, and coquettish, but also arrogant. As such, this character is situated between *halus* (refined) and *gagah* (strong). Samba's movement vocabulary is the most extensive and complex in the pantheon.<sup>62</sup> During this

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<sup>58</sup> Dasih, pers. comm., 23 March 1978. It is noteworthy that Palimanan-style *topeng* eventually replaced Samba with a dance that her father Wentar was commissioned to choreograph, named *Kencana Wunggu*, the bride of *Damar Wulan* (a/k/a Panji).

<sup>59</sup> Sometimes this mask is painted yellow or blue, both of which are rare today.

<sup>60</sup> Pamela Rogers-Aguinga, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis, 65.

<sup>61</sup> Sujana Arja, pers. comm. 2 February 2006.

<sup>62</sup> For this reason, Samba is often the first dance a student studies.

dance, spectators are most inclined to part with their money in spontaneous acts of appreciation or as a form of good luck (*tawur* or *sawer*, respectively). The Samba dance can go on for hours, with various dancers performing the same character, either in succession or in clusters.<sup>63</sup> Once the mask is donned, the adolescent Samba giggles, gazes at her reflection in her hand as if it was a mirror, prepares betel nut, and applies it as make-up. The movements, though fluid, have a desultory quality. Foley and Rogers-Aquiniga contend that many of the movements and their names represent birds.<sup>64</sup> These avian movements, according to Foley, suggest a very old relationship to ancestral spirits. Pamindo is associated with jealousy (*supiyah*) and with the direction, west.<sup>65</sup> Sujana describes Samba as capricious – a wanderer – who lacks direction.<sup>66</sup> This, too, describes a person who has not yet committed to *tarekat*.

Samba nods off during the course of the dance, awakens, and nods off again, suggesting boredom or diffused focus. In some regional styles, Samba is often interrupted by the homely female servant/clown, Tembem, who both imitates and tries to awaken Samba. When finally revived, Samba's movements suggest a bird grooming her feathers. The tropes of the bird and disguise are consistent with Sufi allegories,<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> It is called *rampak topeng* when performed as a group.

<sup>64</sup> One example is *jangkung ilo* (a/k/a *jangkung nilo*), which is found in other dances as well. It refers to measuring one's wishes in accordance with one's capabilities. Variations of this movement appear in all of the other characters. Aside from the literal translation, there is a *tarekat* version described to me by several *dalang*, in which it means to care for one's neighbors who may be less fortunate or are suffering. *Jangkung ilo* is analyzed in Siti Nurcaerani Kusumastuti. *Tari-tarian Keraton Kasepuhan Cirebon: Deskripsi dan Fungsinya*. Unpub. Bachelor's thesis (S1) Antropologi Tari, (Institut Kesenian Jakarta, 1987), 192-95, 200-02.

<sup>65</sup> Foley, "My Bodies: The Performer in West Java," 68; Rogers-Aquiniga, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis, 62-63.

<sup>66</sup> Sujana Arja, quoted in Rogers-Aguinga, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis, 61.

<sup>67</sup> An exemplar of the bird analogy is found in the Persian twelfth century allegory, *The Conference of the Birds*, wherein a group of birds find themselves in need of a leader. They pursue a journey led by a *hoopoe* (a colorful bird), who serves as their *shaykh*. The birds, however, have many questions, and just as



supporting my belief that the Samba/Tembem dyad – as conceptualized in the middle-late twentieth century – elevated Tembem, the homely female servant, to the role of guide, or *shaykh*.<sup>68</sup>

In the Slangit (Klangenan, Cirebon) version of Sujana Arja, the dance ends with Samba sitting at the edge of the spiritually-imbued *kotak topeng*,<sup>69</sup> her feet touching the ground. It is thus a dance of deliverance – from confused neophyte to revelation, symbolized by her grounded feet and proximity to the site of contemplation and prayer.

### Rumyang



Fig. 4. Rumyang (or Parumyangan). Cirebon. Provenance: Enoch Atmadibrata, Cimahi, West Java; Dasih, Palimanan, Cirebon, West Java; Wentar, Palimanan, Cirebon, West Java.

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many excuses, before finally committing to the pilgrimage. Attar, Farid ud-Din, *The Conference of the Birds*, (London: Penguin, 1984).

<sup>68</sup> Most of the clown characters in the *topeng* canon are understood to be “friends of God” (*wali*). Foley and others argue that Samba and Klana are probably the oldest dances in the pantheon. They point to Samba’s bird movements as symmetrical with a variety of ancestral spirit stories of the Pacific generally. While the character Aki-Aki (a teacher) or Semar, would make more sense in the role of mentor or guide, the importance of disguise in Sufi allegories cannot be overlooked. Thus, at least in this capacity, Tembem’s role informs my belief that this dance is linked to trans-Sufi allegories.

<sup>69</sup> The chest where the masks are stored is discussed at length in chapter 7 of this study.

Rumyang usually follows Samba chronologically, although some *dalang* perform it last (after Klana), if time allows.<sup>70</sup> This sequential deviation suggests Rumyang may be a late addition to the *topeng* canon.<sup>71</sup> According to Dasih, Rumyang represents Laksmana (*Ramayana*) or Adipati Karna, who was killed by Arjuna in the *Ramayana*. Dasih told me that Rumyang was once performed last in her village, to sanctify the space. This suggests a pre-Islamic connection to the number “five” and the performance arena, notably: the four cardinal points and the center; the five days of the Javanese calendar;<sup>72</sup> the victorious five Pandawa brothers of the *Ramayana*; and the magic power associations to the *Pancanaka* nails. But it may also be that, as a late addition, it was deemed disruptive to change *topeng*’s sacred topology. Endo Suanda has argued that though the dance was known, it did not gain momentum until after the 1965 putsch.<sup>73</sup> Cirebonese dance first came under the government’s scrutiny around 1970 when they initiated the *Ramayana* dance drama project.<sup>74</sup> Nearing Soeharto’s first official “election,” (1971) it was more intensely analyzed. Although Suanda does not mention this possibility, it is plausible that Rumyang’s elevation at this time was

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<sup>70</sup> This was once the case in Suranenggala and Palimanan in Cirebon and Bongas, Bantarwaru, and Beber in Majalengka. The custom was no longer practiced by the time of Endo’s fieldwork. Endo Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master’s thesis, 150.

<sup>71</sup> Jakob Sumardjo has suggested that Rumyang and Panji are husband and wife in a higher realm, but this is an unusual interpretation. Sumardjo, *Arkeologi Budaya Indonesia*, 261.

<sup>72</sup> *Pon, Wage, Kliwon, Legi, and Pahing*.

<sup>73</sup> The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “putsch” as “a secretly plotted and suddenly executed attempt to overthrow a government.” While most scholars agree to disagree about who was behind it, there is little doubt that it was secretly plotted and suddenly executed, with the aim of overthrowing the government of that time. The “official” Soeharto-imposed term *Gestapu* (a/k/a *G30S*) reflects the government’s narrative about when the killings took place and by whom. The official date, September 30<sup>th</sup> justifies their use - an acronym for “September 30<sup>th</sup> Movement.” The word “coup,” is equally problematic, for we may never definitively know who was behind the killings and it is likely that more than one coup occurred in quick succession. I also use the term *Gestok* – the Indonesian acronym for the actual date of the event, since the events are known to have occurred during the early morning hours of 1 October 1965.

<sup>74</sup> Suanda states that local artists were not aware of this dance prior to governmental scrutiny. Suanda, “Dancing in Cirebonese Topeng,” 8.

fortified by a government decision to have the number of *topeng* characters correspond to the national doctrine, *pancasila*.

The Rumyang mask is similar to Panji in its delicate features, but with a broader smile, more inquisitive expression, and two symmetrical flourishes framing the face and joined at the third inner eye with a crown. This mask is usually painted a salmon-pink color. I have seen a few older masks that are painted a cream color and, less commonly, light blue. Rumyang is the least emotionally evolved or complex character, and, curiously, the only one that begins dancing with the mask on. Foley contends that Rumyang has no unmasked section “because it is the center which is the empowered male-female, divine-demon, everythingness.”<sup>75</sup> There is no warm-up, no tuning in to the character, and the movements are redundant, having been previously introduced with Samba. By many accounts, Rumyang is an extension of Samba,<sup>76</sup> though executed with more playful dexterity and sexual ambiguity that is more deeply invested.

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<sup>75</sup> Kathy Foley, pers. comm., 13 June 2009.

<sup>76</sup> Rumayang’s movements are slightly more refined than Samba. Furthermore, the musical composition (*Lagu Rumyang*) is the same as its predecessor, *lagu Mindo*. Losari *topeng*’s use of Rumyang is quite different, with the character serving as a prelude to the specific story being told and whose name is altered depending on the storyline. Suanda, “Dancing in Cirebonese Topeng,” 9.

## Tumenggung or Patih



Fig. 5. Tumenggung, (also known as Patih). Patih is the vizier of Jengala. Cirebon. Provenance: Enoch Atmadibrata, Cimahi, West Java; Dasih, Palimanan, Cirebon, West Java; Wentar, Palimanan, Cirebon, West Java.

Tumenggung represents a warrior – a positive force, though not in possession of Panji's spiritual profundity nor Klana's confounding intensity. His age hovers around forty and he is in excellent health. In the context of the life cycle, Tumenggung represents adulthood, with bold, but controlled movements that connote his physical strength and determination (*luwamah*); his center, the solar plexus, places him physically and psychologically in the prime of life.<sup>77</sup> Tumenggung's character is associated with Patih Logender (*Damar Wulan*) and the *Tari Kursus* character, Ponggawa. In recent years, he has been collapsed with another character, Patih (regent), except in the Losari region where Patih is the sole character of the genre. At least in modern times, this character appears to have been influenced by Dutch colonial fashion,

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<sup>77</sup> Foley, "My Bodies: The Performer in West Java," 69.

particularly in Slangit, where the costume includes a *peci* (visor) worn over an *iket* (turban),<sup>78</sup> a *kelambi kerah* (collar), and a *dasi* (narrow tie).<sup>79</sup>

A fascinating and, as yet, unexplained aspect of Tumenggung is that the *sobrah* headdress is not always worn. Rather, the head was covered with a cloth hat or cap.<sup>80</sup> Some *dalang* used to perform the unmasked part of the dance wearing sunglasses and/or white socks. The sunglasses were removed just prior to donning the mask.<sup>81</sup> Some female *dalang* wear socks to cover their *aurat*;<sup>82</sup> however, some male *dalang* wear them too.<sup>83</sup> Still other *dalang* believe sunglasses and socks are an expression of the characters' cosmopolitanism.<sup>84</sup> Tumenggung is related to the Bawara story described below, under Jinggaanom.

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<sup>78</sup> The headdress usually worn, called *sobrah*, is made from human hair.

<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, the collar is starched but the tie is worn loose, suggesting some ambivalence about their relationship to the Dutch. On the other hand, Endo Suanda suggests that the loose necktie, which is embellished with ornaments, gives it the appearance of a necklace. Thus, "this is not an effort to imitate the modern style of dress, but more likely to use these materials for their own artistic expression." Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis, 234.

<sup>80</sup> In parts of Majalengka, the character Rumyang also wears an *iket kepala*.

<sup>81</sup> Sujana and Sudji wore sunglasses, as did Ening from Beber, Majalangka and *dalang* from Suranenggala, Cirebon.

<sup>82</sup> *Aurat* are those body parts considered taboo in Islam. The feet are considered *aurat* by conservative Muslims; however, in Cirebon, this is less strictly adhered to than in relation to other parts of the anatomy, such as the hair, neck, and legs.

<sup>83</sup> Another explanation often offered is practical: the ground is dirty and socks protect the feet.

<sup>84</sup> Interestingly, sunglasses have a long history in Cirebon arts linked to trance, particularly the female and male trance forms, *sintren* and *warilais*, respectively, and also the old seafaring male music-dance form, *angklung bungko*. *Angklung bungko* is based on the fifteenth-century Portuguese war under the naval leadership of Alfonso de Albuquerque, who intended to overthrow Islamic forces in the region, beginning with Malacca which he conquered in 1511, and moving eastward toward the Spice Islands. He attempted to overtake Raja Pajajaran and Prabu Siliwangi in order to acquire Demak and Cirebon. One of the last remaining *angklung bungko* performers said sunglasses concealed the dancers' eyes for concentration purposes, because during times of war one must possess full focus; but also because the eyes roll upwards during trance. So the "possession" of concentration and being "possessed" are here inextricably linked. For more on Alfonso de Albuquerque, see the travel journals of Tomé Pires, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, 2v. trans. A. Cortesão, (London: Hakluyt Society, [1515], 1944), (1), lxiii.

## Klana



Fig. 6. Klana. The King of Bewarna. Cirebon. Provenance: Enoch Atmadibrata, Cimahi, West Java; Dasih, Palimanan, Cirebon, West Java; Wentar, Palimanan, Cirebon, West Java.

Klana is a composite of Rawana (*Ramayana*) and Menak Jingga (*Damar Wulan*). He is often described as a lusty, greedy king, lacking full control of his faculties. His temperament is associated with *amarah* (passion) and, as the last character in the pantheon, his very existence is consumed by anger to such a degree that the Cirebonese link him to death. Klana, like the other characters, is more nuanced than meets the eye. Dwelling beneath his anger is a lingering impulse towards deeper consciousness.

Klana, whose staccato movements are larger-than-life and whose energy base is the upper torso, is a vessel of daunting power. His perceived medicinal power, if improperly channeled, is believed capable of unleashing his evil into the world. While Klana is considered to be synonymous with the Hindu *raksasa* (demon) Rahwana, and is often referred to interchangeably with this name, this is not a literal connection. The name Klana, has an alternate spelling, Kelana, that is derived from '*lelana*', the

wandering knights of many Javanese tales rooted in the Majaphit court. *Lelana*, thus, is synonymous with mobility.<sup>85</sup>

### THE CLOWN ATTENDANTS AND JINGGANANOM

In addition to *topeng*'s five main characters are their four attendants: *Tembem*, *Pentul*, *Jinggananom* [alias: *Menak Jingga*], and Semar's brother, *Togog*, the clown-servant for Klana, the evil king. In addition, *Aki-Aki*, Pentul's father, holds an auxiliary position in the pantheon. He is often associated with magic healing. It is rare to find all but *Tembem* performed today.<sup>86</sup>

#### Pentul



Fig. 7. Pentul, Clown character. This character is usually painted red. Cirebon. Provenance: Enoch Atmadibrata.

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<sup>85</sup> Vickers contends that some of these wandering knights were later identified with Bugis mercenaries who traveled throughout Java and became a staple of *topeng* dance-dramas. Adrian Vickers "The Country and the Cities" (*Southeast Asia Research Centre Working Paper Series, No. 56*. The Southeast Asia Research Centre (SEARC) of the City University of Hong Kong, 2003), 6.

<sup>86</sup> The *bodor* characters are always improvised. The storyline and dialogue for some versions of the characters *Jinggananom*, *Aki-Aki*, and *Togog* are available in Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis, 121-48.

## Tembem



Fig. 8. Tembem. Female servant. Clown character. Cirebon, c.1960s. Collection: Enoch Atmadibrata.

## Jinggananom



Fig. 9. Jinggananom (Abay Subadja) fights Tumenggung (Sujana Arja, not seen). Photographer Unknown, c.1975.



In many, though not all *topeng* regions, an auxiliary story is played out between the prime minister Tumenggung and Jinggananom, a regent of Chinese descent. Although often performed by the *bodor*, Jinggananom is not a clown character. The scene revolves around the battle for a kingdom. The King of Bawara sends Jinggananom to fight for it. Jinggananom wins the fight but, enjoying the spoils of his victory, does not return to Bawara. Instead, he declares Jengala's independence. The infuriated King sends his regent Tumenggung Magangdiraja to fight the infidel. The battle scene is then enacted by the *dalang* portraying Tumenggung and the *bodor* as Jinggananom.<sup>87</sup>

## Togog



Fig. 10. Togog. Clown character. C.1960s. Collection: Enoch Atmadibrata.

Togog is the younger brother of Semar. I have never seen Togog used in performance. He is better known in the *wayang wong* and puppet forms, *wayang kulit* and *wayang golek*. In *topeng*, Togog was a comical servant sent to earth to help with

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<sup>87</sup> For an excellent description and transcript of the Patih, Tumenggung and Jinggananom progression in performance, see Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis, 115-38.

dark personalities, notably Klana. Togog instructs the greedy king about a trip to Bewarna where he was to propose marriage to Dewi Tunjung Ayu.<sup>88</sup>

#### **SITUATING THIS STUDY WITHIN INDONESIAN CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

This inquiry seeks a balance between the cultural, political, and religious tenor in which *topeng Cirebon* is located from the mid-nineteenth century until today. In Cirebon, *topeng and wayang* (puppetry) are spun from the same cloth since Sunan Kalijaga is believed to have used performing objects – masks and puppets – interchangeably to gain converts to Islam. Likewise, practitioners are often related inter-generationally or through marriage, and it is common for puppeteers to teach *topeng* to their progeny. This synergy notwithstanding, *wayang*'s counterpart, *topeng*, remains largely underappreciated in the canon.<sup>89</sup>

Both arts are rooted in Indonesia's distant past and embedded in local culture and religious beliefs, yet their modern identification is indelibly linked with Indonesia's post-independence national identity. Tensions between their local and national significance made them ripe for political conflict. Different from the court-sponsored performing arts of Yogyakarta and Surakarta, whose performers are often related to the sultanate, Cirebon area *dalang topeng* and *dalang wayang* (puppeteers) lack both formal education and court patronage.

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<sup>88</sup> Toto Amsar Suanda, *Tari Topeng Panji Sebagai Tari Meditasi*, 41-43.

<sup>89</sup> Notable exceptions are Endo Suanda and Toto Sudarto's work. See Endo Suanda, "The Social Context of the Cirebonese Performing Artist," *Asian Music* (1981) 13-1:27-39; 'Topeng Cirebon dan Konteksnya', Taman Ismail Marzuki, *Pesta Topeng Cirebon*, 17-25; *Topeng Cirebon: In its Social Context*. Also of interest is Toto Sudarto, *Topeng Babakan Cirebon 1900-1990*. Master's thesis, (Yogyakarta: Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2001) The reason *topeng* is underexamined is complex, but we can point with certainty to *wayang*'s associations with court activity and it being found elsewhere on the island, whereas *topeng*, as a virtuosic solo masking tradition, is exceptional today to the Cirebon region.

Another important distinction noted by Matthew Cohen, is that while the Javanese courts were innovators of form, their Cirebon neighbors were invested in the conservation of secret knowledge.<sup>90</sup> *Wayang* has provided an important prism for understanding Javanese thinking, whereas *topeng* has not been viewed, analyzed, or critiqued with equal brio. One explanation is that even though *topeng* likely traveled from east to west Java, it only survives in the Cirebon region today, whereas *wayang* continues to thrive in other parts of Java. Thus, although *topeng* may have enjoyed many metamorphoses over the centuries, on the surface it appears to be a relic. For this reason alone it deserves more critical engagement.

Travel diaries, literary works, and local chronicles, notably *Babad Tjerbon*, are among the earliest extant literature in which Cirebon is situated as a cosmopolitan center. In terms of historiography, the chronicles are problematic due to the variety of local versions and their dates. These works nonetheless provide a window into the reach of popular entertainment during festivals and at the Muslim court. I include under this rubric, masked dance, for the evidence suggests that it has been more frequently associated with festival entertainments than within the context of ritual.<sup>91</sup> From these early texts, I define four sub-groups that have duly influenced and enriched my own research in contextualizing *topeng Cirebon* in its gestalt: colonial scholars; performance research since World War II; scholars of orality; and narratives of power. These

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<sup>90</sup> Matthew Isaac Cohen, *An Inheritance from the Friends of God: The Southern Shadow Puppet Theater of West Java, Indonesia*. Unpub. PhD Diss., (New Haven: Yale University, 1997), xx-xxi, 35-6.

<sup>91</sup> J. L. A. Brandes, "Babad Tjerbon," *Verhandelingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen*, Deel 59, (Batavia and 's Hage: Abrecht & Co. and M. Nijhoff, 1911); See also, Sudibjo Z. Hadisutjipto, trans. *Babad Cerbon*, (Jakarta: Department of Education and Culture, 1979); and P. S. Sulendraningrat, *Babad Tanah Sunda Babad Cirebon*. N.p., n.d.).

categories, while distinctive, also overlap. As such, all scholarship is contextualized with a deep sense of history and the ways in which Islam has entered the discourse.

### Colonial Scholars

I frame the important contributions made by nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial performance scholars in the context of the era that produced them, notably the colonial project of microscopic inquiry coupled with projection, or “orientalism.”<sup>92</sup>

Contrary to popular belief, the first colonizer to take note of performance in Java was not Dutch, but British. It was the solitary pursuit of the former Lieutenant-Governor of Java, Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781-1826), whose massive two-volume *History of Java* was published in 1817,<sup>93</sup> following Britain’s brief occupation of the Archipelago (1806-1815).<sup>94</sup>

Most of the Dutch scholars who followed Raffles were also high-ranking officers, such as D. A. Rinkes, who edited the most oft-cited version of the Cirebon chronicle that deals with the lives of many of the Sufi saints, *Babad Tjerbon*.<sup>95</sup> Rinkes

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<sup>92</sup> I employ here Edward Said’s definition of orientalism – of the, at times, demeaning and essentializing views European imperialists held towards their subjects in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage, 1979).

John Pemberton examines the issue of “the archive” at the Solo court culture. Based on the review of written sources, he concludes that their court culture is a Dutch construction that was later invoked by the New Order government as historical for purposes of exerting control over its citizens. John Pemberton, *On the Subject of “Java,”* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

<sup>93</sup> Thomas Stamford Raffles. *The History of Java*. 2v. (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1965).

<sup>94</sup> Raffles later assembled an impressive collection of several hundred masks and puppets, which were bequeathed to the British Museum the year after his second wife, Lady Raffles, died in 1858. His *wayang kulit* puppets are catalogued in Jeune Scott-Kemball, *Javanese Shadow Puppets: The Raffles Collection in the British Museum*, (London: British Museum, 1970).

<sup>95</sup> J. L. A. Brandes, “Babad Tjerbon,” [Cirebon Chronicle] *Verhandelingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen*, ed. D. A. Rinkes, Deel 59, (Batavia and ’s Hage: Abrecht & Co. and M. Nijhoff, 1911). The manuscript for this translation was in the collection of J. L. A. Brandes, who made the preliminary notes.

was a civil servant of the Dutch colonial government who climbed the ranks from tropical agriculture to the linguistics officer and was second in command to another important scholar, Hazeu, who served as the Adviser for Native Affairs. Rinkes soon after became Hazeu's assistant as Deputy Adviser of Native Affairs running the Department of Education. He eventually replaced Hazeu (who was Rinke's senior) and Hazeu ran the education department. A remarkable scholar in his own right, Hazeu's 1870 dissertation defined Javanese theatre as a truly indigenous form.<sup>96</sup>

The government subsequently retained Rinkes as the head of the Bureau as Commissioner for Native and Arab Affairs. Among his duties was to oversee the *Sarekat Islam* movement's development.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, many Indologists were keenly aware of Islam in Java. The Dutch administrators-turned-performance scholars demonstrate a high mixture of curiosity and passion in their work. They further excelled in their singular dedication to understanding Javanese social structure at the nexus of ritual, cosmology, and legend.

Nonetheless, many questions were left unaddressed. For example, why masks? And why did these villagers commit their lives to a form with no coherent story? Or, if there was a story, what was it? Furthermore, how were local religious beliefs specifically positioned in performance? More troubling, though understandable within the timeframe of this scholarship, is that *topeng* was understood simply as "folk art."

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<sup>96</sup> G. A. J. Hazeu, *Bidragte tot de Kennis van het Javaansche Toneel*. [A Contribution toward Understanding the Javanese Theatre]. *Proefschrift*, (Leiden, 1897), 62-65. This text grew out of his dissertation of the same title (1870-73).

<sup>97</sup> Drewes gives an excellent biography of Rinkes, particularly in his relationship to Hazeu and Snouk Hurgronje. See G. W. J. Drewes introduction of D. A. Rinkes, *Nine Saints of Java*. Alijah Gordon, ed., (Kuala Lumpur: MSRI, 1996), xxiii-xl.

Although many of the men mentioned above (they were all men) were sensitively attuned to Islamic praxis in Java, mystic zones were not fully addressed in their writings on performance.<sup>98</sup> That said, Pigeaud's encyclopedic knowledge of Javanese literature, language, history, religion, and performance transcended the Hindu-Buddhist ethos to recognize Islam as an important cultural feature. The details provided by Pigeaud and these other early observers are unparalleled. Their lush observations allow us to delineate relational borders that are far from black and white.

For the most part, the Indies scholarship was restricted to Dutch, German, and French researchers.<sup>99</sup> Cirebon's *topeng babakan*, or its itinerant form, *beberang*, is mentioned in all of these texts.<sup>100</sup> W. L. Ritter and the illustrator E. Hardouin collaborated on a project of Javanese culture and costume, of which one chapter is dedicated to *topeng babakan*.<sup>101</sup> Serriere's richly detailed essays on Javanese folk theatre predates Pigeaud's opus on the same subject by sixty-five years.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> For example, the embodied practice of *dzikir* (remembrance of God) has two brief mentions in Pigeaud's 1938 opus. They were described in detail elsewhere however. Th. Pigeaud, for instance, co-wrote several books on Islam in Java with de Graaf and himself wrote about the performing arts in Java. De Graaf and Pigeaud collaborated on the following: H. J. de Graaf and Th. G. Pigeaud, *De Eerst Moslimse Vorstendommen op Java: Studien over de Staatkundige Geschiedenis van de 15de en 16de Eeuw*, ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974); *Islamic States in Java 1500-1700. Eight Dutch Books and Articles by Dr. H. J. De Graaf*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), *Chinese Muslims in Java in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries: The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*. M. C. Ricklefs, ed. (Melbourne: Monash Papers of Southeast Asia, 12, 1984); *Kerajaan-kerajaan Islam Pertama di Jawa* [The First Islamic Kingdoms in Java] (Jakarta: Grafiti Pers, 1985).

<sup>99</sup> Hazeu's dissertation was later published as a series of essays (1897). He describes *topeng babakan* as an itinerant masked dance form whose repertoire emanates from the Panji tales G. A. J. Hazeau, *Bidragte tot de Kennis van Het Javaansche Toneel*. [A contribution toward understanding the Javanese theatre]. PhD diss., (Leiden: The State University of Leiden, 1870-1873); G. A. J. Hazeau, *Bidragte tot de Kennis van het Javaansche Toneel. Proefschrift*, (Leiden, 1897), 61-64; V. de Serrière, "Javaansche Volksspelen en Vermaken," *Tijdschrift Nederlandsch-Indië II, Tijdschrift Nederlandsch-Indië II* (1873).

<sup>100</sup> G. A. J. Hazeau, *Bidragte tot de Kennis van het Javaansche Toneel. Proefschrift*, 61-64; V. de Serrière, "Javaansche Volksspelen en Vermaken," (1873), 7-8.

<sup>101</sup> W. L. Ritter and E. Hardouin. *Java's Bewoners in hun eigenaardig karakter en kleederdracht*. [The Javanese and their unusual character and costume], (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1872).

<sup>102</sup> V. de Serrière, "Javaansche Volksspelen en Vermaken," (1873).

In *Javaanse Volksvertoningen: Bijdrage tot de Beschrijving van Land en Volk*, Pigeaud describes two forms of *topeng* in Cirebon: *kleine maskerspel* (small *topeng* play), which is free of a storyline (*lakon*); and *grote topengspel* (large *topeng* plays) which follow a story and refer to *wayang orang* (a/k/a *wayang wong*).<sup>103</sup> Another landmark text was J. Kats' *Het Javaansche Tooneel 1, Wajang Poerwa* [Javanese Theatre 1,<sup>104</sup> *Wayang Purwa*], based on the Hindu stories of *wayang kulit*.<sup>105</sup> A profusion of articles and books on performance appeared in the early twentieth century.<sup>106</sup>

What Pigeaud did for Cirebon village arts, Jaap Kunst accomplished for Javanese music, including Cirebonese gamelan and folk music in his two-volume

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<sup>103</sup> Pigeaud, *Javaanse Volksvertoningen*, 110-120 (nos. 103-112).

<sup>104</sup> According to Rony this is cited as a serial; however, there is no evidence of subsequent volumes. A. Kohar Rony, ed., *Unveiling Indonesia: Indonesian Holdings in the Library of Congress*. (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1996) v2, 1541.

<sup>105</sup> J. Kats, *Het Javaansche Tooneel 1, Wajang Poerwa*, (Weltevreden: Uitgave van de Commissie voor De Volkslectuur, 1923).

<sup>106</sup> Th. Pigeaud, *Javaanse Volksvertoningen: Bijdrage tot de Beschrijving van Land en Volk* [Javanese Folk Theatre], (Batavia: Volkslectuur, 1938). For other late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century works on Javanese cultural traditions see: T. J. Bezemer, "Javaansche Maskers (Verzameling Kunstzaal van Lier, Amsterdam)," (Den Haag: *Nederlandsch-Indie Oud & Nieuw*. 17 Jaargang, Afl 1., 1932), 1-10; Mataram Biendhi, *Dans en Toneelkunst op Java*. (Semarang, 1920); H. H. Juynboll, "Das Javanische Maskenspiel (*Topeng*)," *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie*, XIV (1901); H. Kraemer, "Een Wayang Topeng," *Djawa III* (1923); J. Kunst, *Music in Java: Its History, its Theory and its Technique*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, [1934], 1974); E. W. Maurenbrecher, "De Panakawan-figuren in de Cheribonsche Wajang" in *Djawa 19: Tijdschrift van Het Java-Instituut*. N.O.1 (1939); H. H. Noosten and von Koenigswald, "Maskers en Ziekten op Java en Bali," *Djawa XVII* (1937): 311-17 which examines the role of disease and human representation and as contributing to the aesthetic of the *panakawan* (clown) figures of the *wayang*. *Topeng Cirebon* best articulates the aesthetic of disease with the female clown servant, Tembem; Theodore Pigeaud, "Wayang Wong" in *Djawa IX* (1929); C. M. Pleyte, "De Eerste Ronggeng" in *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*. Deel LVII. Batavia and 'S Hage: Albrecht & Co. and M. Nijhoff, 1916); C. M. Pleyte, "Indonesische Masken" in *Globus LXI* (1892); A. J. Resink-Wilkens, A. J. "De Klana-dans," *Djawa IV*: 99-100 + 4pp. plates (1924); and B. Schrieke, "Wajang Wong," *Djawa: Tijdschrift van Het Java-Instituut*. Negende Jaargang (1929).

reference, *Music in Java*.<sup>107</sup> This early scholarship is invaluable for understanding how *topeng* migrated and transgressed colonial borders. It was on the move.

In their capacity as civil servants, these scholars were the cultural policy-makers of their time. Indeed, the colonial project served as a catalyst for the research that followed. Most notably, scholars have shined a bright light on the subversion of the puppet theatres *wayang kulit* and *wayang golek* by either performers and/or rulers for propagandistic purposes.

### **Performance Studies Since World War II**

With few exceptions, the literature on performance theory in Java after World War II, much like its predecessors, centers on the court arts of Yogyakarta and Central Java. But it takes a decisive turn in the 1980s and 1990s, when scholars began uncovering how cultural policies affected marginalized artists. Endo Suanda delineates Soeharto's homage to those Muslims who participated in the mass murders of 1965 and 1966, when performance schedules were amended in accordance with *shalat* (the five daily prayers).<sup>108</sup> James Brandon's *Theatre in Southeast Asia* is as pertinent today as when it was published in 1967.<sup>109</sup> In addition to providing a panoramic view of performance practices throughout the region, he connects the dots of cross-pollination and regional cultural policies. When turning his attention to Indonesia, Brandon provides a rare glimpse into the politicization of theatre troupes, notably *ludruk*,<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> J. Kunst, *Music in Java: Its History, its Theory and its Technique*, 2v. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, [1934], 1974).

<sup>108</sup> Endo Suanda, "The Social Context of the Cirebonese Performing Artist," 38-9.

<sup>109</sup> James Brandon, *Theatre in Southeast Asia*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

<sup>110</sup> A folk drama from East Java that features cross-dressing and clowning.



*ketoprak*,<sup>111</sup> and *wayang* organizations right before the “coup.”<sup>112</sup> Kathy Foley describes regional meetings and the formalization of *wayang golek* troupes in the Bandung.<sup>113</sup> Matthew Isaac Cohen contributes to our knowledge of Javanese arts generally, and the socio-political contours of Cirebon *wayang* in particular,<sup>114</sup> by outlining the surveillance and regulations (imposed from within and without) on the form during Soeharto’s New Order.<sup>115</sup> Andrew Weintraub identifies power-as-subtext built into *wayang golek*’s structure.<sup>116</sup> In the Central and East Javanese theatre forms, James Peacock’s treatise on the androgynous Surabaya (East Javanese) popular entertainment, *ludruk*, catapulted transvestite performance into performance studies discourse, while sparking a debate about the value of humor between pious (*santri*) and traditional (*abangan*) Muslims.<sup>117</sup> He deems *ludruk* a “rite of modernization” wherein symbolic action is consequential. He convincingly argues that, while Indonesia’s communist and nationalist rhetoric made sufficient inroads into *ludruk* storylines during the last years of Sukarno’s presidency, the basic tenor of the androgynous characters’

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<sup>111</sup> A popular comedic theatre form from Yogyakarta.

<sup>112</sup> Brandon’s fieldwork was conducted in 1963 and 1964. Brandon, *Theatre in Southeast Asia*.

<sup>113</sup> Kathy Foley, *The Sundanese Wayang Golek: The Rod Puppet Theatre of West Java*. PhD Diss. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1979), 246-52.

<sup>114</sup> Cohen, *An Inheritance from the Friends of God*, PhD Diss; Matthew Isaac Cohen. *The Komedi Stamboel: Popular Theater in Colonial Indonesia, 1891-1903*. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006); Matthew Isaac Cohen, “Reading ‘Suluk Wayang’: Javanese Shadow Puppets, ‘Nala’-Vision, Private Self, Bodily Self,” in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, (2002b) 3, 12: 2, 167-86.

<sup>115</sup> Matthew Isaac Cohen, “Entrusting the Scriptures: Wayang Kulit, Cultural Politics, and Truly Popular Art in New Order West Java” in *Puppet Theater in Contemporary Indonesia: New Approaches to Performance Events*, Jan Mrázek, ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Centers for South and Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), 109-23.

<sup>116</sup> Andrew N. Weintraub, *Power Plays: Wayang Golek Puppet Theater of West Java*. Athens, Ohio: Institute of South East Asian Studies. Monographs in International Studies 110, 2004a); Andrew N. Weintraub, “The ‘Crisis of the Sinden’: Gender, Politics and Memory in the Performing Arts of West Java, 1959-1964,” *Indonesia* (2004b), 77:57-78.

<sup>117</sup> James L. Peacock, *Rites of Modernization: Symbols and Social Aspects of Indonesian Proletarian Drama*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 19, 75-76, 280-86.

dialogue and songs were oriented toward fiscal mobility. Barbara Hatley juxtaposes *wayang* with the newer, popular *ludruk* during the early days of the New Order, and examines how the former was viewed as old-fashioned in spite of governmental backing.<sup>118</sup> More recently, Hatley has turned her attention to theatre post-*reformasi*, particularly the dulled interest in political theatre following Soeharto's fall and its subsequent rekindling with Indonesia's fledgling democracy.<sup>119</sup>

Ruth McVey describes the difficulties encountered by the *PKI* in co-opting *wayang*'s message.<sup>120</sup> She argues that *wayang* expressed Javanese feudal values whose shackles the *PKI* were determined to break while appealing to mainstream Muslims, which in turn, deepened the schism with orthodox Muslims.<sup>121</sup> In addition, Clara van Groenendael details how the teaching of *wayang*, once an orally-transmitted village tradition, shifted with sultan-based *wayang* schools at Central Java's courts; this effectively narrowed the distinctions between the production of village and court art *wayang*. She also details the organizational efforts of *dalang wayang* reaching back to World War II and New Order efforts to appropriate *wayang* for its own purposes.<sup>122</sup> Laurie J. Sears invokes the *pasemon*<sup>123</sup> as an allusion that conceals larger themes in the

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<sup>118</sup> Barbara Hatley, "Wayang and Ludruk: Polarities in Java", *TDR: The Drama Review* T50 (1971), 88-101.

<sup>119</sup> Barbara Hatley, *Javanese Performances on an Indonesian Stage: Celebrating Culture, Embracing Change*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008).

<sup>120</sup> Ruth McVey, "The *Wayang* Controversy in Indonesian Communism" in *Context, Meaning, and Power in Southeast Asia*. Mark Hobart and Robert H. Taylor, eds., (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1986).

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* 21, 31, 38.

<sup>122</sup> Victoria M. Clara van Groenendael, *The Dalang Behind the Wayang; The Role of the Surakarta and the Yogyakarta Dalang in Indonesian-Javanese Society*, (Dordrecht: Foris. KITLV, Verhandelingen 114, 1985).

<sup>123</sup> *Pasemon* is a Javanese literary device for allusions that incorporate humor to make its point.

stories from the puppet form, *wayang purwa*.<sup>124</sup> She also considers how Islam was repositioned Islam within a Hindu frame under Dutch rule in order to minimize its effect in Java.<sup>125</sup>

In contrast to the above studies, *topeng Cirebon* scholarship has been limited to a small number of scholars, all of whom are discussed in this book. Endo Suanda localizes *topeng* in its cultural context. As a former practitioner, he provides superb insights into the form and its practitioners spanning four decades.<sup>126</sup> Toto Sudarto provides our first historical overview of *topeng* during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly in its itinerant form.<sup>127</sup> *Wayang golek* expert, Kathy Foley, turned her attention to *topeng* in an important 1990 article that shifts our attention toward the forms' embodied practices, which she links to *wayang* iconography. Drawing from her training and skill as a puppeteer, Foley describes each character's voice and, quite literally, how its sound is formed in the mouth.<sup>128</sup> Maman Suryaaimadja describes the way in which costume, in combination with the mask, serve as a conduit between the external and internal world.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> *Wayang purwa* also employs shadow puppets. Its stories relate to cosmology and likely pre-date Islam's arrival. Laurie J. Sears, *Shadows of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

<sup>125</sup> Laurie J. Sears, *Shadows of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

<sup>126</sup> Endo Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon: Tinjauan Sosio Kultural Kini*, (Np: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Direktorat Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional Proyek Inventarisasi dan Dokumentasi Sejarah Nasional Tahun 1995/1996); "Topeng Cirebon dan Konteksnya"; "Dancing in Cirebonese Topeng," *Balungan* 3/3 (1988); *Topeng Cirebon: In its Social Context*. Master's thesis (Middletown: Wesleyan University, 1983)

<sup>127</sup> Toto Sudarto, *Topeng Babakan Cirebon 1900 -1990*. Master's thesis; Endo Suanda, "The Social Context of the Cirebonese Performing Artist," 13.

<sup>128</sup> Foley, "My Bodies: The Performer in West Java."

<sup>129</sup> Maman Suryaaimadja, *Pertunjukan Topeng Cirebon. Suatu Penelaahan Segi Busananya*, (Bandung: Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia, 1985).

This study builds on the inner/outer matrix on several fronts: I expand upon Foley's work by understanding how sound is prioritized by the ear and understood somatically; I further build on sensation through the object of the mask itself, as a Janus face – the side we show to the world, and its polar opposite: the private self that we safeguard from a sometimes cold and indifferent world. I also explore this contrast in *topeng* itself, by locating mobility and engagement within structured interiority.<sup>130</sup>

### **Textual Evidence: Orality**

Claire Holt contends that the most important element holding Javanese and Balinese performing arts together is their texts. Representations of the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and *Panji* tales, whether depicted in stone reliefs, the scrolled stories, *wayang beber*, *wayang kulit* or the mask proper, tell us much about life during the time they were created and performed. As Sears has eloquently pointed out, adaptation has been central to the Javanese, whose epic heroes are painted in their own regional images.<sup>131</sup>

Mary-Lousie Totton describes the significance of concealment's counterpart: unmasking (exposure) in the imagery in the *Ramayana* motifs at the *Loro Jonggrang* complex in Central Java, most notably: the trickster who is eventually undone (unmasked); monkeys who ultimately must pay for their naughty behavior; divine

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<sup>130</sup> Carl Jung referred to this inevitable process as the "persona" (the face we show to the world) and its "shadow" (those hidden aspects that we shelter from others). Jung borrowed "persona" from the Etruscan theatre of the fourth through sixth centuries BCE, when music and dance flourished at funerals and festivals commemorating the Gods. The name of one of the masked harlequins, Phersu, translates as "persona." C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 20; Margarete Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 147.

<sup>131</sup> Laurie Jo Sears, *The Transmission of the Epics from India to Java*, (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin. Centre of Southeast Asian Studies 2, 1979), 31.

beings disguised as birds; and Rawana removing his ascetic/heron guise.<sup>132</sup> These creatures – all eventually unmasked – point to a similar logic in Cirebonese *topeng*: the performance begins with the *dalang*, who until recently danced sans mask for approximately the first half of the dance. Only after the spirit was absorbed was the mask placed on the face. At the end of the dance the mask was again removed in full view of the audience. This acknowledgement that the dance was completed also signified the *dalang topeng*'s completed transformation, a concept equally at home with Indonesia's Hindu past as its *tasawuf* present.

Rivaling the Indic epics' popularity in Cirebon are the *Panji* tales,<sup>133</sup> whose characters are drawn from stories about the legendary Javanese Hindu prince Panji and his search for his lost love Candra Kirana. Structuralist W. H. Rassers was one of the earliest scholars to link social and symbolic structure within the Panji tales in his doctoral thesis *De Pandji-Roman*.<sup>134</sup> Rassers demonstrates in his later work (1959) *Panji, the Culture Hero: A Structural Study of Religion in Java*, how performance can bridge social science with the humanities, although, like his Dutch colleagues, he privileges Java's Hindu-Buddhist roots. Deeper analysis of the Panji tales was left to his Indonesian colleague, R. N. Ng. Poerbatjaraka who penned (originally in Dutch) *Panji-erhalen onderling vergeleken*.<sup>135</sup> The author gives an exhaustive account of how the

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<sup>132</sup> Mary-Louise Totton, "Narrating Animals on the Screen of the World," *The Art Bulletin*, 85,1 (2003), 6-24.

<sup>133</sup> It is often referred to as "Panji Cycle," a term created by Dutch scholars, which should be avoided as it suggests a cycle, or genealogy of stories. They are instead discrete stories with overlapping themes and tropes.

<sup>134</sup> W. H. Rassers, *De Pandji-Roman*, (De Vos-van Kleef: Antwerpen, 1922).

<sup>135</sup> Twenty-eight years later, Poerbatjaraka's treatise was translated into Indonesian and published under the title *Tjerita Pandji dalam perbandingan*, (Jakarta: Gunung Agung, 1968).

Panji stories traveled in the Malay world,<sup>136</sup> Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand. While many people associate Panji with Indonesia's pre-Islamic past, the tropes of pilgrimage, concealment, disguise, and transformation so brilliantly interwoven into the stories, portend their transitional meaning.

Amin Sweeney and Walter J Ong analyze oral and written conventions. Sweeney<sup>137</sup> looks specifically at the relationship between the author and audience in Malay traditions. Less concerned with the distinction between oral and literary styles, he focuses on the social and political shifts that accompanied literacy's inauguration and expansion. Ong<sup>138</sup> brings Marshall McLuhan's work to the fore when claiming that the user *is* the content of the new technology.<sup>139</sup> He examines how media shapes our thinking, be it literature, popular culture, or hybrid forms. Both Sweeney and Ong believe writing and literacy restructure and externalize consciousness. This concept is important to this study in deciphering patterns of memorization and meaning.

### **Narratives of Power**

*Topeng Cirebon*, much like contemporary *wayang* in Cirebon, merges contemporary values with mystical Islam and older cosmologies, wherein power is concentrated at the center and radiates outward. Benedict Anderson argues that power

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<sup>136</sup> These include one in Malay, five in Modern Javanese, and one in Middle Javanese.

<sup>137</sup> Amin Sweeney, *Authors and Audiences in Traditional Malay Literature*, (Berkeley: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, University of California, 1980); Amin Sweeney, *A Full Hearing: Orality and Literacy in the Malay World*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>138</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, (New York: Routledge, 1982).

<sup>139</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998); McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962).

assumes political force in connection to mystical and magical cosmology.<sup>140</sup> One public sign that power has been attained is the achievement of *wahyu*, or divine radiance.<sup>141</sup>

Ward Keeler draws on and extends Anderson's theory in his pivotal text *Javanese Shadow Plays, Javanese Selves*,<sup>142</sup> in positing power, self, and status, as the essence of Javanese life.

Finally, James Scott's exploration of the discourse of the powerless in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* demonstrates "how the process of domination generates a hegemonic public conduct and a backstage discourse consisting of what cannot be spoken in the face of power."<sup>143</sup> Scott highlights women, slaves, sharecroppers, and others who emerge from their communities in the margins and find their voice in the muddled conversations that hover between the powerless and the power-possessed.

If Michel Foucault is correct when he proposes that a necessary ingredient of power relations is freedom<sup>144</sup> then, in a bi-directional sense, the freedom Scott argues for is in the cacophony of resistance in a variety of forms, be they jokes, euphemisms, or coded language. Likewise, freedom can also manifest itself in the contextual inversions

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<sup>140</sup> For Anderson, the borders of these centers were blurred. Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, "Idea of Power in Javanese Culture" in *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Robert von Heine-Geldern, *Conceptualizations of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia*, (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1956); Soemarsaid Moertono, *State and Statecraft in Old Java: A Study of the Later Mataram Period, 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century*, (Ithaca: Modern Indonesian Project. Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University Press, 1968); Stanley Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). See also Jakob Sumardjo, *Arkeologi Budaya Indonesia. Pelacakan Hermeneutis-Historis Terhadap Artefak-Artefak Kebudayaan*, (Yogyakarta: Qalam, 2002).

<sup>141</sup> Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. "Idea of Power in Javanese Culture," 31.

<sup>142</sup> Ward Keeler, *Javanese Shadow Plays, Javanese Selves*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

<sup>143</sup> James D. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), xii.

<sup>144</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Vintage, 1977), 219-20.

introduced by Mikhael Bakhtin in his groundbreaking study of popular culture in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as depicted in the French novels of François Rabelais.<sup>145</sup> Bakhtin's analysis incorporates a notion of the multilayered, often times grotesque, voices of carnival.

Similar discussions have yet to emerge from the discourse of *topeng*. This may be because *topeng* does not clearly translate as “carnavalesque” in terms of power relations. It is not irreverent, the body is not scrutinized, hierarchies are neither suspended nor reversed: the king is no fool. Whereas carnival is synonymous with moments of transgressive communal excess, *topeng*, as performed during the New Order and in a slightly relaxed form today, remains bound to a rigid social order enforced by the *penilik kebudayaan* (culture inspectors). This is in sharp contrast to the concept of humor, whose purpose is not to create cohesion, but to break or reinforce taboos.<sup>146</sup>

Scott's paradigm is firmly attuned to this project, wherein the public square was often the arena for such seepage. The *dalangs'* silence may have granted them a spiritual advantage toward achieving a more intimate connection to God, but a decisive disadvantage is that, lacking the proper skills, silence becomes a mechanism for forgetting. This study seeks to begin to remedy that.

This manuscript is the first extended politico-religious examination of *topeng Cirebon*. By examining how ideas travel in an oral society, our understanding of

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<sup>145</sup> Particularly noteworthy was Bakhtin's illumination of the prohibitions on the “lower” strata of culture (with carnival its requisite component) as opposed to “high” culture. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

<sup>146</sup> Mel Gordon contends that the purpose of humor is “to unbalance the world.” He uses the example of *wayang kulit*, whose clown-servants (*panakawan*) serve as social critics, who eventually reassume their places as cohesion returns: “Like a dance, [humor] goes in unexpected rhythms and then ends in an embrace.” Mel Gordon, pers. comm., 8 June 2009.



*topeng*'s nuance increases ten-fold. Indeed, *topeng* is a template for pilgrimage in the Cirebonese imaginary.

The Cirebon mask has been described in great detail in previous studies. However *topeng*'s auxiliary objects, though often physically described, remain enigmatic. Some of these items are considered sacred and treated as such, but precisely what the objects meant for those artists who crafted them or carried them on their backs from village to village has not received equal treatment. Finally, the longevity of these objects transcend ruptures in transmission by adapting to the needs of the day.

#### **LANGUAGE AND ORTHOGRAPHY**

My passion for Indonesia notwithstanding, very few things prove as frustrating as conducting archival research in the Indonesian language. Variations in transliteration and spelling are dizzying. The Indonesian languages, much like the history of Indonesia, are fluid and subject to change. Take the namesake of this study: Cirebon. Cirebon refers to both the regency and city of Cirebon. A variety of spellings designate this locale, including Caruban and Carbon, (Javanese), Tjeribon, and Cheribon (Dutch). It even appears as “Sheribon” on a nineteenth century American-produced map of the region. The official Indonesian name is Cirebon. It is Cerbon in the regional language, Cirebon Javanese. “Cirebon” is employed in this study for continuity purposes.

Written records of the Javanese language, to which Cirebon Javanese is related, correspond to Old Javanese (*Kawi*). *Kawi* script is derived from Pali to the now modernized Latin letters. Language became part of the nation-building project with the lingua franca, Indonesian playing an important role in national identity beginning in the

1920s.<sup>147</sup> During the Dutch era, different spellings were imposed that reflected their phonetic understanding of the Indonesian language, then known as *bahasa* Malay. After independence the Indonesian government instituted changes in orthography; notably, “tj” was replaced with “j” (Tjakarta is now Jakarta); “j” became “y” (*Nji* is now *Nyi*) and “oe” became “u” (Soeharto is now Suharto). In this study I employ the current spelling with modern usage except in cases of personal names, bibliographic citations, and when earlier spellings are referred to in the text. The new spellings became standard with the government’s spelling reform of 1972, *ejaan yang disempurnakan*.

Choice of spelling in Indonesia is just that: a choice. When Indonesia achieved independence, many individuals elected to change the spelling of their names. This was viewed as an act of emancipation. Many of those who retained the Dutch spelling were allying themselves with the past. In the pages that follow, many such examples surface as I trace the Indonesian government’s officially sanctioned orthographic conventions in 1972. In the case of some Arabic and Sanskrit terms where I was unable to locate an Indonesian translation or equivalent, diacritics are incorporated depending upon the context and the source. Thus, the spelling of personal names reflects the preference of the individual, except when cited by an outside source. Some names may appear in more than one form. Furthermore, many Indonesians have only one name. This brings up the question of which spelling to use when speaking of Indonesia’s first President Sukarno and second President Soeharto. Dual spellings appear in both cases. We find spellings of the nationalist Sukarno also as Soekarno; and Soeharto frequently appears as Suharto.

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<sup>147</sup> David H. de Queljo, *A Preliminary Study of Malay / Indonesian Orthography*, (DeKalb: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University, 1969), 52.

Upon reviewing many official documents, it was clear that Sukarno adopted the language of nationalist Indonesia. His name, therefore, appears in this study as “Sukarno.” In contrast, many official handbooks and dedication plaques (e.g. guidebooks for *Taman Mini Indonesia Indah*, Indonesia’s government-sponsored theme park, and Indonesia’s national hospital, *Rumah Sakit Harapan Kita*) were launched by then President “Soeharto.” Again, this study concurs. Original spellings are used when quoting texts or activities published prior to 1972. Notably, documents from the regency Majalengka prior to 1972 are referred to by its Dutch spelling: Madjalengka. Indonesian and Dutch translations to English are my own.

Since this work focuses on an expansive area with substantial linguistic variation, it is difficult to classify Cirebon Javanese as a singular language. I have used the following sources for translations: Cirebon Javanese: T. D. Sudjana, *Kamus Bahasa Cirebon*. (Bandung: Humaniora, 2005, Rev. Ed.); Javanese: Stuart Robson and Singgih Wibisono. *Javanese English Dictionary*, (Hong Kong: Periplus, 2002); Sundanese: Lembaga Basa & Sastra Sunda. *Kamus Umum Basa Sunda*, (Bandung, Tarate, 1985); Jonathan Rigg, *A Dictionary of the Sunda Language of Java*, (Batavia: Lange & Co., 1862). Indonesian: W. J. S. Poerwadarminta, *Kamus Umum Bahasa Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1985); Alan M. Stevens and A .Ed. Schmidgall-Tellings, *A Comprehensive Indonesian-English Dictionary*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004); John M. Echols and Hassan Shadily, *Kamus Indonesia Inggris*, (Gramedia: Jakarta, 1989); Dutch: N. Osselton and R. Hempelman, *The New Routledge Dutch Dictionary: Dutch-English/English-Dutch*. London: Routledge, London, 2003).

Finally, plural forms are most commonly indicated in Indonesian by means of reduplication; thus all plural foreign words appear in this study in singular form (no “s”). The reader should derive if it is singular or plural in the context of the sentence.

## **HUMAN SUBJECTS**

This study conforms to the guidelines set forth by the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects. In addition to my fieldwork period (2003, 2004, and 2005-06), CPHS has generously granted permission to include information provided to me during my first year of study in Indonesia in 1977-78; sadly, with only one exception, all of my respondents from the early years are deceased. The many people I worked with in 2005-06 graciously shared their valuable time, trust, and blessings to increase understanding of *topeng Cirebon* both within and outside of Indonesia. Each person granted permission for me to use their names. However, due to the sensitivity of some of the interviews, as well as collated documents laid forth in the chapters that follow, I employ pseudonyms when deemed appropriate. In those cases, the name is followed by the word “pseudonym” when first introduced.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This project has been percolating for many years. Research occurred over two extended periods: an eleven-month study period from 1977 to 1978 and during the course of my dissertation fieldwork in 2005 - 2006. As a young performer interested in mask theatre, I went to Indonesia to study *topeng Cirebon* at a time when most of my friends were in college. I studied the five characters in the *topeng* pantheon of the

Palimanan-style.<sup>148</sup> I also documented my teacher, Dasih demonstrating each movement of each dance of this style in photographs. Dasih and I often discussed *topeng*. I also conducted formal interviews with her and some of the active *dalang topeng*, clowns, and musicians of that era, including Sujana Arja, Bulus, Kandeg Patmadjawanata, and Sudji.

The second part of my research, my dissertation fieldwork, occurred over a sixteen-month period from 2 April 2005 through 15 July 2006 and two weeks of follow-up research 20 June – 5 July 2009. I studied *topeng* again during the 2005-06 period, but this time only one character: Panji.

I did not choose Panji, rather, Panji chose me. Soon after my arrival I realized that this slow-motion dance of the most esteemed spiritual character in the *topeng* pantheon was rarely performed or taught anymore. The reasons for this are complex and not immediately apparent. *Tari Topeng Panji* is an interior dance – a meditation for the dancer. Many spectators (including dancers) consider it boring to watch. But from the perspective of the author and those dancers who remember it, *Tari Topeng Panji* is the most contemplative dance in the hierarchy. Studying theatre requires the participation of the researcher. Particularly when studying states of consciousness, there is no clearer path to knowledge than understanding one's own psychology first. It is essential. All actors who seek to establish an intuitive relationship with their audience must be open to the rawness within themselves. To perform Panji is to tap into a zone of being not often encountered.

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<sup>148</sup> It was unusual for an outsider to study all five characters of a given style in the 1970s and unheard of today. It is all but unheard of today. More commonly, students pick and choose dances and teachers. For instance, one might study Panji with Suji of Palimanan, who was considered to have the best technique for this character; then study Samba with Sujana of Slangit,, etc. So as early as the 1970s there was a shift away from mastering one style.

I also studied Panji because I wanted to understand how dance pedagogy is taught today. I documented in still photographs each movement of the two styles of *Tari Topeng Panji* I studied in 2005: Sujana Arja of Slangit, Cirebon's version and Rasinah's of Indramayu (in addition to Dasih's version from 1978). I was fortunate that, in all three cases, the *dalang* agreed to demonstrate their movements. Although there is insufficient space to include these images in this study, they inform it in recondite ways.

I intend for this study to be truthful to the orality of the form. One way to be faithful to this is to have the artists' voices and words carry this study forward. Thus, most of the interviews and discussions were taped. More than a quarter century ago I promised Dasih that I would share her *ilmu topeng*<sup>149</sup> with a larger audience. The germ for this study then was transferred from Dasih's heart to mine.

My methodological approach in 1977-78 was simple. Listen. Look. Be curious. Be respectful. Be attentive. Be present. From 2003 to 2009 my methodology remained pretty much the same. During the present period, my philosophy has not changed, although the tools available for achieving my goals have. During this period I examine archival texts, film, photographic documentation and oral interviews with *dalang topeng* – mainly elder *dalang* and musicians, many who have not performed in many years, and performance and religious scholars. This included studying Islamic mysticism prevalent to the Cirebon area. Archival research was conducted at *Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia*, personal archives, requiring translations from Indonesian, Dutch, Sundanese, and Cirebon Javanese. I am indebted to Rahkmat Hidayat and Matthew Cohen for their

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<sup>149</sup> lit: “*topeng* knowledge.” In a mystical sense, the heart is the organ of perception.

assistance with translations from Cirebon Javanese and to Ninik Lunde's assistance with some of the Javanese translations.

All of the photographs are by the author, unless otherwise noted.

## **CHAPTER OUTLINE**

The *topeng* community emerged from its marginality while holding on tenaciously to its craft against strong odds. This active process depended upon mobility – not merely physical mobility, but a rigorous commitment to circulation across expansive spaces. This study aims to understand how movement and stasis influenced a rural tradition that once comfortably straddled itinerancy, popular culture, and ritualism. Because of *topeng Cirebon's* connection to mystical praxis, it necessarily navigates between the inner life and engagement in the world. The eight chapters of this study navigate similar terrain.

The first chapter, “Historical Landmarks in the ‘Modern’ Period,” looks at the principal events in *topeng's* transmission from the mid-nineteenth century through the late twentieth century. I argue that, in spite of ongoing political and religious ruptures, *topeng* persisted. Mobility, however, was relative. Imperialism flourished with the steamship, mass transportation, and the 1869 opening of the Suez Canal. These events propelled the first of many colonial expositions. West Javanese artists participated in some of these fairs. Advances in mass transportation also increased the capacity of Muslim Javanese to perform the hajj. Anderson opines that some of these pilgrims returned to colonial Java with the aim of discrediting those “‘non-Islamic,’ heterodox

accretions of the intervening centuries,” and that Dutch capitalism, with its focus on traditional social life and secularism, was threatened.<sup>150</sup>

From the colonial intervention, the next rupture examined in this first chapter is Japan’s invasion of Java during World War II. With it, *topeng* continued, but just barely. Indonesia’s revolution (1945-49) and eventual independence was accompanied by new nationalist fervor about the arts, including *topeng*. Indonesia’s first president, Sukarno, injected local arts into the highest level of diplomacy and, domestically, the same arts were employed to promote his increasingly communist agenda. The communist party’s rapid growth aroused hostility among the military and Islamic groups and combined with other factors led to autocratic rule in 1965. While the precise architects behind the murder of six high-ranking officials in the early morning hours of 1 October 1965 remain mysterious and controversial,<sup>151</sup> there is no doubt that Soeharto and his military swiftly seized control of the government and that mass murder followed in late 1965 and

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<sup>150</sup> Anderson, “Idea of Power in Javanese Culture,” 69-70. More nuanced perspectives on the Dutch experience in Java pertaining to class, as well as to racial and gender ambivalence have been posited by Gouda, Schama, Stoler, and Taylor. See Frances Gouda, *Dutch Culture Overseas: Colonial Practice in the Netherlands Indies, 1900 – 1942*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995); Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*; Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).

<sup>151</sup> There are two dominant theories: one points to Soeharto as behind the “coup,” while the other view has disgruntled PKI members as behind a failed communist coup. The belief that it was a failed communist attempt that quickly devolved in Soeharto’s favor has gained currency in recent years. Anderson and McVey felt it was an internal affair culminating from a weary army. See Benedict R. O’G. Anderson and Ruth McVey, *A Preliminary Analysis of the October 1, 1965 Coup in Indonesia*, (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1971); Ragna Boden, “The ‘Gestapu’ events of 1965 in Indonesia: New evidence from Russian and German archives,” *BKI* (2007), 507-528; John Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder. The September 30<sup>th</sup> Movement & Suharto’s Coup d’État in Indonesia*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).



1966. The arts were silenced. By the early 1970s, the image of *dalang topeng* took an odd turn: from suspected communists and communist sympathizers to icons of Soeharto's state party, *Golkar*.

The second chapter, "Mobility's Muse: from *Topeng Bebarang* to Stasis and Back Again" examines the important function of itinerancy in *topeng*. When street performance was effectively banned in 1965, *topeng* was silenced, but it did not die. The third chapter, *The Dalang and Bodor*, brings the lives of the artists into focus. The *dalang*'s encounter with physical and spiritual mobility brings us to the fourth chapter, "Engaging the Body and Senses." Here, the issue of community is addressed: who supports itinerant artists? Who is being served? By exploring the corporeality of the *dalang* at the interface of what is private (concealed) versus what is public (revealed), I look at performers' experience of the body and how techniques of physiological and emotional attunement are engaged - notably the embodied practice of *dzikir*. This chapter also asks how to live one's work when the dancer's body is no longer tuned to this intuitive level. *Topeng* training is different today. Many of today's younger generation *dalang* study at art academies where *topeng* is part of the curriculum, but modern dance dominates the field.

Beginning with the fifth chapter, "The Cirebon Mask," we turn our attention to the material culture of *topeng Cirebon*. We examine the mask's surface treatment, not only as a vehicle of expression, but as an invisible bridge that connects the living with the dead, and the performer with her audience. The mask is the stimulus for inner and outer travel discourses, whose external aesthetic conditions the body's responses.

The sixth chapter, “The Geography of the Mask” traces the mask’s trajectory in the Islamicate world. It addresses the perceived prohibition on reproducing the human form and speculates about why the mask survived Muslim conversions in some regions and failed in others. Chapter 7 is part of a larger issue of how *topeng* remedies this potential schism by bringing Allah lovingly into the equation in both revealed and concealed form. “Voices from the Grave” considers how Java’s early mosques and ancestral graveyard complexes are repeated in *topeng* iconography, particularly the chest where the masks are stored, or *kotak topeng* and the *dalang*’s headdress, called the *sobrah*, *gambuh*, or *tekes*. I conclude that, at one time, these two artifacts served as portable altars.

The eighth chapter, “*Topeng Comes to the Pesantren*” examines current attitudes about the mask’s meaning at two Cirebon-region Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). The first *pesantren* under discussion, *Pondok Pesantren Darul Musyawirin*, follows a traditional (*salaf*) education model, wherein all forms of dance are prohibited and the only acceptable forms of music are those that praise God, such as the percussive/vocal, *rebana*. The second *pesantren* under discussion, *Pesantren Ma’had Al-Zaytun*, employs the reformist (*talaf*) education model. On the fortieth anniversary of *Gestok*, it unveiled its newly built Soeharto building to house its new university. On this same anniversary, *topeng Cirebon* was incorporated into its art curriculum. This is stunning in and of itself. However, the head of the Indramayu *pesantren*, *Shaykh Panji Gumilang*, has been linked with the separatist *Darul Islam* movement. His Indramayu-based *pesantren* was founded, and continues to be supported, by elite *Golkar* members including Habibie and

Soeharto's daughter, Tutut. This auspicious occasion is examined in the context of post-*reformasi* efforts at reconciliation.

Finally, my conclusion brings us full circle, by looking at pilgrimage as a way of being - a journey whose starting point in this study is the colonial fairs - *topeng*'s first known transnational touristic venture.

## CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL LANDMARKS IN THE “MODERN” PERIOD

This chapter analyzes how events unfolded through three historic moments: the colonial period, with an emphasis on the Chicago and Paris expositions; the mid-twentieth century, from the Japanese occupation (1942-1945) through Indonesia’s Independence and up to *Gestok*; and Soeharto’s New Order (1966-1998). The decade since *reformasi* (1998-2009) will be discussed in the Conclusion.

Domestic ruptures periodically halted three features critical to *topeng*’s survival: movement, migration, and contact. These cleavages will be examined from the perspective of Dutch hegemony during their rule, continuing in modified form by the Japanese military during their occupation of Java, and through Indonesian sovereignty. Much like the religious and emotional components of *topeng*, the struggle of peasant artists to keep their art alive against seemingly insuperable forces competing for dominance, is rooted in a genealogy of knowledge that can only be understood retrospectively. Due to the delicate nature of some of the interviews conducted during the course of my fieldwork, pseudonyms are employed in a few cases in my discussion of the artist registry system.

### TOPENG ON THE WORLD STAGE

We shall first turn our attention to the colonial period, when during the middle-late nineteenth century, when industry was first linked with a global market that intersected with international trade and industry expositions in Europe and the U.S. This was the era when the philosopher Herbert Spencer’s 1864 competition theory “survival of the fittest” was laid out. Spencer’s construct was expanded upon by Charles Darwin’s genetic-based evolution theory in which one organism is pitted against another with the

aim of reproductive success. Theories based on the microcosm were not unique to Spencer and Darwin, but constituted the modernist movement that included Marcel Proust, Albert Einstein, and Sigmund Freud. It was in this broader context of microscopic inquiry that the fairs emerged. The geo-politics of the fairs was far from neutral. Kenyan playwright and performance theorist Ngugi wa Thiong'o admonishes us to be attentive to the meaning of performance space:

For the politics of the performance space is much more than a question of the physical site for a theatrical show. It touches on nearly all aspects of power and being in a colonial and post-colonial society. It is germane to issues of what constitutes the national and the mainstream.<sup>152</sup>

The British Empire in Kenya was Thiong'o's main focus, but its far-reaching tendrils extended to Southeast Asia as well: Singapore, Malaysia, and Burma. Penny Edwards describes how race was "staged" in colonial Burma, particularly the British fear of mobility among the indigenous theatre troupe, the Burmese *phwe*. *Phwe*'s lack of both spatial discipline and predictability of script was synonymous with chaos to those trying to instill order through colonial rule.<sup>153</sup> Indeed, the fear of itinerancy was not unique to British imperialists. It was a leitmotif running through European and American Empire, for it was during itinerant performance that ideas were exchanged.

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<sup>152</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams. Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 69. See also Penny Edwards, "Half-cast: Staging race in British Burma," *Postcolonial Studies* 5:3 (2002), 279-295.

<sup>153</sup> Edwards describes four dominant British 'anxieties' toward *phwe*: space, access, time, and lack of artifice. Penny Edwards, "Half-cast: Staging race in British Burma," 281-82.

Many performance scholars accept that performance art, as it is known in the West originated with Zürich and, later, Berlin Dada<sup>154</sup> cabaret acts. However, Dada did not occur in a vacuum. The Dadaists drew inspiration from the international colonial fairs. It was here that Tristan Tzara<sup>155</sup> and most Westerners had their first encounter with non-European culture. Richard Schechner refers to the fairs and other pan-optic dioramic events as “performances of magnitude.” These performances are distinctive from traditional performances in several ways: they require audience participation; the multiplicity of events cannot be taken in all at once; and they invite multiple visits to take everything in.<sup>156</sup> The fairs informed some of the earliest serious scholarship on the performing arts of Java, with articles and books emerging in the last three decades of the nineteenth century.

The conditions under which the international colonial fairs took place tell us much about conceptualizations of industry and power in the global sphere. London’s 1851 *Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations – The Crystal Palace* was the first international exposition.<sup>157</sup> The Crystal Palace dramatically changed the world of commerce by making the most powerful nations’ products available to an international audience.<sup>158</sup> Its appeal, however, was not limited to products. It was one of

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<sup>154</sup> Dada was a brief cultural movement of avant garde visual, literary, and performing artists begun during World War I.

<sup>155</sup> The Dadaists’ imitative gestures ranged from the appropriation of African dress and dance and even words performed as ‘sound poems’ in 1917 at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich. See Coco Fusco, “The Other History of Intercultural Performance” in *Redirection: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*. Rebecca Schneider and Gabrielle Cody, eds, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 270; Richard Huelsenbeck, *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*, (New York: Viking Press, 1974), 8-9.

<sup>156</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 251-88.

<sup>157</sup> International fairs had been held prior to 1851, but they were devoted to industry.

<sup>158</sup> Anne Maxwell, *Colonial Photography & Exhibitions: Representations of the ‘Native’ and the Making of European Identities*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1999), 2.

the first mass entertainment spectacles. The popularity of the international expositions grew exponentially with the 1869 opening of the Suez Canal. Walter Benjamin describes the colonial fairs as “sites of pilgrimage” in which “the universe of commodities” could propagate.<sup>159</sup> Many pilgrims traveled great distances and at great expense to participate. Visitors from all parts of Europe and the United States flocked to the fairs to observe natives in their reconstructed “villages.” By the 1880s, these kinetic expressions of the colonial imagination had bypassed the display of industry to become the most popular exhibits.

The fairs emerged when mass audiences in Europe and the United States were barely literate, let alone cognizant of the rest of the world. For this reason, they served an important heuristic function in bridging oral and literate culture. The fair’s artifice was the backdrop against which the majority of white people had their first contact with non-European culture. The performers were pilgrims too, but their journeys were not fueled by interior yearnings, such as pilgrimages to ancestral graves or to the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina. There was little agency for those Natives removed from their villages and families for protracted periods and put on display in distant lands.<sup>160</sup>

Neither was there much discussion of the “villagers” as individuals save for two

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<sup>159</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century” in *Reflections* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 151; Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 894.

<sup>160</sup> The Sundanese artists and performance materials were selected and sent to Chicago in early 1893, arriving there on 3 April 1893, two months before the village opened on 2 July 1893. They departed for San Francisco on 3 November 1893, four days after the Exposition ended. The sale of performance artifacts from the Javanese Village to the Field Columbian Museum provided sufficient extra cash for the villagers to embark on their voyage home, departing on 9 November. Carolyn Schiller Johnson, *Performing Ethnicity: Performance Events in Chicago 1893-1996*, PhD dissertation (University of Chicago, 1998), 127; (citing the *Chicago Tribune* of 11/2/1893: 4, 16), 135-36.

mentions in the *Chicago Tribune*, wherein the deaths of three Java villagers<sup>161</sup> during the course of the exposition and immediately thereafter were noted. A paragraph was devoted to the death of a woman named Antonia who had just been buried that afternoon. According to the article, thousands of people gathered around the Java Village, where they could hear the gamelan, “the mournful lays of the little natives, and the prayers of the priest. They were holding memorial services....”<sup>162</sup> Five months later, right before the long voyage home, one of the gamelan musicians, Sanoera died. His death at age thirty was related to heart disease. His survivors included his widow and three children. His was the third death in the village since the exposition began and the second one of that week. The article described the Java Village as “in mourning” with “[w]eird songs...heard coming from the bamboo huts of the village, who were gathered around the remains of Sanoera.”<sup>163</sup>

Although the Dutch were far from the most powerful nation who participated at the expositions, they had something to offer that other colonizers lacked: an empire with growing profits and a seemingly magical hold over its subjects. Geographically speaking, the Netherlands was one of the smallest colonizing nations but it was among the richest in exports, which resulted in the country hosting two of the international colonial fairs (1864, 1883). At its first exposition, the Dutch Industry Exhibition, Holland’s industrial achievement in the colonies was highlighted. Fourteen years later,

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<sup>161</sup> The approximately one hundred fifteen Sundanese Natives that made up the Java Village, presumably worked on the plantations owned by two Dutchmen, G. C. F. W. Mundt of Parakan Salak, and E. J. Kerkhoven of Sinagar. The men comprised the “Java-Chicago Syndicate” and were responsible for organizing the Java Village and sold the artifacts to the museum after the fair ended on November 9, 1893. Carter-De Vale, “The Gamelan” in *Field Museum of Natural History Bulletin* (1978), 6-7.

<sup>162</sup> *Chicago Daily Tribune*. “Mournful Music in the Village,” 29 May 1893.

<sup>163</sup> *Chicago Tribune*. “Midway is Fenced In. Exposition Company Means to Stop All Business There.” 2 November 1893, 16. Sanoera was buried at Oakwoods Cemetary, presumably in Chicago.



at the 1878 Exposition Universelle in Paris, the cultural artifacts of the East Indies created the most attention, resulting in the Dutch electing to bypass industry when hosting their second fair, *Internationale Koloniale en Uitvoerhandel Tentoonstelling* (Colonial International and Export Exhibition) from 1 May through 31 October 1883. The second exposition focused on trade and tourism. A *kampung*<sup>164</sup> was constructed adjacent to the building housing the objects of the Dutch colonies, where natives were brought in to live. The Dutch railway companies offered a discount to travelers arriving and departing from Amsterdam to facilitate its success.<sup>165</sup>

By the 1889 Paris exposition, reconstructed villages had become a central feature.<sup>166</sup> Anik Devriès notes that while the Algerian and Tunisian<sup>167</sup> café concerts were all the rage at the 1878 Paris exposition, it was the music and dance emanating from the Java Village that ignited the colonial imagination at the 1889 Paris *Exposition Universelle*.<sup>168</sup> The ethnographic displays became the prototype for the American and British fairs that followed, including Paris' 1889 *Exposition Universelle* and Chicago's 1893 *World's Columbian Exposition*.<sup>169</sup> The French composers Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy were introduced to the *gamelan* music and dance of West Java at the Paris exposition. These cultural genres exerted a marked influence on Debussy's

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<sup>164</sup> Village

<sup>165</sup> Rudolf Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land. Technology and Nationalism in a Colony* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 46.

<sup>166</sup> Curtis M. Hinsley, "The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893" in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 346.

<sup>167</sup> Tunisia and Algeria were then under French colonial influence.

<sup>168</sup> Anik Devriès, "Les Musiques d'Extrême-Orient à l'Exposition Universelle de 1889" (*Cahiers Debussy*, New Series, 1977), 25.

<sup>169</sup> Anne Maxwell, *Colonial Photography & Exhibitions: Representations of the 'Native' and the Making of European Identities*, 1999, 19-20.

subsequent work.<sup>170</sup> Many of the same villagers were featured in the Paris and Chicago Java Villages since both were organized and financed by wealthy Dutch plantation owners in the villages of Parakan Salak and Sinagar in Sukabumi, West Java.<sup>171</sup> The Village employed over one hundred Natives, the majority of whom were Sundanese. The Field Columbian Museum (now The Field Museum of Natural History) has been the custodian of the collection since the end of the Chicago Exposition in 1893. The Field Museum's website states that 675,000 visitors paid admission to the Java Village between its opening on 2 July and its closing on 31 October 1893. The Bamboo theatre alone welcomed 82,000 patrons during the expositions run, which featured the Sundanese instruments of *suling* (flute), *kacapi* (zither) and *tarawangsa* (a bowed string instrument).<sup>172</sup> The performers participated in localized forms whose anonymous massive-in-scale audiences moved in and out of the space.

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<sup>170</sup> It is believed that the French composer Erik Satie's inspiration for the minimalist dance-inspired *Gnossienne* genre was the Romanian '*lautar*' songs he saw at the same exposition. Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair*, (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 260.

<sup>171</sup> Johnson, *Performing Ethnicity* 120.

<sup>172</sup> Field Museum of Natural History website: [http://www.fieldmuseum.org/exhibits/exhibit\\_sites/javamask/WCE.htm](http://www.fieldmuseum.org/exhibits/exhibit_sites/javamask/WCE.htm) (accessed 4 June 2009).



Fig. 11. West Javanese gamelan and musicians performing in the Javanese Village theatre at Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition. ©1893 The Field Museum, A106223

The Java Village was designed to promote the products of the region, chiefly tea and coffee. *Harper's Weekly* covered the Java Village at the Chicago fair:

All the performances begin with an overture, followed by the entrance of a half dozen demure little coryphées with round soft childish eyes and tiny *retroussé* noses, who place themselves in angular attitudes and bend and twist their slim little brown hands, while the orchestra plays a rhythmic strain. After they finished their quaint posing and have modestly withdrawn, the funny man, in a grotesque mask and long baglike garment, appears, and dances about to lively music. Then comes the princess, her face covered by a white mask...<sup>173</sup>

While it appears that the first part of the performance consisted of *srimpi* dancers imported by Mangkunegoro V from the Solo court, Mangkunegoro, it is widely believed

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<sup>173</sup> *Harper's Weekly*, 28 October 1893, 930, cited in Johnson, *Performing Ethnicity*, 118.

they were part of the West Java contingency and singled out to be trained to perform *srimpi* for the fair.<sup>174</sup> *Srimpi* was followed by *wayang wong* introduced with the *bodor's* (clown) entrance. The catalogue for the Java Village describes scenes that include “*Ardjoena*, the prince of *Dorna Doersasana*, the high priest *Kombajana* or the divine fools, *Semar* with his grinning face and solitary tooth, *Petro* and *Tjepot*.”<sup>175</sup> The Solo dancers, ranging in age from thirteen to eighteen, performed first. Their movements are described as “more a series of graceful posing, with slow, rhythmic movements of the hands and feet, than a dance as we understand it.”<sup>176</sup> One article described the dancers’ muteness thus:

Back of the players in the theater is a little screen. Behind this sits the man who does the conversation for the entire company, changing his voice to represent different characters. The actors are thus relieved of the trouble of remembering cues, and give their undivided attention to their gestures and to holding on their masks with their teeth.<sup>177</sup>

*Wayang wong*, as a rule, is narrated by one person. This is not due to laziness on the dancer’s part, but to allow her to hold the mask in place with her teeth. Regardless of which mask character or style was performed, artists had to adapt their choreographies to fit Western production values which, in translation, were more resonant with *bebarang*<sup>178</sup> than with ritual. But this was more than merely personal taste. Shifts in

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<sup>174</sup> Ten *srimpi* dancers from Surakarta reportedly embarrassed the royal Surakarta court by misbehaving during the 1889 Paris expo and were not invited to participate in Chicago. This lends credence to the idea that the *srimpi* dancers in Chicago were not from Surakarta at all. See Chicago Tribune, “Came from Far Java,” 1 April 1893.

<sup>175</sup> Java Chicago Exhibition Syndicate. *The Javanese Theatre. Java Village, Midway Plaisance*, (Chicago: World’s Columbian Exposition, 1893). Unpag.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> *Chicago Daily Tribune* “Glimpse into Java” 2 July 1893.

<sup>178</sup> Itinerant performance during the rainy season.

style and repertoire reconciled the exotic and the quotidian by uniting the dancers within a Dutch hierarchy of culturalization.

As the description of the above performance indicates, the name “Java Village” was far from precise. Carolyn Schiller Johnson contends that with the exception of *srimpi*, the villagers and the art forms on display were decisively West Javanese (Sundanese). She concludes that the reconstructed village would have been more aptly named “Sunda Village.”<sup>179</sup> This is an important distinction, for West Java is geographically isolated and politically marginalized in contrast to its more powerful Central Java neighbor. The *gong ageng*, which was forged in West Java<sup>180</sup> was acquired by the Field Museum following the Exposition’s conclusion. Johnson considers it the most important artifact of the Java Village in accordance with its size, sonic, and spiritual significance.<sup>181</sup> Within the Village’s confines visitors could observe West Javanese batik and weaving demonstrations and Sundanese *angklung* (bamboo) music. Coffee, tea, and cocoa were dispensed free to visitors from a teahouse. This fusing of Javanese, Cirebonese, and Sundanese culture by Dutch colonizers suggests a unified

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<sup>179</sup> Johnson, *Performing Ethnicity*, 81-84. “Sunda” is not a precise cultural term when describing Cirebon. It is, however, the geographic designation for the Province of West Java today. While the majority of Cirebonese, who reside close to the border of Central Java, self-identify culturally and linguistically as Javanese (*wong Jawa*), there are Sundanese inflections in the language which are more pronounced in the Southern region. The people of Majalengka speak something closer to Sundanese, while Javanese is the dominant language in Indramayu and the northeast Cirebon region. Johnson speculates that the name “Sunda Village” may have been rejected because visitors knew little about the geography of Java and the Dutch were promoting tea and coffee from Java. Furthermore, the French colony of what is now called Sudan had its own village labeled “Soudanese,” which might have been confusing to visitors. Interestingly, the word “Sundanese” continues to be misspelled and misinterpreted “Sudanese” in documents, articles, and books.

<sup>180</sup> It would be logical to assume that it was made in Cirebon since this is presumably where some of the mask dancers originated; however, Cirebon gamelan instruments of this vintage were often forged from iron. The instruments from the Columbian World Expo are non-ferrous, according to anthropologist Jamie Kelly of the Field Museum. Furthermore, many of the objects exhibited were not the same as the actual items the plantation owners originally promised in 1892. Johnson, *Performing Ethnicity*, 127 (Chart 5.1).

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-85.

whole, not merely between these vastly divergent cultural formations, but between the perceived elite *priyayi srimpi* dancers and the West Javanese peasant-stock mask dancers. Many of the latter were likely displaced farmers who, as in generations past, migrated to other regencies following famine or drought.<sup>182</sup> Many Cirebon region villagers relocated to the Buitzenborg (now Bogor) region in search of work, where they landed jobs on tea and coffee plantations in nearby Parakan Salak and Sinagar. But it may be that some of these dancers were from Sumedang (approximately midway between Bandung and Cirebon), as the *bupati* of Sumedang, *Pangeran Arja* Soerjakoesoemahadinata (Suria Kusumah Adinata, 1836-1882) was passionate about *wayang wong* and *topeng* and the palace dancers were trained in this form.<sup>183</sup> Still, the connection to Wentar's Palimanan *topeng* style appears indubitable, for Wentar and Koncar (from Priangan) established audiences in the region at roughly the same time. It would also explain how many Cirebon masks of this vintage wound up in the region.<sup>184</sup> We can also point to the movement lexicon, many of which are nearly identical.<sup>185</sup> There were modifications, however. The headdresses that I examined at the Field Museum were constructed from feathers instead of human hair, providing a similar

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<sup>182</sup> Radin Fernando, *Famine in Cirebon Residency in Java 1844-1850: A New Perspective on the Cultivation System* (Melbourne: Monash University, 1980), 10-11. Fernando describes a rice paddy failure in mid-nineteenth century Indramayu that forced many peasants to move to neighboring Regencies. Migration, then, was a built-in feature of farming life in the region.

<sup>183</sup> Pigeaud notes later that the female dancers wore masks in the region. Th. Pigeaud, *Javaanse Volksvertoningen: Bijdrage tot de Beschrijving van Land en Volk*, (Batavia: Volklectuur, 1938), 121-23; Iyus Rusliana, *Wayang Wong Priangan. Kajian Mengenai Pertunjukan Dramatari Tradisional di Jawa Barat*, (Jakarta: Kiblat, 2002), 58-59.

<sup>184</sup> The Wentar/Koncar connection is usually stated as occurring at either the end of the nineteenth century or the beginning of the twentieth century.

<sup>185</sup> The movements, *gambuhan* (perfecting the *sobrah*), *batarubah*, *tepak bahu*, *jangking ilo* (*jangkungilo*), *pakblang badetan* and the variety of *mincid* originating with the Palimanan version of *Tari Topeng Samba* are identical in name and nearly identical in form to *topeng Koncaran* (named after Koncar). Nia Kurniati Franata, *Tari Topeng Koncaran: Suatu Tinjauan histories, koreografis, dan karakterisasi*. Skripsi. (ASTI, Bandung, 1978).

visual effect from a distance. Eighty-nine of the Indonesian masks displayed at the fair were later purchased by the Field Columbian Museum, which was launched solely to display the exposition's artifacts.<sup>186</sup>

The display of masks was by no means unique to the Columbian Exposition. It was the *modus operandi* of the Dutch (and other colonizers as well) to display them in their pavilions and to establish ethnographic collections from the spoils of their colonies. Many of the East Indies objects first exhibited in Amsterdam's 1877 arts and crafts exhibition, for example, would later comprise the core holdings of Haarlem's crafts museum. This Museum would, in turn, supply its finest East Indies wares to the 1883 Amsterdam colonial fair. These objects, long removed from the homeland, continued to live on as fragments in many of the Netherlands' newly established museums.<sup>187</sup> The nineteenth century *gamelan* set at the exposition was called *Sari Oneng Parakan Salak* and obviously named after the plantation's location. However, Sumedang claims ownership as well, stating that it was made under the auspices of the *bupati*.<sup>188</sup> The ornate Chinese-inspired gamelan stands display iconography reserved for the *kraton*,

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<sup>186</sup> The items were purchased immediately after the fair ended with money pledged by retail magnate Marshall Field to establish a natural history museum. The entire collection is now in storage. Johnson, *Performing Ethnicity*, 133

<sup>187</sup> Rudolf Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land. Technology and Nationalism in a Colony* (2002), 46-47. For a discussion of the display of cultural fragments, see Kirschenblatt-Gimblett "Objects of Ethnography" in *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 17-78

<sup>188</sup> R. M. Abdullah Kartabrata. *Mengenal Museum Prabu Geusan Ulun Serta Riwayat Leluhur Sumedang*. Sumedang: Yayasan Pangeran Sumedang, 1996, 9, 41. The gamelan is of exceptionally high quality and very old – it is estimated to have been built fifty years prior to the Chicago fair, yet there is no consensus on its origin. Enoch Atmadibrata, who performed on the Field Museum gamelan during the 1977-78 tour of *topeng* Cirebon, states a near identical one was made in Sukabumi. Richard North believes the set is from the royal city of Sumedang, but possibly manufactured in Sukabumi. The gamelan set at the Museum Pangeran Sumedang is very similar to the original Field Museum set (part of the Field set was acquired much later). This makes sense, of course, since the plantation owners were from this region. See Sue Carter-De Vale, "The Gamelan" in *Field Museum of Natural History Bulletin*, (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1978), 8.

including lion forms. The musical style that accompanied the mask dancers was decidedly Cirebonese. The same Dutch entrepreneurs who organized the Java Village at the Chicago exposition also organized the ones in Amsterdam (1883) and Paris (1889).<sup>189</sup> The gamelan music Debussy first heard at the 1889 fair is often described as influencing the composer's subsequent work. This *gamelan* was "presented" by the Dutch East Indies' Minister of the Interior, van Vleuten, to the Paris Conservatoire and later installed at Paris' Musée de l'Homme.<sup>190</sup> Many of these items, including a Cirebon mask of the character Samba,<sup>191</sup> are catalogued in the Guide to the National Museum of Ethnology<sup>192</sup> and Amsterdam's *Koninklijke Vereeniging Koloniaal Instituut* multi-volume collection of Indonesian artifacts, *Gids in Het Volkenkundig Museum*.<sup>193</sup> Many of the newly acquired Field Museum objects were quickly sold to other academic and ethnographic collections including Columbia University, The National Museum (Smithsonian), and Harvard's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology.

This represents the material culture of the fairs, but what about its ephemeral aspects? We are at a loss to recoup or to understand the mechanics of embodied performance, that is, the dancers. Capturing sound, however, is a very different story.

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<sup>189</sup> G. C. F. W. Mundt of Parakan Salak, and E. J. Kerkhoven of Sinagar.

<sup>190</sup> Mervyn Cooke, *Britten and the Far East: Asian Influences in the Music of Benjamin Britten* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press/Britten-Pears Library, 1998), 4, citing Neil Sorrell, *A Guide to the Gamelan* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 2.

<sup>191</sup> The mask was evidently not known by the cataloguer. It is identified simply as "Topèng mask, Java."

<sup>192</sup> Ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences, *Guide to the National Museum of Ethnology* (Leiden: Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde), 1962: 135-62. It is a curiosity that this same character, Samba, which was known to the Field Museum by its alternate name, "Pamindo" [literally: 'second' as it is chronologically the second dance performed] is the only mask that was de-acquisitioned from their original lot of eighty-nine masks following the Columbian fair. The Pamindo mask was traded with the U.S. Museum in return for the "Hassler Collection" [contents unknown to author] in 1894.

<sup>193</sup> Koninklijke Vereeniging Koloniaal Instituut (n.d.). *Gids in het volkenkundig Museum. V: Java*. Amsterdam. Volume V of the series is devoted to Java. Figure 3 is a photograph of three Javanese female dancers posing in front of a group of masks (possibly from Madura) that are displayed on the wall behind them. *Ronggeng* and *topeng babakan* are described as 'street dancers' (*straatdansers*) on 44-45.



The Library of Congress would become home to the first sound recordings using wax cylinder technology, including the music of Java and Sunda *gamelan* performances at the fair. Owned by Harvard's Peabody Museum, the recordings were made by Benjamin Ives Gilman, a specialist in music and psychology. Ives was the first person to use the phonograph with the purpose of musical analysis. On 23 September at 1:30pm he recorded a concert at the Java Village on twenty-five cylinders. Nine additional cylinders were used for recording the singers and individual instruments after the performance.<sup>194</sup>

Removing objects from their specific cultural meanings into the detached universe of museum displays is an important theme in Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett's work (1998). This is precisely what happened to objects once they were no longer being modeled or performed. The display of the extensive mask collection at the Mangkunegoro court has a similar effect, where the masks are enclosed in glass cabinets, but for very different reasons, that is discussed in chapter 5, "The Cirebon Mask."

The *Exposition Coloniale*, which was held in Paris in 1931, proved disastrous for the Dutch East Indies. At the last minute, the Sultans of Yogyakarta and Solo refused to send their renowned court dancers to Paris. A troupe of Balinese musicians and prepubescent *legong* dancers were sent instead even though, as Frances Gouda points

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<sup>194</sup> In addition to his Javanese and Sundanese recordings, Ives also made the first sound recordings of Kwakiutl, Turkish, Samoa/Wallis Island. The gamelan recordings were not used until the American and European explosion of interest in gamelan occurred in the 1970s, at which time the recordings were transferred from the Peabody Museum to the Library of Congress. Ives' extensive notes were eventually published by the Library of Congress in Dorothy Sara Lee, ed. *The Federal Cylinder Project: A Guide to Field Cylinder Collections in Federal Agencies*, (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, American Folklife Center, 1984). Johnson, *Performing Ethnicity*, 129-33; DeVale, "The Gamelan" in *Field Museum of Natural History Bulletin*, 1978, 6.

out, the young girls were at risk of succumbing to tuberculosis and had been denied approval to travel.<sup>195</sup> The excitement generated by the *legong* dancers would be overshadowed when a fire of unknown origin destroyed the Dutch pavilion and its treasures on 28 June 1931. An electrical malfunction was ruled out, yet the possibility of sabotage remains unexamined.<sup>196</sup> The pavilion was quickly rebuilt as the “Phoenix Pavilion.” It was a contested space, providing a false memory or what Umberto Eco refers to as a “false synonym,” as it replicates the original object stripped of its intrinsic meaning.<sup>197</sup> A few years later the Dutch were forced out of the Archipelago, leaving a domino effect of change in its wake and, with it, relegating the fairs to Indonesia’s past just as the nation state was being realized.

#### **EACH ARTIST COUNTS: ANTECEDENTS OF THE ARTIST REGISTRY SYSTEM**

As mentioned previously, how the West Javanese musicians and *wayang wong* dancers were selected for the international expositions is unknown, though presumably many of them were employees of G. C. F. W. Mundt and E. J. Kerkhoven’s plantations. What we do know with certainty is that performers were being policed in Java as early as the ninth century.<sup>198</sup> We also know that Dutch regents imposed taxes on itinerant performers in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>199</sup> A few centuries later, the *izin pertunjukan*

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<sup>195</sup> Frances Gouda, *Dutch Culture Overseas: Colonial Practice in the Netherlands Indies, 1900 - 1942* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), 226.

<sup>196</sup> Gouda, *Dutch Culture Overseas: Colonial Practice in the Netherlands Indies, 1900 – 1942*, 231.

<sup>197</sup> Eco argues for the impossibility of forgetting. Eco, Umberto. “An Ars Oblivionalis? Forget It!” *PMLA* 10/3 (1988), 254-61.

<sup>198</sup> As mentioned in the introduction of this study, epigraphic evidence describes officials being in charge of popular entertainments in Java as early as 840 CE. Holt, *Art in Indonesia*, 281.

<sup>199</sup> Th. Pigeaud, *Javaanse Volkstervtoningen: Bijdrage tot de Beschrijving van Land en Volk*. Batavia: Volkslectuur, 1938), 36-37. Paramita R. Abdurachman, ed. *Cerbon*. (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1982), 50. This would be in accordance with Amanangkurat I’s rule (1646-1677), which unlike his father’s reign, was punctuated with revolts and rebellions and his participation with the VOC. He attempted to break

(performance permit) was launched. For the first time, the location, content, and sponsors of a given local performance in Java were stipulated.<sup>200</sup>

Permits continued during from the Japanese Occupation of Java. The Japanese invaded the Cirebon coast at Eretan-Wetan on 1 March 1942 near the border of Indramayu and quickly gained control of the region.<sup>201</sup> By 1943 *Tonari Gumi* neighborhood associations, known locally as *roekoen tetangga*<sup>202</sup> had been installed by the Japanese throughout Java. The associations were supervised by *lurah* (village chiefs) who became *ex officio* heads of the associations throughout Java. Sukarno advanced to the position of President of the Central Advisory Council of *Putera*<sup>203</sup> in 1943 and soon after was designated Chief of the Head Office of the civilian organization for community services, *Djawa Hookoo Kai*.<sup>204</sup> Japan's attempt to create a pan-Asian economy free of Western influence required Javanese support of its "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere." One means that the occupiers employed to condition Indonesian opinion was the "consultation system," a similar method to the one they employed at

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down trading activities of the coastal principalities by forcing coastal princes, including Panembahan Ratu II of Cirebon, to relocate near the Mataram *kraton*.

<sup>200</sup> There are several references to permits and taxes issued for puppetry, dance and theatre in West Java (Preanger) in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. See F. De Haan (1910-1912) *Priangan: De Preanger-Regentschappen onder het Nederlandsch Bestuur tot 1811. Vierde Deel (1912): 1. Commentaar 1501-2850, II: Staten en Tabellen*. Batavia: G. Kolff. For more on the use of performance permits in Java, see Matthew Isaac Cohen, *The Komedi Stamboel: Popular Theater in Colonial Indonesia, 1891-1903* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006); Endo Suanda, "Topeng Cirebon dan Konteksnya", 17-25.

<sup>201</sup> Paramita R. Abdurachman, ed., *Cerbon*, 65.

<sup>202</sup> Harry J. Benda, *The Crescent and the Rising Sun. Indonesian Islam under the Japanese Occupation 1942-1945* (The Hague: W. Van Hoeve Ltd., 1958), 154-55; Nicole Niessen, "Indonesian municipalities under Japanese rules," *Issues in Urban Development: Case Studies from Indonesia*. Peter J. M. Nas, ed. (Leiden: Research School CNWS, 1995), 125-28. The *rukun tetangga* (its current spelling) continues to exist in the municipalities today, where they function as a conduit between local government and its inhabitants, and also as neighborhood watches.

<sup>203</sup> acronym: *Pusat Tenaga Rakjat* (Center of People's Power). Although the new movement was political in scope, it also had a cultural wing that ran related programs. M. A. Aziz, *Japan's Colonialism and Indonesia* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1955), 214-15; G. S. Kanahale, *The Japanese Occupation of Indonesia: Prelude to Independence*. Unpub. PhD diss. (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1967), 78.

<sup>204</sup> M. A. Aziz, *Japan's Colonialism and Indonesia* (1955), 212-25.

home to disseminate ideas through the Japanese press.<sup>205</sup> In this system, ‘unofficial’ announcements were made to the press during consultation meetings,<sup>206</sup> with instructions for “positive guidance.”<sup>207</sup> The consultation system’s mixture of positive mobilization and coercion proved successful in Java as well, so successful that Sukarno fully integrated it in relationship to village artists after independence. The Japanese military sought the most efficacious way to reach uneducated, rural Javanese. They thus utilized oral media, particularly propagandistic film and performing arts, including a form similar to *wayang beber* called *kamishibai*, where scrolled pictures tell a story.<sup>208</sup> The rigors of the war, however, left little leisure time for local traditions. Indramayu was exceptional, however, where the Japanese military was firmly entrenched.

The Japanese formed youth military corps called *Keibodan* in 1943, which were composed of Indonesian men in their twenties. As the war dragged on, the corps expanded to include men in their thirties. *Seinendan*<sup>209</sup> soon followed to augment the *Keibodan*. The ubiquity of these two militaristic branches in Java prompted deep fear in *dalang topeng* whose occupation now exposed them to considerable peril.

The Japanese presence was strongly felt in Astanalanggar village in Losari. According to *dalang topeng* Sawitri (1920-1999), all of the bridges were bombed. The only way to cross the river was by raft. These were the physical realities, to which must be added psychic trauma experienced by many local women. Sawitri drew a vivid

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<sup>205</sup> The mechanics of the consultation system are described in Gregory J. Kasza, *The State and the Mass Media in Japan 1918-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 168-93.

<sup>206</sup> ‘*Kondan*’ is the Japanese term employed for these meetings.

<sup>207</sup> ‘*Sekkyokuteki ni shido.*’ Kasza, *The State and the Mass Media in Japan 1918-1945*, 168-93.

<sup>208</sup> Aiko Kurasawa, “Films as Propaganda Media on Java under the Japanese, 1942-45,” *Japanese Cultural Policies in Southeast Asia During World War 2*. Grant K. Goodman, ed. (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1991), 36.

<sup>209</sup> Indonesian youth columns comprised of teenagers.

portrait of the constant threat of rape by soldiers. In hopes of repelling them, local women smeared their faces, arms, and legs with mud before venturing outside; if that failed to deter the soldiers, the women placed rice bowls under their sarongs to feign pregnancy. Some women could not escape the Japanese gaze; many women were raped and suffered the trauma's sequela. Sawitri described one of her neighbors who was removed from her Losari home by Japanese soldiers, presumably to serve as a comfort woman. She was unable to return to daily events after the war. She was traumatized whenever a plane was spotted overhead and during thunderstorms.<sup>210</sup>

*Dalang topeng* Rasinah (b.1930), who was a child living in Cabang, Indramayu, during the occupation recalled with dread the day a military officer asked what her parents did. She replied that her father was a *dalang wayang*. One day in 1943 the military followed her home. They later entered the home and rounded up and destroyed her family's *pusaka* (heirloom) *wayang kulit* and masks in front of her parents.<sup>211</sup>

Rasinah's father did not live to see Independence, which placed a heavy burden on her mother, Sarmina, a *dalang ronggeng ketuk*<sup>212</sup> who suffered unspecified assaults by the

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<sup>210</sup> Today this is called, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" (PTSD). It was, in fact, during WWII that the disorder's symptoms were first noted, but the name would not follow until nearly forty years later when Vietnam vets suffered from a host of trauma-related symptoms. Monica Wulff, "Ibu Sawitri and the a/occidental Oriental" in *Portal: Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 3/ 2 (2006b), 4.

<sup>211</sup> Only one mask survived: *Samba Merah* (the red Samba), which Rasinah still owns today. Rasinah, pers. comm., 24 May 2005. A very different reality befell the wealthy Sino-Javanese major Tan Tjin Kie, who was an important collector of Cirebon region masks. According to Anderson, Tan's masks were disappeared during the same period. Benedict R. O'G. Anderson "A Language Learned in Java: A Collector's View of His Masks," *Ithaca: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, Spring 1999 Bulletin* [url:http://210.34.3.199/mirror/cornell/outreach/SEAPBulletin/bulletin\\_sp99/home\\_sp99.htm](http://210.34.3.199/mirror/cornell/outreach/SEAPBulletin/bulletin_sp99/home_sp99.htm).

<sup>212</sup> Accounts of Rasinah's *topeng* trajectory are inconsistent. Lina Marlina writes that her father was a *dalang topeng/wayang* and her mother a *dalang topeng*. Alternately, Rasinah told me that her mother was chiefly a *runggeng*, but studied *topeng* later. Lina Marlina. *Tradisi Bebarang Sebagai Media Alih Keterampilan Menari Para Penari Topeng Cirebon*, (Bandung: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, STSI, 1999), 26-29.

*Runggeng ketuk* is unique to Indramayu, although may be related to the *kraton's* *runggeng* schools.

Japanese. She succumbed to an emotional breakdown soon after the Japanese withdrew from Java. Shortly thereafter, Rasinah mysteriously lost vision in one eye for several months. Her condition improved but resurfaced years later, this time, permanently.<sup>213</sup>

Although *topeng* was not banned during the occupation, invitations to perform were rare. As *topeng* historian Toto Sudarto put it: “*Jer basuki mawa bea*” (“Everything has a cost.”) It seems that only Indramayu was spared, and marginally. This is where *ayun-ayunan*,<sup>214</sup> a light acrobatic form, was likely initiated by *dalang topeng* to entertain the troops based there.<sup>215</sup>



Fig. 12. *Dalang topeng* Carpan performs *Ayun-ayunan*. April 2006.

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<sup>213</sup> Rasinah, pers. comm., 26 May 2005.

<sup>214</sup> Literally: ‘swinging and swaying.’

<sup>215</sup> T. D. Sudjana, interview, 17 October 2005. Matthew Isaac Cohen states that acrobatics as a performance modality began on Java in the 1890s where they were originally known as *komedie tiruan Jepang*, or imitation Japanese acrobatic shows. Matthew Isaac Cohen, “‘Multiculturalism’ and Performance in Colonial Cirebon” in *The Indonesian Town Revisited*, Peter Nas, ed. Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2002), 360.

*Ayun-ayunan* is different from other acrobatic forms, such as *Genjring Dodog* or *Genjring Akrobat* (also found in the Cirebon region) or *Seni Kuntulan* from Magelang. *Ayun-ayunan* is performed solely by one *dalang topeng* at the end of the full-day performance, *topeng dinaan*. It was primarily performed in Indramayu. Performers have varied opinions about *ayun-ayunan*'s origin. The late *Kraton Kasepuhan* puppeteer, Kalim (d. June 19, 2009) recalled Rasinah's father performing *ayun-ayunan* in conjunction with *lais*, in which bamboo was used. Its use, he contends is founded in ritual as it represents "*dunia di bawah dan dunia atas. Pasti ritual.*"<sup>216</sup> What is clear is that *ayun-ayunan* is a highly original village art situated between entertainment and meditation.

According to Carpan, *ayun-ayunan* could only be performed at the end of *topeng dinaan* and only after the second version of Klana, called "Klana Udeng"<sup>217</sup> was complete. Although *ayun-ayunan* is associated with male *dalang*, Carpan learned the form from his mother who also performed it.<sup>218</sup> He first performed it in 1957, twelve years after the Japanese left Indonesia. Today, at age 72, Carpan is the only *dalang* still able to perform it. It is not performed on a high wire as in Central Java. Rather, a low-hanging rope is attached to either two adjoining homes, trees or, as mentioned, bamboo. The lowest part of the rope's curve is approximately five or six feet off the ground. *Dalang topeng* Wangi from Tambi, Indramayu, said that in the olden days, the audience was expected to throw *sawer* on the ground after the performance. It was the *dalang*'s task to retrieve the money with his tongue while dangling from rope in a backward arch

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<sup>216</sup> "The world from below and the world from above. It was clearly a ritual."

<sup>217</sup> This version of Klana is only performed in Indramayu.

<sup>218</sup> Carpan, pers. comm., 18 February 2006.

(*kayang*). The tongue must reach very far down in order to make direct contact with the *sawer*. Wangi said it was “magic.” After the performance, the family members drank hard liquor, which was understood as a direct offering from the ancestors. It was said to be poured directly through the mask’s mouth into the body. There is a prohibition on drinking alcohol in Islam, but in the context of *ayun-ayunan* it was deemed acceptable because of its ancestral connection.<sup>219</sup> The connection with drinking may have been inherited from *tayuban* or *ronggeng*, where a warm drink composed of ginger, called “*air serbat*” was an integral part of the experience. A prominent *kraton* scholar said that *air serbat* was consumed to heat up the body and ignite passion in the performer.<sup>220</sup> During the Dutch era the ginger drink was replaced with alcohol, which was likely responsible for *tayuban* becoming linked with entertainment. The confluence of popular culture and magic is compelling, suggesting a thin line separated the two spheres. No one had requested Carpan perform *ayun-ayunan* in many years. This supports the likelihood that it was a Japanese construction that gradually fell out of favor.

*Dalang wayang/topeng* Wita who lived in Indramayu during the Occupation described an iron building constructed by Japanese troops where female *dalang topeng* sometimes performed. *Tayuban* and *wayang* usually followed *topeng*. Whenever the sound system failed (which evidently was often), *topeng* was abandoned. The *dalang* slipped back into her *kebaya* (blouse) and *sarong* and entertained the troops as a

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<sup>219</sup> Wangi, pers. comm., 7 May 2006.

<sup>220</sup> Heating up the body is often linked with Sufism and the practice of *dzikir*. Many Sufi poets describe the importance of drunkenness in the teacher/student relationship on the Sufi path. This is a metaphorical use of drinking alcohol, which is prohibited, or *haram*, in Islam.



*ronggeng*.<sup>221</sup> Female *dalang* had many more opportunities to be hired by the Japanese troops. Sujana Arja's father, Arja, for example, who was then a well-known and respected *dalang* from Slangit, did not receive a single invitation to perform during the occupation.<sup>222</sup>

The batik industry was also affected. It was dependent upon traders for their cotton, which had grown so scarce that batik production nearly halted. This had a decisive impact on *topeng*. In one of her notebooks, Claire Holt noted itinerant *wayang wong* troupes' costumes having taken on a decidedly improvised cast in West Java, where striped artificial Japanese silk scarves substituted for the more expensive and scarce batik.<sup>223</sup> Adaptation was very much in evidence not only during the Japanese era but long after it.

#### **SUKARNO'S NATIONALISTIC VISION FOR THE ARTS**

Those village arts that were stalled during the Japanese occupation returned in full force after Indonesia's independence. Sukarno formally declared Indonesia's independence on 17 August 1945. The nascent state's economy was in shambles; however, Sukarno was well aware of the role culture played in establishing past hegemonic control and would play in the formulation of Indonesia's national identity.<sup>224</sup> One of Sukarno's first acts as president was to establish Indonesia's department of

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<sup>221</sup> Wita, pers. comm., 20 June 2005.

<sup>222</sup> Sujana Arja, pers. comm., 25 June 2005.

<sup>223</sup> *Wayang wong* and *topeng* troupes were often synonymous. Claire Holt Collection of Indonesian Dance, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. "Photographs of Indonesia / Java, East and West: Dances (Miscellaneous): Image 1122589.

<sup>224</sup> Lindsay compares the Indonesian project with Malaysia, which established its culture department seven years after its independence from the British in 1964, and The Philippines, which waited one year after its independence in 1947.

culture.<sup>225</sup> The 1950 conference on “National Culture” led to the subsidization of cultural organizations in 1952. The flowering of cultural organizations that followed included the non-governmental arts agency *Badan Musyarwarah Kebudayaan Nasional*, (*BMKN*),<sup>226</sup> *Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (LEKRA*, or People’s Cultural League), the Indonesian nationalist party’s (*PNI*)<sup>227</sup> art wing, *Lembaga Kebudayaan Nasional (LKN)*<sup>228</sup> and several art conservatories.<sup>229</sup> From 1962 to 1966, culture was included in Basic Education. According to Idro Sukardi, who was then Majalengka’s head of education, the department was subdivided into categories of *pendidikan masyarakat* (mass education), which included non-formal education, adult education, and community education. Within this category were the following subdivisions: *keluarga*, *pemuda*, *wanita*, and *sekolah*.<sup>230</sup> Cultural arts were divided into the following categories: *kesenian*, *sastra*, and *kebudayaan*.<sup>231</sup> Thus, while the two departments were under the same roof, their daily functions were independent of one another.<sup>232</sup>

District government penetration into village life continued uninterrupted after the Japanese left Java and the archipelago gained its independence. The late 1940s were

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<sup>225</sup> Jennifer Lindsay, “Cultural Policy and the Performing Arts in Southeast Asia” (1995), 658.

<sup>226</sup> Council on National Culture. BMKN was a liberal body comprised of artists, intellectuals and bureaucrats and was eventually weakened by *LEKRA* in the early 1960s. Tod Jones, *Indonesian Cultural Policy, 1950-2003: Culture, Institutions, Government*, (np: Curtin University of Technology, 2005), 113-15; Holt, *Art in Indonesia*, 248.

<sup>227</sup> *PKI*, or *Partai Nasional Indonesia*

<sup>228</sup> National Institute of Culture

<sup>229</sup> Parani, *National Culture and Ethnic Cultures*, PhD diss, 78-80.

<sup>230</sup> Family, youth, women, and school, respectively.

<sup>231</sup> The arts, literature, and culture, respectively.

<sup>232</sup> Idro Sukardi interview, 20 June 2006. In 1967, cultural affairs came under the rubric of the Directorate General of Education and Culture. See Lindsay, “Cultural Policy and the Performing Arts in Southeast Asia, (1995), 658-9; Parani, *National Culture and Ethnic Cultures*, PhD diss, 66-67; 78-79.

lean years for *topeng* and *wayang*.<sup>233</sup> Tod Jones aptly notes that in the early 1950s cultural policy and foreign policy became intertwined.<sup>234</sup>



Fig. 13. Sukarno rally in Cirebon, c.1957. Photo courtesy of *Kementerian Penerangan Indonesia*. *Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia* #570429 FY 26.

Sukarno's vision for a communist state was more closely linked with the Soviet model, including its elevation of proletariat art. However, Indonesian cultural policy was taking a decidedly Maoist turn by the late 1950s. Sukarno was influenced by Mao Zedong's

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<sup>233</sup> Sudarto, *Topeng Babakan Cirebon 1900 -1990*, 106-7.

<sup>234</sup> Tod Jones, *Indonesian Cultural Policy, 1950-2003: Culture, Institutions, Government*, (2005), 111.

1959 movement known as the policy “Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom,” wherein traditional Chinese visual arts were co-opted and linked with patriotism.<sup>235</sup>

Two themes piggybacked on *PKI* and *LEKRA*’s expansion from 1959 to 1965: the implementation of Sukarno’s autocratic Guided Democracy, in which he was designated “president for life,” and the final phase of his career, culminating in General Soeharto’s ascendancy in 1965. These themes were set in motion by a chain of events that began with *LEKRA* and intensified with Sukarno’s *Manifesto Politik (Manipol)*,<sup>236</sup> which to many artists signaled the end of their artistic freedom. In response, they proactively published their own cultural manifesto, *Manifes Kebudayaan (Manifes)*.<sup>237</sup> These events, distant as they seem from the lives of village artists in Cirebon, would eventually come home to roost in the two years before the coup.

The two types of artist registration cards I discovered during my fieldwork concretizes how the above events unfolded on the ground in the Cirebon region. One card was issued shortly before the 1965 coup, and the second card was issued one year after it. The two types of cards comprise the same cluster of artists over two critical periods, thus offering a unique perspective on the *mise-en-scène* in which they were launched.<sup>238</sup> The documents were located in the possession of an elderly *dalang* named Amin (pseudonym) who was the leader of his troupe, called *pemimpin*.<sup>239</sup> He had stored the cards for over forty years in an envelope together with his marriage certificate. When

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<sup>235</sup> Julia F. Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People’s Republic of China, 1949-1979*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 119, 174, 180.

<sup>236</sup> *Manipol* was later known as *Manipol-USDEK*.

<sup>237</sup> Gerson Poyk, pers. comm., 8 May 2006.

<sup>238</sup> I interviewed all of the surviving members of the troupe.

<sup>239</sup> The *pemimpin* was synonymous with the main performer, namely the *dalang topeng* or *dalang wayang*.

asked why he kept them so long, Amin responded, “I thought someone might ask to see them one day.”

The cards provoke us to rethink what constitutes an “artist.” More than a historic fragment, each card represents a flesh-and-blood person (whether actual or obscured), a designated skill, kin and group affiliation, and member of a community. The cards contextualize *topeng*’s role in Indonesia’s political infrastructure which, I contend, defines shifts in cultural policies not so much as ruptures as Harry J. Benda<sup>240</sup> suggests. I am in agreement with Feith<sup>241</sup> who argues that Indonesia’s policies share a lineage and hence are continuous with much older practices that predicted its success through subsequent regimes. Prior to our discussion of individualized artist registration in the Cirebon region, it is important to understand how policy issues shaped West Java’s cultural landscape.

Whereas a relationship between the courts and performers could heighten the latter’s status, Sukarno viewed performance in iconic terms: as a means to merge symbolic imagery with the nascent state. Using performance to this end was not a novel idea, but one honed by previous administrations. Now at center stage, Sukarno was eager to distance himself from the Japanese. One strategy was to install *musjawarah* at the village level.<sup>242</sup> Although *musjawarah* is generally understood to be an old Javanese

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<sup>240</sup> Harry J. Benda, “Democracy in Indonesia: The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia,” (*Journal of Asian Studies*, 1964), 449-456.

<sup>241</sup> Herbert Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962).

<sup>242</sup> This Arabic term (*mushāwara*) designates any kind of “consultation.” In the Indonesian context, it is associated with *mufakat* (Arabic: *muwāfaqa*) which means “consensus.” Taken together, the terms are conceptualized as democratic representation through consultation that culminates in consensus. This philosophy is embedded in *pancasila*, Indonesia’s symbolic ideology of the nation-state first outlined in

concept,<sup>243</sup> its contemporary usage highlights Sukarno's ingenuity in blending Javanese conceptualizations of power centers with Islamic currents, particularly *figh*,<sup>244</sup> while excluding its Japanese influence. By introducing the Arabic term at a time when very few Indonesians understood the language, Sukarno tacitly infused it with Japan's "friendly" or "polite" *kondan* model. Consensus among parties was *musjawarah*'s objective, however, the *lurah*'s decision was final.<sup>245</sup> This was not an altogether new concept in Java. Rather, it was integrated into a wider corporatist Asian norm. The *lurah*'s other responsibilities under Sukarno included deflecting rebellions while ensuring registration dues were paid, permits processed, and regulations enforced. In his dealings with artists, the *lurah*'s direct superior was the chief of the culture department.

James Brandon outlines the rigorous process for obtaining performance permits in Cirebon in the early 1960s. They were "issued by the Legal Division of the district government after being endorsed by district officials in Public Health, Public Works, and the Police." Police were required to approve play contents in advance of the performance as well. Typically the Internal Security Police (*DPKN*) carried this out in conjunction with local officials of the Ministry of Information (*Kementerian*

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their 1945 constitution: the five principles that form the ideological and political foundation of the Republic of Indonesia: belief in God, humanity, national unity, democracy, and social justice.

<sup>243</sup> Ricklefs discusses the process of *rembug*, *rembag* [consultation] and *mufakat* [from the Arabic *muwafaka*, meaning 'agreement'] in the eighteenth century Kartasura court. M. C. Ricklefs, *The Seen and Unseen Worlds in Java, 1726-1749: History, Literature and Islam in the Court of Pakubuwana II* (St. Leonards and Honolulu: Allen & Unwin/University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 229.

<sup>244</sup> Jurisprudence.

<sup>245</sup> Herbert Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia 1962*, 39-40. I am indebted to Paul Stange for pointing out the duplicate uses of *musjawarah-mufakat* as parallel to John Bowen's discussion of *gotong-royang* in "On the Political Construction of Tradition: *Gotong Royong* in Indonesia (*Journal of Asian Studies*, 1986), 545-56).

*Penerangan*), the National Front, and other groups.<sup>246</sup> Administering permits at the village level took a more relaxed form, where they were issued by district culture departments who distributed them to the *lurah*. It was the *pemimpin*'s responsibility to retrieve the permits from the *lurah*. The registration protocol was amended one year after Brandon's research when the individual artist registry was launched.

The date on the 1965 artist registration card informs us that the commonly held view that Soeharto launched the registry to suppress communism and critical thinking is not wholly correct. The card dates from the period when Sukarno was still in control – albeit barely – pointing to a different trajectory and meaning. The registry was a harbinger of the end of Sukarno's presidency, fueled by intense power struggles between various Indonesian parties and organizations. At the center of the conflict was Indonesia's nationalist party, *PNI*, which was vying to preserve its long-held dominance over the better organized, but cash poor, communist party, *PKI*, led by D. N. Aidit. Sukarno was one of the founders of the *PNI* in 1927, but was now at odds with the organization and had aligned himself with the *PKI* and with *LEKRA*.

Sukarno's affiliation with the arts was longstanding and complex. He was a painter and an avid art collector, but he also had a deep affection for village arts, including *topeng Cirebon*.<sup>247</sup> The binding relationship between group affiliation, kinship, and identity among *topeng* and *wayang* groups appealed to Sukarno and he embraced them as exemplars of national identity. *Elang Djoni* from *Kraton Kanoman* recalls one of Sukarno visits to Cirebon's state building in 1957. The President was

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<sup>246</sup> Brandon, *Theatre in Southeast Asia*, 230-31.

<sup>247</sup> Some of Sukarno's art collection may be viewed at the following website: <http://sukarno.netfirms.com> (accessed on 24 August 2007).

entertained by *topeng*, as well as the aristocratic dance, *tayuban*,<sup>248</sup> *tarling*,<sup>249</sup> and gamelan. Sukarno was not enthusiastic about foreign instruments generally and, according to *Elang Djoni*, displeased with *tarling*.<sup>250</sup> It is unknown whether this was Sukarno's first exposure to *topeng*, however there is little doubt that his response to it was positive. The following year (1958), *topeng* was incorporated into cultural programs at the state palace, *Istana Negara*.<sup>251</sup> So heartfelt was Sukarno's commitment to *topeng* that all of his children, including Indonesia's fifth president Megawati (2001-2004), and her sister *PNI-Marhaenisme* leader, Sukmawati, studied it in the late 1950s and early 1960s at the state palace *Istana Negara* in Bogor. Dasih was their teacher, accompanied by *tukang kendang*<sup>252</sup> Entang and his son, Sukarta Candra from Majalengka.<sup>253</sup> According to Sukarta, Sukarno had specifically requested *topeng* Palimanan-style.<sup>254</sup> Entang described the presidential palace as a welcoming place where he shared meals with Sukarno's family and spent the night during state visits. A former Cirebon culture department official, Ishak Herdjan, recalls that although Entang only received a junior

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<sup>248</sup> It was performed that night by Ayub, a prince from *Kraton Kasepuhan*.

<sup>249</sup> *Tarling* is a hybrid musical form that combines guitar with the reed instrument, *suling*.

<sup>250</sup> *Elang Djoni*, pers. comm., 14 September 2005.

There is some irony in this. Michael Wright writes that although the Cirebonese ensemble's origins are unknown, the legend is that *tarling* was an outgrowth of Indonesia's revolution (1945-49) when homesick nationalist troops attempted to recreate gamelan sounds with guitars. While Wright could not verify *tarling*'s origin, he is confident that it does not predate the revolution. Michael R. Wright, "Tarling: modern music from Cirebon," *Balungan* 3/3 (1988), 21.

<sup>251</sup> Sukarta Candra, pers. comm., June 29, 2009. Retired Cirebon culture official, Ishak Herdjan, confirmed this with Sukarno's daughter, Sukmawati, in the 1980s. Ishak Herdjan, pers. comm., 6 August 2005.

<sup>252</sup> The drummer and rhythmic leader of the *gamelan*.

<sup>253</sup> Entang's birth name was Rentang.

<sup>254</sup> Dasih was at the time, the only *dalang* from Palimanan, Cirebon, although she was then married to a *dalang wayang* from Bongas, where she lived for several years. Her sister Sudji was married at the time and not permitted to dance.



high school education, he was a quick study, who dressed and behaved more like a college student than someone of his humble background.

Sukarno enjoyed other *topeng* performances during subsequent trips to the region. *Dalang* Wita of Gegesik, Cirebon, recalls Sukarno attending a *topeng* performance in which his younger sister, Persit, performed in Tangkil, East Cirebon, in the late 1950s.<sup>255</sup> Sukarno was also fond of *wayang kulit*, *wayang golek*, *wayang wong*, *ludruk*, *ketroprak*,<sup>256</sup> *gamelan*, and Sundanese *angklung*,<sup>257</sup> and used these forms in creative ways. Much more than merely appreciating the performing arts, he integrated them into the highest level of diplomacy with *misi kesenian* (art missions). His government subsidized international cultural exchanges in which fellowships were provided for international performances, and approving ones awarded to Indonesian artists by foreign sponsors.<sup>258</sup> Sukarno exported Cirebonese, Sundanese, and Javanese village performers to China, India, Egypt, Russia and the Eastern bloc. When these nations' leaders made State visits, national identity was merged with entertainment at the state palace and in West Java's capitol, Bandung and at the state palaces in Jakarta, Bogor, and Cipanas.<sup>259</sup>

Sukarno's attachment to Bandung reaches back to the late Dutch colonial era when he studied engineering at Bandung's *Technische Hogeschool* from 1921 to

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<sup>255</sup> Wita, pers. comm., 20 June 2005.

<sup>256</sup> A popular comedic theatre form from Yogyakarta inspired by *wayang*.

<sup>257</sup> Bamboo instruments that are shaken with the hand. Although *angklung* is associated with the Sunda region, it is also found elsewhere on Java, in Bali, Madura, parts of Sumatra and Kalimantan. Jaap Kunst, *Music in Java*, 361.

<sup>258</sup> Parani, *National Culture and Ethnic Cultures*, PhD diss., 31.

<sup>259</sup> Kathy Foley, pers. comm., 12 August 2006. See also Irawati Durban Arjo, "Women's Dance among the Sundanese of West Java, Indonesia," *Asian Theatre Journal*, 6, 2 (1989), 171; Irawati Durban Ardjo, *Perkembangan Tari Sunda. Melacak Jejak Tb. Oemay Martakusuma dan Rd. Tjetje Somantri* (Bandung: MSPI, 1998), 133-36.

1926,<sup>260</sup> but it was Bandung's role as host to post-colonial heads of state in 1955 that signaled its emergence as a destination point for visiting dignitaries in years to come.

The choreographies of Bandung artists Tjetje Somantri (1891-1963) and Nugraha Sudiredja, who had studied *topeng* with Wentar and his daughter, Dasih, were showcased at the Conference of Asian-African Nations in Bandung in 1955 and at the first Asian Games in Jakarta in 1961.<sup>261</sup> When heads of states visited Indonesia in the late 1950s, they were accompanied by Sukarno or another high-ranking official to Bandung where they were entertained with Indonesian music and dance. India's first president, Rajendra Prasad viewed *Priangan*-style *topeng*<sup>262</sup> in the ballroom of Bandung's opulent art deco hotel, Grand Savoy Homann. In the same ballroom, Ho Chi Minh enjoyed an *angklung* performance by local school children and *tari tani* ('farmer dance'), which was reportedly created by the director of *LEKRA*'s dance division, Bandung choreographer, Raden Oni Martasoeta.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> It was changed to *Kogyo Daigaku* during the Japanese occupation, before being named *Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB)* in March 1959. See Jamie Mackie, *Bandung 1955: Non-alignment and Afro-Asian Solidarity*, (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2005), 24-25.

<sup>261</sup> Irawati Durban Arjo, "Women's Dance among the Sundanese of West Java, Indonesia." *Asian Theatre Journal*.6:.2 (1989), 168-78.

<sup>262</sup> The Sundanese adaptation of *topeng* Cirebon.

<sup>263</sup> Enoch Atmadibrata, pers. comm., 6 January 2004.

While never formally declaring itself a subsidiary of the communist party, (*PKI*, or *Partai Komunis Indonesia*) *LEKRA* nonetheless enjoyed overlapping membership (including *PKI* chairman D. N. Aidit), accounting for *LEKRA*'s integral function in Indonesia's communist party.



Fig. 14. “Tari Tani” performance. Ho Chi Minh (in white) and Sukarno, front row, center. Hotel Savoy Homann, Bandung, 4 March 1959. Photo Courtesy of *Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia* #5901/277.



Fig. 15. “Tari Topeng Rahwana.” Priangan-style topeng. India’s first president, Prasad (in white, his face partially obscured by microphone) is accompanied by the Governor of Bandung (front row). Hotel Savoy Homann, Bandung, 11 December 1958. Photo Courtesy of *Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia* #5805/126.



Fig. 16. Ho Chi Minh (holding *angklung*, rear center) and Sukarno (in black *peci*) pose with young *angklung* performers. Hotel Savoy Homann, Bandung. 4 March 1959. Photo Courtesy of *Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia* #5901/264

Bandung was also the central training ground for the self-tutoring educational cooperatives, *Pendidikan Nasional Indonesia*, or Indonesian National Education. Spearheaded by Sjahrir, Hatta, and other nationalist leaders in the 1930s, the cooperatives' chief aim was “to provide literature.”<sup>264</sup> During the Japanese occupation, the organization reportedly had a strong impact on Bandung, Garut, Sumedang and Cirebon with considerable traffic between educators in Cirebon and Bandung. Rudolf Mrázek describes *Pendidikan* activity in Cirebon as second only to Bandung during the occupation. Bandung, thus, had an established nationalist trajectory. However, it was its role as host to the first Conference of Asian-African Nations in 1955 that signaled its emergence as a destination point in years to come.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Rudolf Mrázek, *Sjahrir: Politics and Exile in Indonesia*. (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1994), 234.

<sup>265</sup> April 2005 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the conference. Dignitaries converged from throughout Asia and Africa to the conference in Jakarta, but it included a nostalgic side trip to Bandung on 23 – 24

Sujana Arja, a frequent performer at *PKI* events, describes his relationship with *PKI* and *LEKRA* as frosty. Although *topeng* was favored at *PKI* functions, suspicions ran high on both sides. According to him, *PKI* was concerned about a potential link between *dalang* and the staunchly anti-communist *Darul Islam (DI)* movement during the late 1950s and early 1960s. His troupe was routinely strip-searched in front of guests to prove they were not detractors. *Darul Islam* was suspicious about potential *topeng/PKI* links and often reprimanded Sujana for performing with masks.<sup>266</sup> *PKI*'s fears of *dalang topeng* and *DI* may seem far-fetched since the majority of these artists were apolitical; yet paranoia was a leitmotif throughout this era.

### **Battling Manifestos**

Attempts to bring 'culture' into the discourse of nation-building first occurred in the 1930s with the published cultural debate entitled *Polemik Kebudayaan*. Julianti Parani argues that the literary debate, though historic, underestimated the Archipelago's cultural, linguistic, technological, and geographic diversity, which manifested in an enduring cultural debate that continues today.<sup>267</sup> A generation would pass before Sukarno delivered his *Manipol* speech in 1959, which portended the artist registry in its return to Indonesia's Constitution of 1945. By the time it was enacted, virtually every major political party had formed cultural branches, including *Nahdlatul Islam (NU)* and *Partindo* (Indonesian Party). Many elite artists concluded that Sukarno's polemic posed

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April 2005, where two days of performances and exhibitions were scheduled. The second night was at the *Taman Budaya* (previously known as Dago Tea House). Dance was a major contribution from the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, India, and the Philippines. Africa was defined by traditional song, while Indonesia took a curious turn in presenting a contemporary Western band from Bandung.

<sup>266</sup> Sujana Arja, pers. comm., 29 June 2005.

<sup>267</sup> Parani, *National Culture and Ethnic Cultures*, PhD diss, 29-31; 48-52.

a threat to their artistic freedom which, in addition to creating a national cultural identity, was designed to neutralize the numerous organizations and parties vying for power. An alliance, however, proved impossible due to the complex issues that divided the parties and strained relations between Sukarno and the Indonesian Army.<sup>268</sup>

It seems a paradox that Sukarno, who respected and elevated the arts, condemned freedom of expression as an imperialist and antisocial act,<sup>269</sup> his indictment, however, was aligned with a genealogy of artistic suppression that extended back to the Dutch colonial era. This underlying continuity of Javanist political culture informed the proliferation of art associations along both artistic and political lines, which ultimately resulted in a legal system of censorship. Subgroups were formed and officially sanctioned in some cases. In 1961, *wayang golek* troupes created the self-policing *Jajasan Padalangan* (Foundation for the Art of the *Dalang*) in Bandung, West Java, as a way to insulate *wayang* from external political forces.<sup>270</sup> Central and East Javanese theatre were more entrenched with the government and better organized than its West Javanese neighbors. *Ketroprak*, which was closely tied to the *PKI*, founded its association *BAKOSI* (All-Indonesian *Ketoprak* Organization) in Yogyakarta in 1957. The Surabaya-based *Lembaga Ludruk* (*Ludruk* Association) had even closer *PKI* ties, having come into contact with *PKI* and *LEKRA* ideology during lectures and *Pemuda*

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<sup>268</sup> Harold Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, [1978], 1988), 24-42, 94, 179-80.

<sup>269</sup> Brandon, *Theatre in Southeast Asia*, 229.

<sup>270</sup> Foley, *The Sundanese Wayang Golek*, 250-51.

*Rakjat* (youth congresses).<sup>271</sup> For the majority of rural, non-literate Cirebon artists, contact resulted from communist party outreach and performing at local *PKI* functions.

The *Manifes Kebudayaan* (*Manifes*) was published on August 17, 1963 by a group of Indonesian intellectuals as a proactive response to *Manipol* and *LEKRA*. This would not seem to have affected peasant Cirebon artists, had it not been for *PKI* chairman Aidit viewing *Manifes* as a threat to his organization. According to Gerson Poyk, one of *Manifes*' original signatories, Sukarno initially approved of the debate, but eventually succumbed to Aidit's will.<sup>272</sup> *Manifes* was banned by presidential decree on May 8, 1964.<sup>273</sup> Rather than quashing the debate, the ban initiated a widespread underground movement,<sup>274</sup> which for the first time included performers and their institutions.<sup>275</sup> Soon after *Manifes*' defeat, the communist-aligned *Bintang Timur* (Eastern Star) reported that a cinema in the city of Cirebon (whose mayor was

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<sup>271</sup> Brandon, *Theatre in Southeast Asia*, 213-21; James L. Peacock, *Rites of Modernization: Symbols and Social Aspects of Indonesian Proletarian Drama*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 41.

<sup>272</sup> Gerson Poyk, pers. comm., 2 May 2006.

<sup>273</sup> Keith Foulcher, "A Survey of Events Surrounding 'Manikebu': The Struggle for Cultural and Intellectual Freedom in Indonesian Literature." *Bijdragen tot de Taal – Land – en Volkenkunde* 1969), 444-5; D. S. Moeljanto and Taufik Ismail. *Prahara Budaya. Kilas-Balik Ofensif Lekra/PKI dkk. (Kumpulan dokumen pergolakan sejarah)*, (Jakarta: Mizan/Harian Umum Republika, 1995), 9-12; 58.

<sup>274</sup> Accounts of the *Manifes* movement are available in Moeljanto and Taufik Ismail, *Prahara Budaya*, which provides a linear unfolding of events, placing *Manifes* in its historical context against the backdrop of increased *PKI* activity. It synthesizes many of the original documents. For two writers' personal perspectives on the movement (one of the original signatories and one who elected not to become involved), see Goenawan Mohamad, "The Manikebu Affair: Literature and Politics in the 1960s." *Prisma* 46 (1988), 70-88; and Ajip Rosidi, *Sastera dan Budaya: Kedaerahan dalam Keindonesiaan*, (Jakarta: Dunia Pustaka Jaya, 1995), 158-240, respectively.

<sup>275</sup> Letters of support included Rendra's company, *Bengkel Kerja Warung Theatre* (12 February 1964; April 26, 1964), *Teatre Nasional Indonesia* (June 2, 1964); and *Teater Muslim Indonesia Sumatera Selatan*, Eddi Tarmiddi (26 January 1964) H. B. Jassin archives, Jakarta.

reportedly communist),<sup>276</sup> had begun circulating films that promoted the New Emerging Forces' (NEFO) anti-imperialist ideology.<sup>277</sup>

Bandung choreographer and dance scholar Enoch Atmadibrata (b.1927), like his colleague, Sundanese author Ajip Rosidi, were among the few intellectuals who remained neutral during the *Manifes* battle. Enoch, whose *raison d'être* was to elevate Sundanese culture, enjoyed conversing with other artists regardless of their political stance. He was once invited to the home of the Sundanese *LEKRA* painter, Hendra Gunawan (1917-1982) where a group of artists had gathered. A heated discussion ensued between Enoch and Hendra. "Art should not be prescribed by someone else, it must come from within. The artists must be proactive" Enoch argued. Noting a *kacapi*<sup>278</sup> in the room, Enoch mentioned having heard an exceptional *juru pantun* (storyteller) who accompanied his stories by plucking his zither. Hendra replied in Sundanese: "*Yah tapi teu tiasa ngamaenkeun sora guludug saperti kieu!*" ("Yes, but you cannot play thunder like that [*kacapi*]!"). Enoch volleyed back: "That depends. Its sound can be very *rame* (lively)." The room fell silent. Enoch concludes that Hendra believed Sundanese music, i.e. the *kacapi*, was too weak to represent the masses, adding with a smile: "Hendra liked loud music."<sup>279</sup>

### **Aidit's Ideological Stance on the Arts**

Sukarno and Aidit may have agreed on the formation of a left-leaning national identity, yet their relationship was otherwise a delicate ecology. Sukarno approved many

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<sup>276</sup> Robert Cribb, ed. *The Indonesian Killings 1965-1966. Studies from Java and Bali*. (Victoria: Monash University, 1990), 26.

<sup>277</sup> "Tjirebon akan putar film2 Nefo setjara kontinu." *Bintang Timur*. 24 May 1964.

<sup>278</sup> Sundanese zither instrument

<sup>279</sup> Enoch Atmadibrata, pers. comm., 25 December 2003.



of Aidit's projects in exchange for *PKI* support of the President's non-Western stance and Marxist-inspired agrarian theory known as *Marhaenism*.<sup>280</sup> Aidit and other *PKI* leaders were interested in initiating an agrarian movement in order to promote land reforms in the late 1950s. This was a tricky issue for Sukarno as it would reduce the power and, hence, loyalty of his power-base, many of whom were landowners. In preparation of Aidit's rural movement, party cadres were deployed at the village level to study local problems.<sup>281</sup> Although Sukarno was initially lukewarm to Aidit's project, by 1964 he supported research spearheaded by Aidit on the state of the peasant in West Java.

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<sup>280</sup> Recently surfaced evidence from former East German and Soviet archives suggest that while Aidit believed Sukarno was not progressive enough for his taste, and may have possibly at some point considered a putsch, he was not directly involved in the so-called 'aborted communist coup' that continues to dominate modern Indonesian historiography. Ragna Boden, 'The 'Gestapu' events of 1965 in Indonesia: New evidence from Russian and German archives,' (*Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (BKI)*, 2007), 517-8.

<sup>281</sup> Sartono Kartodirdjo, *Agrarian Unrest and Peasant Mobilization of Java in the Nineteen Sixties: A Study of Configurations and Conditions*. Paper presented at the Seventh Conference of International Association of Historians of Asia held in Bangkok from 22 - 26 August 1977 ([Yogyakarta]: Gadjah Mada University, 1977), 17.



Fig. 17. *Dalang topeng* Carpan, Indramayu, c.1995.  
Photograph courtesy Carpan.

The study was conducted over a seven-week period.<sup>282</sup> Aidit isolated twenty-four sub-districts, including Cirebon, Majalengka's Jatitujuh, Lemahabang, and Indramayu's Haurgeulis and Kandanghaur districts.<sup>283</sup> His findings were published the same year in the slim treatise, *Kaum tani mengganjang Setan-Setan Desa (Laporan singkat tentang*

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<sup>282</sup> This down-and-dirty approach to research reveals the frustrations and chaos of the period, which stood in sharp relief to the PKI's earlier foray into rural regions in the late 1950s. Then the goal was to develop a "mass line technique of leadership...through the practice of the four togetherness, i.e. living, eating, working and studying together with the peasants." Kartodirdjo, *Agrarian Unrest and Peasant Mobilization of Java in the Nineteen Sixties*, 17.

<sup>283</sup> 2 February through 23 March 1964. D. N. Aidit, *Kaum tani mengganjang setan-setan desa. (Laporan singkat tentang hasil riset mengenai keadaan kaum tani dan gerakan tani Djawa Barat)* (Jakarta: Pembaruan, 1964), 7.

*hasil riset mengenai keadaan kaum tani dan gerakan tani Djawa Barat*), or “The Peasant Class Devours the Village Demons (A Brief Report Regarding the Outcome of Research Concerning the Condition of the Peasant Class and Peasant Movement in West Java.”<sup>284</sup> Aidit identifies seven types of demons oppressive to rural peasants in the region: landlords, usurers, people who purchase rice at deflated prices, middlemen, evil traders, hired thieves, and capitalists.<sup>285</sup> Aidit foregrounds artists in his text; his glossary is packed with descriptions of various types of performance, including *topeng* and its attendant clown, which he describes as “very positive” for spreading the revolution at the village level.<sup>286</sup> He envisions *tani* as the backbone of the revolution, a concept drawn chiefly from Soviet, Beijing and North Vietnamese communist models, with peasant-*dalang topeng*, *wayang*, and *bodoran* (comedic forms) deemed ideal messengers of the revolution. The idea was not far-fetched. The *PKI*'s peasants' union, *Barisan Tani Indonesia* (*BTI*, or Indonesian Peasant Front) claimed eight million members,

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<sup>284</sup> Aidit, *Kaum tani menggantung setan-setan desa. (Laporan singkat tentang hasil riset mengenai keadaan kaum tani dan gerakan tani Djawa Barat)*. 1964, 7.

<sup>285</sup> A higher number of family landholders were working in the service of government cultivation in West Java than in East Java and the interior regions of Central Java. This was particularly true regarding the amount of land required for indigo cultivation. Niel argues that village leaders in all areas where government cultivation was introduced – including Cirebon and Pekalongan – were able to manipulate forced labor under their control to increase their profits under the cultivation system, by satisfying the requirements of the government. The concept of the “seven demons” was adopted as a national theme at a *PKI* meeting held in Klaten, Central Java, several months before *Gestok*. Ironically, this process of radicalization, first articulated in regards to West Java was more clearly played out in East Java, where the *BTI*'s opposition intensified the conflict. The theme of the ‘seven devils’ was played out not only in violent activities, but on the stage of *ludruk* and *wayang* performances. Centre for Village Studies, Gadjah Mada University, “Rural Violence in Klaten and Banyuwangi” in *The Indonesian Killings 1965-1966*, Robert Cribb, ed., (Clayton, Australia: Center of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1990), 130-32; Kartodirdjo, *Agrarian unrest and peasant mobilization of Java in the nineteen sixties*, 20; Robert Van Niel, *Java Under the Cultivation System: Collected Writings* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1992), 72-73, 80.

<sup>286</sup> Aidit, *Kaum tani menggantung setan-setan desa. (Laporan singkat tentang hasil riset mengenai keadaan kaum tani dan gerakan tani Djawa Barat)*, 1964, 83.

accounting for approximately forty percent of the organization's 20 million members.<sup>287</sup>

The *BTI* enjoyed spectacular success in attracting local farmers, particularly from Indramayu, yet *PKI*'s influence over agrarian *dalang topeng* was marginal at best. At first glance this seems surprising as *dalang* were warmly received by many *PKI* members. The key to the performers' disinterest may be that while political humor was sometimes incorporated into *topeng*, as a discipline, it is less overtly political than *wayang*. Furthermore, its singular connection to the spoken word is through the *dalang*'s verbal sidekick *bodor*. The latter were of sustained interest to *LEKRA* for their ability to provoke and inspire change.<sup>288</sup> Puppeteers, for whom the story line is critical, took greater political license with their art, yet even they were disinclined to become affiliated with any political party. Abyor Dayagung (1914-1969), a well-known puppeteer from Palimanan, Cirebon is case in point. Abyor was both overtly political and a bibliophile, whose *wayang* story lines were often constellated around *LEKRA* themes, yet he never joined the organization. Matthew Cohen describes a *wayang* performance Abyor once gave, whose subtext concerned *tujuh setan desa* (seven village demons) which, of course, was the theme of Aidit's book.<sup>289</sup> Abyor may have been attracted to *LEKRA*, but he remained fiercely independent. This was tested when Hendra Gunawan bestowed the title "Professor" upon Abyor. Abyor still refused to join the organization.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Robert Cribb and Colin Brown, *Modern Indonesia: A History Since 1945* (London and New York: Longman, 1995), 91.

<sup>288</sup> Bulus, pers. comm., 12 October 1977.

<sup>289</sup> Cohen, *An Inheritance from the Friends of God*, PhD Diss, 173.

<sup>290</sup> Ajip Rosidi, pers. comm., 17 June 2006

Historian Kartodirdjo has pointed out that throughout Java, the peasants' primary locus of power resides within the village itself, as interactions with outside institutions were always conducted through the leadership of the village head.<sup>291</sup> Cirebon region artists were exemplars of this model. The shift from internal to external orientation in post-Independence Indonesia, while still beholden to the village chief, also offered opportunities for peasants to create links with political parties and other organizations linked to them. Contact between villages and the outside world were more frequently encountered without reporting to the village authorities.<sup>292</sup> Certainly *topeng* and *wayang* troupes had greater contact than most when performing outside of their villages, which may have raised the ire of both the *PKI* and *PNI*, who were contending for control of West Java. Both organizations sought to dominate these artists through cultural organizations. While never formally declaring itself a subsidiary of the communist party, *LEKRA* nonetheless enjoyed overlapping membership (including *Aidit*) and frequent collaborations between the organizations. *LKN*, in contrast, was the formally recognized art organ of the *PNI*. Java's two main political parties' growth may have resulted from Sukarno's subsidization of cultural organizations, but their continued strength confirms that art and politics did indeed intersect. Certainly, both organizations recognized the importance of grassroots performance. This was particularly true of life-cycle events and other ceremonies (*hajat*), namely *topeng* and *wayang*. But they also had a secondary function as designated sites for disseminating social and political information, both informally and by way of the critically attuned *bodor*. Most community members,

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<sup>291</sup> Kartodirdjo, *Agrarian Unrest and Peasant Mobilization of Java in the Nineteen Sixties*, 10.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

including regional *PKI* and *PNI* officials, perceived *dalang* as performers who had achieved a high level of mastery, but who also had attributes associated with *dukun* (shaman), particularly their perceived curative powers. This stood in sharp relief to the attitudes of the Solo and Yogyakarta courts who were quick to deny the *dalang wayang*'s mystical claims, choosing instead to foreground his aestheticism as a counterweight to their perceived control over nature's forces.<sup>293</sup> As mentioned earlier, the *dalang topeng*'s sophisticated use of masks was believed capable of altering the way information was processed by the spectator. Thus, these artists were actively recruited by both organizations. In the *PKI*'s eyes, *dalang* were imbued with abstruse meaning in their multiple functions as healer, leader, and one-person propaganda machine. Alternately, the *PNI* emphasized the *dalang*'s prestige generally, and the culture department's financial gain, specifically. The performance space, then, was a contested space, providing the unlikely battleground between Java's two major parties which, for their own idiosyncratic reasons, envisioned their future as dependent upon the dynamic interplay between geo-politics, aesthetics, and religion.

#### **THE LAUNCH AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE ARTIST REGISTRY INITIATIVE**

Sukarno disapproved of itinerancy (particularly what he perceived as begging) in any form, including the itinerant form of *topeng*, *bebarang*. A ban appeared to be imminent when the first artist membership card, *kartu anggauta kesenian*, referred to by

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<sup>293</sup> Ruth McVey, "The *Wayang* Controversy in Indonesian Communism" in *Context, Meaning, and Power in Southeast Asia*. Mark Hobart and Robert H. Taylor, eds. (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1986), 39; Laurie J. Sears, *Shadows of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 151; Victoria M. Clara van Groenendael, *The Dalang Behind the Wayang: The Role of the Surakarta and the Yogyakarta Dalang in Indonesian-Javanese Society*. Dordrecht: Foris. KITLV, *Verhandelingen* 114, (1985), 36.

locals as *kartu kuning* (“yellow card”)<sup>294</sup> was issued (herein referred to as *kartu*). The first order of business was to supply the local culture department with the names of *nayaga* (musicians) in every troupe. Furthermore, the *rombongan*’s<sup>295</sup> leaders were instructed to report to their culture department each time the troupe was invited to perform outside of Cirebon and to pay for each member per commission.<sup>296</sup>

The *kartu*’s lineage can be traced with certainty to 14 March 1965, six months prior to *Gestok*.<sup>297</sup> There exists no tangible proof that the card was affiliated with either the *LKN* or *LEKRA*, although officials from both parties had secured key posts and the

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<sup>294</sup> I have never heard it referred to by its official name (*Kartu Anggauta Kesenian*) and, hence, it is referred to as *kartu kuning* in this article. Elsewhere, the card is now referred to as *kartu seniman* or ‘artist card.’ ‘*Kartu kuning*’ has become a generic term for all work-related identification cards in Majalengka. Samsuri, pers. comm., 28 June 2006.

<sup>295</sup> During the 1960s, informal groups of performers were referred to as *rombongan*. These artists often travel, such as during *bebarang* (*ngamen*). Prior to the 1965 coup, the names of *topeng* troupes were synonymous with either the *gaya* (style) of the *dalang*’s village, or that of the *dalang topeng*, or *wayang*, as the case may be. Suanda, “Topeng Cirebon dan Konteksnya,” 21. The style (*gaya*) or name of the *dalang* thus was synonymous with the name of the *rombongan*. For instance, siblings Keni and Sujana Arja had separate troupes, though both were from Slangit. Their individual groups were both formally and informally referred to as *Topeng Sujana* and *Topeng Keni*, respectively, or *Topeng Slangit*; Wentar and his daughter Dasih’s troupe from Palimanan were called *Topeng Wentar* or *Topeng Dasih*, respectively, or *Topeng Palimanan*; Dewi and Sawitri’s groups from Losari were named *Topeng Dewi* and *Topeng Sawitri*, respectively, or *Topeng Losari*. The absence of a designation on the card for the name of the troupe suggests their informality. The term *sanggar*, alternately, was a formal designation for art associations in the 1950s, most frequently composed of visual artists such as *Sanggar Seniman* (Artist’s Studio) founded by the Bandung artist, Kartono Yudhokusumo and *Sanggar Bambu*, which was composed of graduates and senior students of *ASRI* (Indonesian Academy for the Plastic Arts). These associations were often defined along communist versus apolitical lines. With the institutionalization of groups in the early 1970s, the term ‘*sanggar*’ was adopted as a generic term for visual and performing arts groups and their members. For a discussion of the development of artist associations, see Holt, *Art in Indonesia*, 231-54.

<sup>296</sup> “Mereka juga meminta kami untuk membuat atau mendaftarkan sanggarnya. Mereka juga bertanya jumlah *nayaga* uang dimiliki. Kemudian kami diminta untuk melapor apabila ingin mengadakan pertunjukan di luar daerah. Kami diminta untuk membayar sejumlah uang untuk semua itu.” Sujana Arja, pers. comm., 6 August 2005.

<sup>297</sup> Endo Suanda who performed with a *wayang golek* troupe during his youth in Majalengka, believes he received his first identification card in 1964. Pers. comm., 4 May 2006. Artist registration in Indramayu, alternately, appears to have been in the planning stages in late 1964, but the cards were not issued during Sukarno’s reign. One of the few surviving *dalang wayang* there, Taham, age seventy-two, clearly recalls receiving his first *kartu kauning* shortly after the coup. Taham, pers. comm., 9 October 2005. Ajip Rosidi, who lived in Bandung during the period in question, while not certain, speculates that the artist card (referred to as “*kartu seniman*” outside of Cirebon) was initiated in 1964, but was not strictly enforced until at least 1965. Ajip Rosidi, pers. comm., 5 June 2006.

cultural departments affiliated with them were legal at the time.<sup>298</sup> Nor is it possible to construct a definitive timeline and explanation for the *kartu* as record keeping was not a hallmark of governmental policy during this period. Majalengka was no exception. After three failed attempts to access Majalengka's culture and tourism department archives in 2006, I was informed by their most senior employee (hired in 1990) that their oldest records are from 2003.<sup>299</sup> The current director of Majalengka's education department, Karna Sobahi, notes that the regional government, *Pemda*, asks department heads to remove all documents related to their tenure when they retire. True to form, when Majalengka's last culture department head, Engkos (d.2006), retired he took all evidence of his tenure with him.<sup>300</sup> Engkos' son informed me that upon his father's death, his records were deposited with his predecessor, the former culture department head, Samsuri. Samsuri, however, denied that this was the protocol or that Engkos' records were in his possession.<sup>301</sup> He contends that the liquidation of Majalengka's culture department archives through 1998 occurred during former President Abdurrahman Wahid's (Gus Dur's) brief administration.<sup>302</sup> This is when the education department became autonomous and the culture and tourism departments merged.<sup>303</sup> Wahid's efforts to promote transparency about the coup were undermined by regional officials who instructed their employees to destroy any documents through 1998 that could not be

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<sup>298</sup> Historian Mona Lohanda of the *Arsip Nasional* contends that had either group been responsible, their name would have been printed directly onto the card; their absence, in her opinion, negates the possibility of such a relationship. Mona Lohanda, pers. comm., 28 February 2006.

<sup>299</sup> Sri Haryati, interview, 15 May 2006. The mandatory retirement of *Pemda* officials at age fifty-five, by definition, means that any employee connected to activities in 1965-6 would no longer be employed there.

<sup>300</sup> Karna Sobahi, pers. comm., 28 June 2006.

<sup>301</sup> Samsuri, pers. comm., 28 Jun 2006.

<sup>302</sup> The decision was announced in late 1999 and completed by 2000. This was confirmed by a retired Majalengka culture department official (1986-2000). E. Kusnadi, pers. comm., 28 June 2006.

<sup>303</sup> This included all references to the departments from the 1960s through 1998.



safely stored: *'Likwidasi sesudah Dinas Pendidikan 1998....kalau tidak bisa diamankan, ya, sudah!'*<sup>304</sup> These documents, it turns out, contained the department's entire archive.

District-level culture departments reaped financial benefits from their relationship to education departments, but anthropologist Widodo claims that when the latter became autonomous, the culture sections' well ran dry.<sup>305</sup> Gus Dur's decision to re-organize resulted from the swelling education department. Likewise, he felt the much smaller culture and tourism branches had more in common.<sup>306</sup> This was probably linked to tourism's role in beefing up industry in the region by promoting local arts. His decision placed "culture" firmly under the rubric of industry. Tourism oversees the hotel industry and it was at Cirebon's upper-end hotels that *topeng* became a staple of weekend entertainment. Thus, the decision to restructure these departments was significant in historical, psychological, and practical terms. The culture department had been united with the education department since 1962. This continuity distinguished Indonesia from its ASEAN neighbors, where the emphasis on cultural affairs was more porous. That culture was emphasized at all, confirms its pivotal role in forming national identity among the former colonies.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> "After the Education Department [left] we liquidated...anything that could not be safely stored was destroyed."Samsuri, pers. comm., 28 June 2006.

<sup>305</sup> Widodo argues that the culture sector has not been able to attract high-budget projects, nor do they have the authority to extract funds from community members and institutions. Amrih Widodo, "The Stages of the State: Arts of the People and Rites of Hegemonization" *Rima* 29, 1 / 2(1995), 19.

<sup>306</sup> Tourism was previously merged with the postal and telecommunications division. Abdurrahman Wahid, interview, 12 July 2006.

<sup>307</sup> Jennifer Lindsay, "Cultural Policy and the Performing Arts in Southeast Asia" (*Bijdragen Tot de Taal, Land en Volkenkunde*, 1995: 151, 4 1995), 658-9.



Fig. 18. *Kartu Kuning*, dated 14 March 1965.

The *kartu* was issued in the final months of Sukarno’s tenure by Majalengka’s education and culture department.<sup>308</sup> I found no mention of the new initiative in the local press, which has made the search for truth, much like the 1965 “coup,” a puzzle of Rashomonian<sup>309</sup> proportion. Each Majalengka official I interviewed for this study stressed that secrecy and infighting made any kind of documentation of the card unlikely.<sup>310</sup> We are thus dependent upon the memories of survivors, while recognizing their potential fallibility. The surviving artists clearly remember receiving their first card, though there is no consensus about when it was received. Endo Suanda, who performed with a *wayang golek* troupe in Majalengka in 1964, recalls receiving his issue

<sup>308</sup> The department is abbreviated as “*Dep P&K*.”

<sup>309</sup> Akira Kurosawa’s 1950 film, *Rashomon*, describes the frailty of memory. A series of witnesses describe a rape that occurred, with each version contradicting the others, highlighting the tricks memory may play on both the occupant and the onlooker.

<sup>310</sup> The head of Majalengka’s education department during the period under discussion said that he was unaware of the card prior to our meeting. Idro Sukardi, interview, June 20, 2006.

that year.<sup>311</sup> Ajip Rosidi, who was raised in Majalengka but lived in Bandung in the 1960s, speculates that the artist card was launched there in 1964 although not enforced until 1965.<sup>312</sup> All of the other artists interviewed pinpoint the date to Soeharto's ascendancy, that is, 1966 or later. Certainly *dalang topeng* and puppeteers had more contact with the government than other troupe members. *Pemimpin* were either directed to the *lurah*'s home when the card was first issued or the *lurah* paid them a visit. In either case, *pemimpin* had the only direct contact with local officials. The new protocol was announced during the "friendly consultation." As the *lurah*'s will was final, the *pemimpin* were instructed to register and purchase identification cards for the *rombongan* at their local culture department and ensure their safekeeping. The cards were to be renewed annually.

The *kartu*'s large size, 6 1/2" x 4 1/16", suggests that it was not intended to be carried, but stored.<sup>313</sup> In addition to an identification number in the upper right corner, it includes the name of the responsible party for the entire group, called the *pimpinan*,<sup>314</sup> village, sub-district, *Daerah Tingkat III*,<sup>315</sup> which in this case was Majalengka (Madjalengka) and the *anggauta kesenian* (performer's specialization). Each card is signed and dated in the lower right corner by the department's head inspector, Dajim

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<sup>311</sup> Endo Suanda, pers. comm., 4 May 2006.

<sup>312</sup> Ajip Rosidi, pers. comm., 5 June 2006.

<sup>313</sup> Issues of the card dating from the 1970s had been modified to fit in one's wallet. The wallet-size card was ubiquitous throughout West Java by the early 1970s with performance restrictions clearly enforced. Samsuri, pers. comm., 28 June 2006. One informant told me that during the 1980s any performer who could not produce his or her card risked arrest.

<sup>314</sup> The terms *pimpinan* and *pemimpin* are sometimes used interchangeably. The *dalang* is always the troupe's leader regardless of whether it is a *topeng* or *wayang* company.

<sup>315</sup> Regional level. Government departments are hierarchical. *Daerah I* is the Province of the Governor; II represents the *kabupaten* [county]; III is the *kecamatan* [regional sub-district]; IV is the *desa*. Therefore, this card was issued by the *kecamatan* (III) Majalengka.

Sutawiria, accompanied by the culture and education department's official stamp, "Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Majalengka." All of the cards I examined were from one *rombongan* in the village of Randegan in the Ligung district.<sup>316</sup> Statistical information on all of the cards was filled in by the same culture department employee and hand-dated "14 March," followed by the year "1965," which is press-printed onto each card.

If the *kartu* was a top-down affair, it would have emanated from Sukarno by way of *keputusan presiden* (presidential decree) and then sifted down through *paraturan daerah*, or *Perda* (regional regulations) with local branches of government exerting their autonomy in its implementation. This strongly suggests that Sukarno was building support for his pro-communist agenda by promoting the art he loved, while monitoring and shaping performers' activities. Many Indonesian politicians and historians accept this view. Its plausibility rests on the fact that many Sukarnoists – both *PNI* and *PKI* members – held posts in education and culture departments in 1964 and 1965 and were thus in a position to implement such an order.<sup>317</sup> Brandon confirms this idea in his description of the appointment of *PNI* members to

...a majority of the key positions in provincial, district, sub-district, and city governments. Almost without exception, PNI party members run the offices of the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of

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<sup>316</sup> According to the current director of *Pemerintah Kota Cirebon Kantor Kesatuan Bangsa dan Politik* [Government Unit of People and Politics, City of Cirebon], the Soeharto regime believed sprawling areas were too difficult to monitor. Ligung was one such example, and was split soon after *Gestok*, with the village of Randegan being absorbed into the regency of Jatitujuh. Abidin, pers. comm., 23 March 2006.

<sup>317</sup> This was the consensus between DPR member Tjetje Hidayat Padmadinata and the head of Cirebon's government office, *Kantor Kesatuan Bangsa dan Politik*. Abidin. Interviews, 21 March 2006 and 3 April 2006, respectively.

Education in Java... the party's first priority is maintaining its bureaucratic network in government...<sup>318</sup>

At the time the card was issued, Majalengka's education and culture department had long been under the leadership of *PNI* members Idro Sukardi (b.1915)<sup>319</sup> and Dajim Sutawiria (d.1988),<sup>320</sup> respectively. The two men enjoyed considerable respect in the community. Sukardi had joined the *PNI* in 1928, one year after its inception. He was thus one of its earliest members and, at age ninety-three, one of the last – if not the last – survivors of this pivotal moment in Indonesian history.<sup>321</sup> According to Sutawiria's son, Ajip Rosidi, Sukardi was his father's mentor and close friend. The two leaders drew a sharp ideological division between the *PNI* and the *PKI*. Sutawiria had been an avid Sukarnoist who remained active in the *PNI* until it was forced to consolidate with other nationalist and non-Islamic parties under the umbrella of *PDI (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia)*.<sup>322</sup> The long-held view of the *PNI* as an elite *priyayi* organization began to unravel during the Guided Democracy years.<sup>323</sup> It had, in fact, been split for a long time between two camps: one led by longtime *PNI* official, Hardi, whose opposition to the *PKI* had put him at odds with Sukarno since 1957; the other group was led by *PNI*

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<sup>318</sup> Brandon, *Theatre in Southeast Asia*, 220. These sentiments have been echoed by various political factions, including Herbert Luethy and his colleagues, whose staunchly anti-PKI account of the period, *Indonesia in Travail* describes "...dissident politicians, with the exception of a few diehard *emigres*, who all received sinecures in embassies, in cultural and touristic organisations, and in the multiplicity of consultative councils with which the government is surrounded." Luethy, et al. *Indonesia in Travail*. New Delhi: Congress for Cultural Freedom, 1966), 56-57.

<sup>319</sup> A brief biography of Idro Sukardi is available in Rosidi, *Apa Siapa Orang Sunda*, (Bandung: Kiblat, 2003) 202. Idro retired from the education department in 1971.

<sup>320</sup> Dajim was a teacher in Jatiwangi, after which he became the head of the culture department where he stayed until retirement. Ajip Rosidi, pers. comm., 5 June 2006 and 17 June 2006.

<sup>321</sup> Idro Sukardi, pers. comm., 20 June 2006.

<sup>322</sup> The merge resulted from Soeharto's systematic depoliticization of the national party system in 1973. Ajip Rosidi, pers. comm., 5 June 2006.

<sup>323</sup> J. Eliseo Rocamora, "The Partai Nasional Indonesia 1963- 1965," (*Indonesia* 10, October 1970), 143.

chairman Ali Sastroamidjojo, who was sympathetic to the *PKI*, which enabled him to have closer ties to Sukarno.<sup>324</sup> Majalengka's government was then run by seasoned *PNI* members aligned with Hardi's faction, who were vying to maintain their influence against an influx of younger, left-leaning members.<sup>325</sup> A purge of *PNI*'s leadership occurred in May and June 1965: Ali Sastroamidjojo and secretary general Surachman expelled over 150 conservative party leaders throughout the country. One of those leaders was Idro Sukardi.<sup>326</sup>

While Rosidi contends that the *PNI* dominated Ligung politics in the early 1960s,<sup>327</sup> a Cirebon government official, Abidin, has a different take on events. He surmises that the *kartu* was backed by *PKI* members as "a form of solidarity, used to mobilize the peasants," adding that many *PKI* members had already infiltrated the department.<sup>328</sup> Tjetje Hidayat Padmadinata, a bold, self-described "libertarian" and four-time member of Indonesia's house of representatives<sup>329</sup> agrees with Abidin. Padmadinata refers to the card as proof of an uncertain — indeed paranoid — Sukarno regime: "It was a last-ditch effort to mobilize the left" and "proof of Sukarno's crumbling guided democracy."<sup>330</sup> These conflicting views highlight the confusion

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<sup>324</sup> Daniel S. Lev, "Indonesia 1965: The Year of the Coup" (*Asian Survey* 6, 2, Feb. 1966), 104.

<sup>325</sup> Rocamora, *Nationalism in Search of Ideology. The Indonesian Nationalist Party 1946-1965*. (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1975), 349-50.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, 341- 42.

<sup>327</sup> Ajip Rosidi, pers. comm., 17 June 2006.

<sup>328</sup> "Banyak yang ikut PKI di dalam pemerintah." Abidin, pers. comm., 23 March 2006

<sup>329</sup> *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat (DPR)*. Tjetje was imprisoned five times by Sukarno between 1960 and 1966. Following *Gestok*, Tjetje represented the province of West Java in the House from 1971-77; 1987-1992; 1992-1997; and 1999-2004. His first three terms were with *Golkar*. Tjetje was *Ketua Dewan Pimpinan Provinsi of Partai Keadilandan Persatuan (PKP)*, or Chairman of the Province Leadership Council of the Justice and Unity Party) during his fourth term.

<sup>330</sup> Tjetje Hidayat Padmadinata, pers. comm., 21 March 2006. For an account of Tjetje's political triumphs and hardships, see Tjetje H. Padmadinata with Tatang Sumarsono, *Setengah Abad Perlawanan 1955-2005. Memoar Tjetje H. Padmadinata*, (Bandung: CV Hikayat Dunia, 2006).

swirling around events at the time, and even in hindsight. One perspective is offered by an insider (Rosidi) with informed and intimate knowledge of Majalengka's education and culture department structure; the other two perspectives come from political leaders (Padmadinata and Abidin) whose insights are drawn chiefly from astute observations of the region's local history. While the latter's accounts of the card as an internal communist affair are plausible, the *PNI* was stronger in Java and was deeply invested in keeping its network lubricated.

The internal workings of the department may be murky, but the card's financial impetus is crystal clear. Annual membership fees were issued at a premium of 10,000 *rupiah* per registrant during this period of hyperinflation.<sup>331</sup> When combined with the pre-existing performance permits, the new cards promised a steady stream of cash flowing into the culture department.<sup>332</sup> The *pemimpin* was not merely a formality. She or he was crucial to the registry's smooth functioning. The individual's responsibilities included paying for and storing the troupe's registration cards, renewal fees, applying and paying for performance permits, and reporting changes in group membership to the *lurah*.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Inflation rose to 594% in 1965, while economic growth was reduced from -1.6% to -4%. Margaret J. Kartomi, *The year of voting frequently: Politics and artists in Indonesia's 2004 elections*, (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 2005), 4.

<sup>332</sup> Ajip Rosidi, pers. comm., 5 June 2006.

The cards continued to be a cash cow under Soeharto's rule. The cost of the card did not increase when a new registration card was issued under Soeharto. There was no need to, as the same *rupiah* 10,000 per card provided its own kind of coup for the new government. A palpable feature of Sukarno's legacy was that his rejection of Western aid resulted in soaring inflation. The Indonesian currency, the *rupiah*, was so devalued that in December 1965, just a few months after the coup attempt, a new one was created at the rate of 1,000 old *rupiah* to one new *rupiah*. Internet citation: <http://www.gocurrency.com/countries/indonesia.htm>

<sup>333</sup> The differences in definition of the term "artist" in Cirebon and West Java's capital, Bandung, are instructive. In Cirebon, "artist" signifies an individual who is a member of a *rombongan*. The term connotes a "performing artist," particularly *dalang topeng*, *bodor*, *dalang wayang*, and the musicians

Cirebon-area artists, who up to this point had operated with considerable anonymity, interpreted the first artist registration card as symbolic of the government's recognition of their craft and tangible proof of their individual and collective artistic achievement.<sup>334</sup> This idea was reinforced due to its high cost and the necessarily obsessive emphasis *pemimpin* placed on their safekeeping. The *pemimpin*'s extensive financial and personal responsibilities lent credence to their belief that the troupes' registration cards were their personal property.<sup>335</sup> According to *pemimpin* Amin, the 1965 card was the only issue he received during Sukarno's tenure.<sup>336</sup> The putsch six months later declared it moot.

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(*nayaga*) who accompany them. By contrast, in Bandung, the definition of "artist" is a self-contained entity. The notification system followed a very different procedure in Bandung, where artists were often intellectuals – chiefly writers, dancers, visual artists, and actors. Their status made them easier to track since writers' ideas were published and performances and art exhibitions were announced in the press. Bandung's culture department thus took a more direct approach by mailing registration instructions directly to individual artists. The protocol was not consistently followed, however. Rules were more rigidly enforced on those artists whose activities were deemed questionable by the regional government.<sup>333</sup> Rosidi was living in Bandung at the time and, as previously mentioned, was one of the few intellectuals who did not participate in the *Manifes* debate. Like his colleagues, he had received notification to register with the culture department. However, he chose not to comply and never received another notice. Ajip Rosidi, pers. comm., 17 June 2006.

<sup>334</sup> Endo Suanda, pers. comm., 5 July 2006; Amin, pers. comm., 27 June 2006.

<sup>335</sup> Agus, pers. comm., 15 May 2006; Amin, pers. comm., 31 October 2005.

<sup>336</sup> Amin, pers. comm., 31 October 2005.



## SOEHARTO INSTALLS THE *TANDA KENJATAAN*

| INSPEKSI DAERAH KEBUDAJAAN DT. II<br>MADJALENGKA  |                        | No. 258   |
|---|------------------------|---|
| POTRET<br>atau<br>TANDA TANGAN<br>PEMEGANG  | <b>TANDA KENJATAAN</b> |   |
|   | Nama :                 | [REDACTED]  |
|   | Umur :                 | 25 th.  |
|   | Angg. Kesenian :       | Wajang kulit sika mawar   |
|   | Alamat :               | Desa : Randegan   |
|   | Kedjuruan :            | Madjale   |
| Telah mengikuti MUSJAWARAH KESENIAN I<br>yang diselenggarakan oleh Komando Operasi Mental<br>( K O M E N ) Pantjasila Dt. II Madjalengka pada<br>tgl. 15 September 1966 |                        |   |
| Mengetahui<br>Dan Dim 0617 Madjalengka<br>u. b.<br>Ketua KOMEN Pantjasila<br>ttd<br>( Lettu Moch. SALOE )   |                        | Madjalengka, 15 September 1966<br>Kepala Inspeksi Daerah Kebudayaan<br>DT. II Madjalengka<br>( DAHM SUTAWIRIA ) |

Fig. 19. *Tanda Kenjataan*.

One of the military's first acts immediately following the coup was the forced exile of Sukarno to his palace in Bogor and Aidit's capture and execution. Torture and mass killings persisted during the latter part of 1965 through March 1966 and continued sporadically in isolated areas in 1967 and 1969.<sup>337</sup> While the violence penetrated most deeply in East Java and Bali, its tendrils extended into West and Central Java, Sumatra, West Kalimantan, and Sulawesi.

Performers who enjoyed success during the Guided Democracy years were viewed with distrust by the district-level government. It seems a paradox, then, that

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<sup>337</sup> Robert Cribb, ed., *The Indonesian Killings 1965-1966. Studies from Java and Bali*, 3. The actual number of dead is in dispute. The generally accepted range is between 500,000 and one million.

some artists who were linked with the *PKI* in the New Order's imagination at least, would become key players in Soeharto's nation building and that these same artists would prove critical in stabilizing the economy. While this shift seems strange and new, it was continuous with much older practices. What made the new card different was the military's nascent role and underlying meaning as the murders waned. This new card, "*tanda kenjataan*" (herein referred to as "*tanda*") roughly translates as "certificate of proof." It was issued in Majalengka, a few weeks shy of *Gestok*'s first anniversary.

Indonesia's remarkable cultural and political pluralism unfolded the following year. *Gestok* had caused unprecedented upheaval, yet on the surface nothing had changed in Majalengka's education and culture department. Sukardi and Sutawiria continued their respective posts, and Sutawiria's signature graced the new registration card. Their continued leadership was likely the result of the regional military's confidence that the two men posed no threat to Soeharto's plans and that their flexibility in adjusting to the new government would be an asset. Sukardi's recent purge from the PNI, after all, was well known to the military. If these leaders' role in the new administration appeared ambiguous, the detailed information on the new card was not. It imposed a deafening silence on the local art scene. Press-printed on the card is the name and title of its administrative officer: "*Dan Dim u.b. Ketua KOMEN Panjasila Lettu. Moch. Saloe.*"<sup>338</sup>

Whereas the *kartu*'s backer was nebulous, the *tanda* was to the point. It was sponsored by the regional military command, *Komandan District Militer (Dan Dim)*.

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<sup>338</sup> *Komando Operasi Mental*, or the Military Regional Command on behalf of the Chairman of the Operational Command for the Ideology of *Panjasila Lettu. Moch. Saloe.*

Padmadinata described the new document as overt: a “clearance card” awarded to artists who, in accordance with *musjawarah* (its former democratic nuances now muted), could convince the military they were not connected to the now illegal *PKI*.<sup>339</sup> Those artists unable to prove their “innocence” – including families and friends, regardless of how tangential those contacts may have been – were punished. Some *dalang* were arrested. Others took an extended hiatus from performing, many permanently.

“*KOMEN Panjasila*” is an enigma, with no other known references.<sup>340</sup> It appears to have been the ideological branch of Soeharto’s feared security agency, *KOPKAMTIB*.<sup>341</sup> This was Soeharto’s version of the Dutch-imposed *rust en orde* (tranquility and order) in conjunction with Soeharto’s regional military command.<sup>342</sup> Soeharto wasted no time establishing the organization, which had unrivaled powers to enforce newly imposed guidelines and to hunt down communists and anyone else who posed a potential threat to the nascent regime.<sup>343</sup> As First Lieutenant Moch. Saloe’s title suggests, Majalengka’s local enforcer was a minor figure. He is the only person named on the *tanda* whose biography I cannot verify.

The *tanda*’s timing coincided with heightened anxieties among Cirebon region artists, who had heard that performers elsewhere in Java and in Bali with suspected *PKI* and/or *LEKRA* affiliations had “disappeared.” The hunt for artists in the Cirebon region

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<sup>339</sup> Tjetje Hidayat Padmadinata, pers. comm., 21 March 2006.

<sup>340</sup> I found a more recent reference to the acronym “*KOMEN*” (*Komando Resimen*, or Regiment Command) but it is unrelated to *KOMEN Panjasila*.

<sup>341</sup> *Komando Operasi Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban* (Operational Command for the Restoration of Security and Order).

<sup>342</sup> Mona Lohanda, pers. comm., 28 February 2006; Tjetje Hidayat Padmadinata, pers. comm. 21 March 2006.

<sup>343</sup> Ulf Sundhaussen, *The Military in Indonesia*, (Cambridge: Center for International Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1974), 33; Andrew T. H. Tan, *A Political and Economic Dictionary of South-East Asia* (London and New York: Europa Publications, 2004), 148.

appears to have been a measured response to Sukarno's elevation of *topeng* and *wayang*. *Dalang topeng* Sujana Arja put it this way: "Because [we] often performed during that time and *PKI* members sometimes invited us to play, the government assumed we were also party members, but we were only paid by communists to dance."<sup>344</sup> Every *dalang* I spoke with – both during Soeharto's New Order and even years after Soeharto stepped down – insisted their contact with *PKI* was strictly professional. Yet associations between the two spheres persist. *Dalang* were so marginalized at this time that any affiliation with them was considered suspect. According to retired Cirebon culture department official and *topeng* aficionado Ishak Herdjan, it was equally perilous for individuals to hire a *dalang* following *Gestok* as it was for a *dalang* to perform. Anyone who dared cross that schism would be reported to the regional military command, *KODIM* (*Komando District Militer*).<sup>345</sup> While Cirebon region puppeteers who were suspected of communism were tortured and/or imprisoned, those clowns whose content had been overtly political were not subjected to the same intense scrutiny. One reason may be that *bodor* cleverly injected base humor into their dialogue, which the new government relegated to innocent banter, unlike the sharp-edged *LEKRA* story lines woven into some *wayang* scripts. This does not minimize the *bodors'* suffering. Many were interviewed and harassed and their careers effectively destroyed.

The *lurah*'s role in cultural matters took a decisive turn after 1965 when, according to Robert Wessing, roughly half of all *lurah* in West Java bore some

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<sup>344</sup> Sujana Arja, pers. comm., 6 August 2005.

<sup>345</sup> Ishak Herdjan, pers. comm., 6 August 2005.

connection with the military.<sup>346</sup> Thus, military rank became part of the criteria to be elected to the post of *lurah*.<sup>347</sup> The *dalang*'s genealogy, formerly a source of immense pride, now placed them under a dark cloud while providing a direct pathway to their whereabouts through their *rombongan*. The most distant relatives and acquaintances in a suspected communist's orbit were also at risk under the new regime. The *tanda* thus proved a serious challenge to performers because the card concretized their group affiliations, which were previously relatively fluid. This was particularly true of musicians and clowns who were in high demand and often subcontracted with other groups on a contingency basis.<sup>348</sup>

It is stunning that most performers do not remember the *tanda*, considering the *Sturm und Drang* surrounding it. This lacuna may have less to do with forgetting, than with their exclusion at the *musjawarah* with the secret police. The artists were represented in absentia by the *dalang topeng*. The *tanda* is slightly larger than its predecessor, measuring 6 3/4" x 5". The 15 September 1966 date is official. It was not handwritten as was its predecessor, but press-printed on the card. Therefore, this was its official and, likely, only printing. Like the *kartu*, the *tanda* was processed at the culture department, but unlike its predecessor, it was prepared by the military. It is, therefore, not surprising that the *tanda*'s meaning was confusing to nearly everyone involved – including the culture department. On the one hand, not everyone understood it was a clearance card though it was, in fact, one. On the other hand, *pemimpin* Amin

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<sup>346</sup> Wessing, "Electing a *Lurah* in West Java, Indonesia: Stability and Change" *Ethnology*, 26,3 (1987), 167.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid, citing Pluvier (1976:30) and Hofstede (1971:54).

<sup>348</sup> These regulations had loosened by the 1970s and since *reformasi* are obsolete.

understood that performers unable to produce their cards would raise the ire of *KOPKAMTIB*'s local enforcers.

An important counterweight to *KOPKAMTIB*'s aim to flag artists' political allegiances was the *pemimpin*'s mandate to protect the members of their *rombongan*, who were almost always related through marriage or bloodline. They improvised creative means for doing so. In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990) James Scott outlines the constellation of strategies employed by subalterns globally, which "insinuate their resistance, in disguised forms, into the public transcript." He concludes that "Most of the political life of subordinate groups is to be found neither in overt collective defiance of powerholders nor in complete hegemonic compliance, but in the vast territory between these two polar opposites."<sup>349</sup> In his earlier book on the topic of subaltern resistance in a Malaysian village, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, Scott contends that the issues that inspire such resistance are usually constellated around class struggles, for example, the appropriataion of taxes, land, labor, etc. He contends that such resistance may escalate to violence, but it is more commonly expressed as "passive noncompliance, subtle sabotage, evasion, and deception."<sup>350</sup> A parallel may be drawn with how Cirebonese artists were tracked, for whom non-compliance was more dangerous, more immediate, and more far-reaching. The only protective measure available to *pemimpin*, short of

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<sup>349</sup> Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 136.

<sup>350</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 28-31.

outright revolt, was to provide information about their friends, neighbors, and family while covertly altering the details of their lives.<sup>351</sup>

A box is indicated on each *tanda* for either a photograph or the signature of the artist, though none of the registrants in the group discussed herein provided either one. The performer's age was also required on the new card. Age, however, is a vexing issue for many older performers, for whom vital statistics are rarely recorded. The cards are further riddled with inconsistencies and errors regarding artists' names. A young female member is a case in point. Her *kartu* and her *tanda* identify her as "Nji Iwig."<sup>352</sup> Her profession is listed as "*wayang kulit/topeng*."<sup>353</sup> The title "Nji," however, is rarely applied to *dalang*. Rather, it is a term of respect often employed for married female singers (*pesindhen*), who accompany the *gamelan* during *wayang* and, more recently, *topeng* performances.<sup>354</sup> "Nji Iwig," as it turns out, was not a mask dancer, puppeteer, or singer. She was a very young clown-in-training. Her name as it appears on her *kartu* was tweaked from the Sundanese word '*riwig*'<sup>355</sup> – a humorous reference to her long, disheveled hair. It was, as is the norm with *bodor*, her designated *nama lucu* (comic name) which had been bestowed upon her by the group's leader.<sup>356</sup> Her given name, and the one she is known by today, is herein referred to as Nini (pseudonym). Nini appeared distraught that I knew her as 'Nji Iwig' and requested I refer to her by her given name.

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<sup>351</sup> Since all of the *tanda* I located were from one troupe, I am only discussing how their *pemimpin* responded to the situation. There was, however, consensus among the few other surviving *dalang* *topeng* who had served in this capacity.

<sup>352</sup> She is one of the only members of Amin's group for whom both the *kartu kuning* and *tanda kenjataan* were issued under the same name.

<sup>353</sup> Puppetry and mask performance.

<sup>354</sup> R. Anderson Sutton, "Who is the *Pesindhen*?": Notes on the Female Singing Tradition in Java," *Indonesia* 37 (1984), 127-28.

<sup>355</sup> This is derived from '*ngariwig*.'

<sup>356</sup> Waryo, pers. comm., 1 November 2007; Amin, pers. comm., 21 November 2007.

In addition to the confusion about her name and occupation, Nini's age is stated as "twenty" on the *tanda*, which would make her sixty-three at the time of this writing. This, too, is in error; she is much younger. Nini received her *kartu* at approximately age eight<sup>357</sup> and her *tanda* at ten. Indeed, almost all of the troupe's members' names, ages, and positions had been altered, suggesting a high level of ingenuity and hypervigilance in protecting members' identities. The artist's name on one of the remaining *tanda* is so well camouflaged that, today, even the *pemimpin* cannot identify the card's rightful owner. The above inconsistencies suggest false compliance and sabotage as articulated by Scott, requiring "little or no coordination or planning; they often represent a form of individual self-help; and they typically avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority or with elite norms."<sup>358</sup> In his next book on peasant rebellions, *Domination of the Arts: Hidden Transcripts*, Scott outlines those strategies employed by subalterns, which "insinuate their resistance, in disguised forms, into the public transcript." He concludes, that "[m]ost of the political life of subordinate groups is to be found neither in overt collective defiance of powerholders nor in complete hegemonic compliance, but in the vast territory between these two polar opposites."<sup>359</sup>

### **Unmasking Mythologies**

Although the putsch occurred in the early morning hours of 1 October 1965, it is all but lost in Indonesia's collective consciousness. The date indelibly etched in the Indonesian imagination, 30 September 1965, is perpetuated by its official name:

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<sup>357</sup> Age was not a requirement of the *kartu kuning*. The fact that she was issued one attests to her being born prior to 1965.

<sup>358</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 29

<sup>359</sup> Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 136.



“September 30<sup>th</sup> Movement” or its acronym “G30S/PKI.” The power of this date did not escape Soeharto. Today, many older Indonesians still attach to 30 September a different acronym derived from the same date and first put forth by Soeharto: *Gestapu*.<sup>360</sup> The term’s anachronistic parallels to Nazi Germany included, but were not limited to, their secret police, Gestapo. John Roosa argues that in much the way Hitler used the Reichstag fire as a pretext to crackdown on the German Communist Party in 1933, Soeharto seized the opportunity afforded by the communist coup attempt to claim his ascendancy to power.<sup>361</sup> Whereas Hitler singled out the Expressionist artists in his infamous 1937 exhibition, *Entartete Kunst* (“Degenerate Art”) to humiliate artists while building a national coalition,<sup>362</sup> Soeharto manipulated the press, labeling practitioners of politicized dance “degenerates” in precisely the same way. Soon after Soeharto gained control, the military targeted the feminist wing of the *PKI*, *Gerwani* (Indonesian Women’s Movement) as the culprits of the alleged sexualized torture and execution of the generals. *KOPKAMTIB* stressed that following their executions, the women performed a joyous, ritualized “dance” above *Lubang Buaya*, the mass grave where the corpses were disposed of.<sup>363</sup> Other female dancers were condemned in the press and their reputations effectively destroyed. Two months after the coup, for example, the

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<sup>360</sup> The younger generation refer to it as G30S/PKI.

<sup>361</sup> John Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder. The September 30<sup>th</sup> Movement & Suharto’s Coup d’État in Indonesia*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 31-2.

<sup>362</sup> Stephanie Barron, “*Degenerate Art*”: *The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, (New York and Los Angeles: Abrams/LACMA, 1991).

<sup>363</sup> Ben Anderson, “*How Did the Generals Die?*,” *Indonesia* 43 (1987),109-11; Saskia Wieringa, *Sexual Politics in Indonesia*, (The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 2002), 301-21. Ben Anderson disputes that any sexualized torture occurred in his detailed exposé based on autopsy reports of the forensic experts who had examined the remains of the six murdered generals. According to the report, the men died from gunshot wounds and, contradicting official government reports, their eyes and penises were intact. For a discussion of how dance was pejoratively eulogized by the New Order, see Rachmi Diyah Larasati, *Dancing on the Mass Grave: Cultural Reconstruction Post Indonesian Massacres*. PhD Diss., (University of California, Riverside, 2006).

Bandung daily, *Pikiran Rakyat*, linked Bandung dancer Nyi Saina to Gerwani's "*Tarian Harum Bunga* (Dance of the Fragrant Flowers).<sup>364</sup> The press described women dancers in such vague terms that the tendrils of its web stretched beyond the literati to include female *dalang topeng* from among the most geographically isolated regions of West Java.

In Cirebon, some female *dalang* who had been forced to stop performing *topeng* turned their attention to less politically scrutinized dance forms. Some styles even flourished, particularly *ronggeng* and contemporary choreography, *kreasi baru*. Even *sintren*, the trance dance that invokes a goddess from heaven, enjoyed a rise in popularity. When Rasinah's *topeng* career was halted, she turned her attention to creating new choreographies of *Kuda Lumping*, *Nelayan*, *Tari Nespar*, and apolitical versions of the farmer dance, *Ibu Tani*, *Bapak Tani*, and *Petani*.<sup>365</sup> Although Rasinah is a devout Muslim, she even choreographed a Christian dance named *Tari Maria* (The Maria Dance). She supplemented her income by teaching *kreasi baru* to elementary school children in Indramayu during the lean New Order years. Since *reformasi* and up to her 2005 stroke, Rasinah was arguably the most successful female *dalang topeng*. She was also the subject of an English language documentary, *Rasinah: The Enchanted Mask* (Salto Films, 2004) directed by Rhoda Grauer, who collaborated with Robert Wilson on his production of the Sulawesi epic, *I La Galigo* the same year.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> "*Tari Jang Tidak Wangi: 'Bunga Harum'*" ("The Dance that is not Aromatic: Fragrant Flower") (*Pikiran Rakyat*, 13 December 1965): 1; See also Cribb, *The Indonesian Killings 1965-1966. Studies from Java and Bali*, 29; Wieringa, *Sexual Politics in Indonesia*, 291-327; 330-35

<sup>365</sup> "Mother Farmer," "Father Farmer," and "Farmer," respectively. Rasinah began performing *topeng* again in 1994. Rasinah, pers. comm., 23 May 2005.

<sup>366</sup> A discussion of Wilson's production of *I La Galigo*, based on the Sulawesi epic *Sureq Galigo*, is found in chapter 2 of this study.

Returning to our discussion about why different strategies were employed elsewhere on Java to silence artists, it becomes clear that those artists with strong *PKI* affiliations in other regions were taken very seriously indeed. Historian Paul Stange, who conducted research in Salatiga, Central Java, in 1971, witnessed how *jatilan*<sup>367</sup> troupes from Salatiga who were once aligned with *PKI* and its subsidiary peasant front, *BTI*, were quickly rounded up and mobilized by *Golkar*. The troupes were paid to participate in the organization's parades, which were a preamble to Indonesia's first "election" since 1965.<sup>368</sup> Jennifer Lindsay describes how many popular Jakarta dancers, bands, singers, and comedians were also mobilized by *Golkar* to represent the party during the same election, whose artists toured under the name *Kesenian Safari Golkar*.<sup>369</sup> Social change came to Cirebon with considerably less fanfare. In anticipation of the election, performances were injected with *Golkar* propaganda, even during *hajatan*. Endo Suanda describes how *Wringin Putih* (The White Banyon Tree) was performed at nearly every *wayang* performance in the months leading up to the election. Between 1972 and 1976 pharmaceutical ads often accompanied performances, which had a lasting effect in the secularization of the form.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> A form of horse trance dance.

<sup>368</sup> Paul Stange, pers. comm., 11 October 2007.

<sup>369</sup> Jennifer Lindsay, "Performing in the 2004 elections," (2005), 38-9; citing Ken Ward, *The 1971 Election in Indonesia: An East Java Case Study*, (Clayton, Monash University, 1974), 85-86.

<sup>370</sup> The banyon tree is emblematic of *Golkar*, and the five Pandawas symbolize its number in the election. Endo Suanda "The Social Context of the Cirebonese Performing Artist," 35. Ironically, today the majority of performances are sponsored by Indonesia's leading cigarette manufacturers.

The other primary area where artists were targeted was Bali. John Emigh, who has conducted research on the ramifications of the coup on Balinese performers,<sup>371</sup> stresses that those artists typically singled out were puppeteers, resulting from the politics pursued during their performances and the political substance of their jokes. Some artists were targeted for both their organizational affiliations and their plays' linguistic content. The persecution of these artists was most consistently connected to their *LEKRA* affiliations.<sup>372</sup> Balinese *topeng*, like *topeng Cirebon*, contained substantial topical humor, yet they were perceived as less politically rigorous than *wayang*. This, however, is where any symmetry between the two *topeng* forms ends. Stylistically, they are profoundly different both in form and content. Men comprise all the roles in Balinese *topeng*, which is framed in terms of privilege and caste; *topeng Cirebon*, in contrast, is rooted in village life, perpetuated by farmers and encoded with indigenized, mystical meaning. Bali's waning political autonomy and the weaker presence of the army proved critical factors in the violence there.<sup>373</sup> The military initially rounded up Balinese civilians after the 1965 coup, but soon *pemuda* gangs took the lead. Teachers were particularly vulnerable, and it was in this capacity that puppeteers were most vulnerable to the violence that erupted.<sup>374</sup> A striking distinction between artists in Bali and Cirebon was the camaraderie of some Balinese performers on both sides of the political fence in the aftermath of 1965. John Emigh describes the situation as

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<sup>371</sup> John Emigh, "Culture, killings, and criticism in the years of living dangerously: Bali and Baliology," *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, ed. Tracy C. Davis. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008), 60-75.

<sup>372</sup> John Emigh, pers. comm., 27 July 2006.

<sup>373</sup> Geoffrey Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 311.

<sup>374</sup> John Emigh, pers. comm., 27 July 2006.

protective: “Some older performers with strong *PNI* credentials shielded *LEKRA* performers in their homes.”<sup>375</sup> I found no such bond in the Cirebon region. This is not to say it did not exist, only that it was not borne out from my research.

Robert Cribb and Colin Brown<sup>376</sup> contend that the Soeharto regime was disinclined to arm Muslims in West Java where the protracted *Darul Islam* rebellion had only recently been suppressed. Furthermore, Cirebon’s sub-district military command, *Komando Ressort Militer’s* (acronym: *KOREM*) was at a strategic disadvantage. Its commander, Colonel Witono, had less manpower at his disposal because the military unit usually stationed there was serving in Sulawesi at the time.<sup>377</sup> Anti-communist violence was milder in West Java than elsewhere on the island, yet it was one of the first areas where post-*Gestok* killings occurred. It is believed that as many as half of the West Javanese slaughtered were from Cirebon, Indramayu, and in nearby Subang, where poverty was ubiquitous and strong ties had been forged with communist organizations. Sundhaussen argues that many of the killings in Indramayu were committed by vengeful members of the local police, who targeted squatters believed responsible for taking over government-owned teak forests.<sup>378</sup> This had a decisive impact on *topeng* in Indramayu, which was effectively banned until 1969. So while the *PKI* may have been weaker in West Java, it could not be overlooked by the new military, who recognized that a different strategy was required there to ensure its unilateral victory. Witono and his

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> Robert Cribb and Colin Brown, *Modern Indonesia: A History Since 1945*, (London and New York: Longman, 1995), 26.

<sup>377</sup> Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia*, 234; Ulf Sundhaussen, *The Road to Power: Indonesian Military Politics 1945-1967*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982), 216.

<sup>378</sup> Sundhaussen, *The Road to Power*, 217.

cohorts successfully paralyzed the local *PKI* through intimidation when they paid a visit to a rural *PKI* branch on the outskirts of Cirebon on 2 October 1965. There, members were succinctly told that Aidit had betrayed their party with his part in the aborted communist coup. A few sentences proved sufficient for the branch to “voluntarily” dissolve itself almost immediately after the military’s visit.<sup>379</sup> On 4 October 1965, the army’s strategic reserve forces, led by Major General Soeharto had “captured” approximately 150 rebel troops who had fled to Cirebon following Untung’s capture.<sup>380</sup> Between 13 and 16 October 1965, 211,000 *PKI* members renounced their membership in the Cirebon region. The dissolution of their branches immediately followed.<sup>381</sup> By year’s end, 10,000 party members in the region had been arrested.<sup>382</sup>

The *tanda* was a different form of intimidation, which portended the establishment of the local *penilik kebudayaan* (culture patrol). Under the culture department’s control at the sub-district level, their primary function was to monitor *topeng* and *wayang*’s linguistic content and enforce crowd control.<sup>383</sup> But these men (they were always men) were also integrated into the community, making their presence at performances complex. In addition to the civil servants’ obligations, performances provided opportunities for them to mingle with important people, flirt with the *pesindhen*, and even to enjoy the performance.<sup>384</sup> Additional responsibilities included rigorous adherence to regulations of Muslim prayer, *shalat*, a formal acknowledgement

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid, 216-17.

<sup>380</sup> Kodam VI Siliwangi, *Siliwangi Dari Masa Kemasa. Sedjarah Militar Kodam VI Siliwangi*, (Djakarta: Fakta Mahjuma, 1968), 606.

<sup>381</sup> Sundhaussen, *The Road to Power*, 216-17.

<sup>382</sup> *Angkatan Bersenjata*, 21 October and 2 November 1965, cited in Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia*, 142.

<sup>383</sup> Cohen, *An Inheritance from the Friends of God*, PhD Diss, 208-9.

<sup>384</sup> Kathy Foley, pers. comm., 12 August 2006.

of the crucial role Islam played in *PKI*'s eradication.<sup>385</sup> Evening performances could begin no earlier than 8 p.m., approximately one hour after evening prayer *Isa*, and had to conclude no later than 3:30 a.m., approximately one hour prior to morning prayers, *Subuh*. Breaks from 12:30 to 1 p.m. for noon prayers, *Duhur* also had to be observed, as well as at 3:30 p.m. for afternoon prayers, *Asar*.<sup>386</sup> The Islamists,<sup>387</sup> whom Soeharto feared as much as the communists, thus became integrally linked with his rise to power.

### **Imprinting Memories**

As the artist cards reveal, naming has a decisive effect on how and what we remember. The film that was constructed to recapture the events of the early morning of 1 October 1965 rests with the military's version, which was concretized with *Penghianatan G30S/PKI (Treason of G30S/PKI)*. As the film's title attests to, the ideology about the propagandistic slant of this fictional work is transparent; however, it was shot with the appearance of a documentary by the state's film company *Perusahaan Produksi Filem Negara (PPFN)*<sup>388</sup> in 1982-1983, and released in 1984.<sup>389</sup> In commemoration of the coup, the state television station, *Televisi Republik Indonesia (TVRI)*, broadcast the film every September 30<sup>th</sup> until a few years before Soeharto's fall. When private stations gained access to Indonesian airwaves they, too, were forced to

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<sup>385</sup> *Kompas*, "Carpan Kendalikan Topeng Cirebon" 13 November 1993.

<sup>386</sup> Endo Suanda, "The Social Context of the Cirebonese Performing Artist," 38-39.

<sup>387</sup> Muslims who subscribe to an Islamic political ideology.

<sup>388</sup> The State Film Production Company.

<sup>389</sup> Although this seems a long time to wait to inculcate the state's version of events, TV was not a staple of Indonesian households until the 1990s. It would take another decade before its ubiquity in the *Wilayah III Cirebon* was on par with urban areas. Tursini purchased her first TV three years ago with funds her daughter earned while working as a *pembantu* in Saudi Arabia. For more on TV broadcasting, see Elihu Katz and George Wedell, *Broadcasting in the Third World: Promise and Performance*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 89-90.

broadcast the film.<sup>390</sup> The inculcation of the New Order's dark version of events into the Indonesian imaginary shaped both the official and, for the majority of people too young to remember 1965, the only version of events.

The project of institutionalizing memory was already on the New Orders' agenda a good decade earlier than *Penghianatan G30S/PKI*'s inauguration. *Rombongan* underwent major revisions. Informal performing networks became institutionalized as legally-sanctioned associations, called *sanggar*.<sup>391</sup> *Topeng* troupes had to register all of their members under an official name with the Education and Culture Department (*Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan*). Keni Arja's group, for example, adopted the name *Adiningrum*; her brother Sujana troupe was called *Panji Asmara*; and Sawitri's Losari *rombongan* became *Sanggar Topeng Purwa Kencana*.<sup>392</sup> Sawitri's niece, Noor Anani still uses this name. Concurrent to the formalization of *sanggar*, banners had to be erected in plain view at each performance site stipulating the name of the *pemimpin* and *sanggar*, their village, sub-district, and city.

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<sup>390</sup> Ariel Heryanto, *State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia: Fatally belonging*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 6-7.

<sup>391</sup> '*Sanggar*' had been the formal designation for visual art associations in the 1950s. These associations tended to be defined along communist versus apolitical lines. See Holt, *Art in Indonesia*, 231-54.

<sup>392</sup> Sudarto, *Topeng Babakan Cirebon 1900-1990*, 117.





Fig. 20. *Dalang topeng* Sawitri's sign, *Purwa Kencana* continues to be displayed in her Losari studio, now run by her great-niece, Noor Anani.

Dutch attempts to merge Sundanese and Javanese culture at the colonial fairs in order to convey a unified whole stands in sharp relief to the emphasis on ethnicity initiated by Sukarno and, later, fine-tuned by Soeharto. From the vantage point of history, we can see how the colonial expositions inflected upon Indonesia long after the Dutch and Japanese had left. Questions of cultural memory and identity related to fantasies of collective belonging and re-imaginings of the past were made manifest. The expositions would be reinvented during the New Order years, in the form of the permanent theme park, *Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (TMII)*<sup>393</sup> located on the outskirts of East Jakarta. Soeharto's wife, Ibu Tien (Siti Hartinah), was the life force behind its construction. It was on a trip to Disneyland in 1971 that the idea of a national theme

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<sup>393</sup> "Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Garden."

park and museum hit Ibu Tien like a juggernaut.<sup>394</sup> *Taman Mini* was inaugurated on International Women's Day in 1975. The Philippines' First Lady, Imelda Marcos, was on hand for the fanfare. *TMII*, like the East Indies pavilion prior to its destruction at the 1931 Paris exposition, is yet another false synonym, insensitive to the theme park's true purpose. James Siegel describes *TMII* as a "contemporary version of the colonial museum of ethnography."<sup>395</sup> Frances Gouda stresses its Disneyesque features. In addition to museums, overhead trains, gardens and architecture of Indonesia's main islands, which had been extracted from their native soil, *TMII* boasts a theatre in which regional, state-sponsored performances and visual arts are highlighted. Cirebonese glass-painting, *wayang kulit*, and *topeng* are presented there, hosted by Cirebon's culture and tourism department.<sup>396</sup>

### **Circulation, Soeharto-style: *Topeng* Tours**

As the first section of this chapter attests to, any discussion of *dalang* traveling abroad is vexed. Certainly Soeharto's appointment of his *Kabinet Pembangunan* (Development Cabinet) in 1967, whose sole purpose was Indonesia's development in material terms, took a lead role in tourism overseas.<sup>397</sup> These ventures brought *dalang* and the government prestige and capital, but for the vast majority of *dalang* who had never left their region prior to *Gestok*, these journeys served a heuristic purpose,

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<sup>394</sup> Frances Gouda, *Dutch Culture Overseas: Colonial Practice in the Netherlands Indies, 1900 – 1942*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995) 236.

<sup>395</sup> James Siegel, *Shadow and Sound: The Historical Thought of a Sumatran People*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 3-5.

<sup>396</sup> *Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata*, or its acronym *Disbudpar*.

<sup>397</sup> For discussions of the etymology of "*Pembangunan*" as regards the progression of economic and cultural growth during the New Order see Ariel Heryanto, "The 'Development' of Development," *Indonesia* 46 (1988), 1-24; Jürgen Hellman, *Performing the Nation: Cultural Politics in New Order Indonesia*, (Copenhagen: Nias Press, 2003), 23-30.

narrowing the gulf between fact and fiction on both sides of the divide.<sup>398</sup> Perhaps no one has done more for West Javanese arts in this capacity than Bandung choreographer and retired government employee, Enoch Atmadibrata. He is widely respected among politicians and artists alike. He was granted the trusted role of *pemimpin* (doubling as the *kecrek* player) for the 1977 Asia Society tour. He worked closely with Beate Gordon, who was then head of Asia Society's performing arts department. Gordon had learned of *topeng* through Larry Reed. She was interested in pursuing a West Javanese program. Reed put her in touch with American *topeng* teacher, Pamela Rogers-Aquiniga (nee Rogers) and Ron Bogley to create a *topeng* tour.<sup>399</sup> With Enoch Atmadibrata and the Indonesian government's assistance, several troupes auditioned for the tour before Sujana Arja's troupe was selected. Sujana, whose star was ascendant, was the centerpiece of the "*Penca and Topeng Babakan*" tour. The group of fifteen musicians and dancers<sup>400</sup> toured sixteen cities in the United States and Canada in late 1977.<sup>401</sup> To the best of my knowledge, it marked the first time that Cirebonese artists left Indonesian

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<sup>398</sup> Sujana Arja often mused that prior to his first trip to the U.S. he had been under the impression that American streets were literally paved in gold.

<sup>399</sup> The tour was partially funded by DeWitt and Lila Acheson Wallace's foundation for cultural programs. Today their different philanthropic programs that began in the 1950s have merged under the name, The Wallace Foundation.

<sup>400</sup> The *topeng* troupe was comprised of Sujana Arja (*dalang topeng*), Bulus (*bodor*), Sandrut (dancer and musician), Bodong (*kendang*), Otong (*gamelan*), Amud (*saron*), Abay Subardja (*panerus*), Abas Kohar (*kebluk*), Djadja (*kemanak*), and the always understated Enoch Atmadibrata, who quietly organized the project from the Indonesian end, played *kecrek*. Djadja (dancer and *kendang*), Abay Subardja (*kendang*), Holidin (dancer and *tarompét*), Abas Kohar (dancer and *tarompét*, Otong (*kempul*) and Didi (dancer) comprised the *penca silat* (martial arts) group from Bandung.

<sup>401</sup> I am indebted to Ron Bogley for sharing his archive with me. The troupe traveled to the following cities: San Francisco (Fort Mason); Knoxville (Music Hall); New York (Lincoln Center); Buffalo (SUNY); Washington (Smithsonian Institution); Boston and Medford, Mass. (lecture demonstrations at Harvard University and Tufts University, respectively); Toronto (York University); Waterloo, Canada (University of Waterloo); Athen, Ohio (Ohio University), Grinnell (Iowa); Madison (University of Wisconsin); Chicago (Field Museum of Natural History); and Ann Arbor (University of Michigan). They also gave workshops at UC Santa Cruz and UCLA before returning to Indonesia.

soil since the colonial fairs.<sup>402</sup> The farthest Sujana had traveled prior to this was Pandaan, East Java when he performed at the national Ramayana Festival in 1971.

With the exception of Atmadibrata, this marked the first time the artists had performed outside of Java and the first time they had been on an airplane. Prior to granting visas, the Indonesian government conducted background checks on all of the performers. Upon learning that the troupe's *bodor*, Bulus, was once suspected of communist activity, they demanded to know who would "guarantee" him. Atmadibrata tried in vain to secure identification for him as a Bandung resident. Just prior to the tour, I was studying dance with one of the members of the troupe, Abay Subardja,<sup>403</sup> and was fortunate to attend a few rehearsals. It was touch-and-go whether the tour would take place on schedule, but finally clearance was received.<sup>404</sup>

Foreign interest in *topeng* received the government's full attention; consequently the region was endowed with tourism-marked funding. Ironically, the landmark Asia Society tour catapulted the nationalistic reach of tourism first imagined by Sukarno into full motion under Soeharto.

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<sup>402</sup> To the best of my knowledge, the artists included in Sukarno's art missions were from the Priangan.

<sup>403</sup> Abay Subardja was a grandson of Bapa Wirakusumah, who had been scheduled to perform at the 1931 Paris colonial fair, but fell ill and died soon before. Enoch Atmadibrata, pers. comm., 8 October 2003.

<sup>404</sup> Although Atmadibrata held an important civil servant post with Bandung's department of public works, even he was not immune from the government's watchful eye. Years earlier (1969-1970) he was the recipient of a Rockefeller Foundation grant to teach *karawitan* (*gamelan* music) and study dance and filmmaking at UCLA. Upon returning to Indonesia, he was debriefed by the government about his overseas activities. Enoch Atmadibrata, pers. comm., 29 December 2003.



Fig. 21. Asia Society's "*Penca and Topeng Babakan*" tour. October 1977. New York City. Photo courtesy of Ron Bogley.



Fig. 22. Sujana Arja and Bulus give a lecture demonstration in the U.S. Photograph courtesy Ron Bogley.

One of the stops on the Asia Society tour was Chicago. In a curious twist, the contract with the Field Museum stipulated that the *topeng* and *penca* troupe perform with the Columbian World Exposition's *gamelan*, which had been in storage for many years.<sup>405</sup> Sujana being accompanied by the elegant nineteenth century *gamelan* was multivalent. There was as much a sense of progress as lingering sadness for this very *gamelan*, whose century-old sound is preserved on wax cylinder recordings at the Smithsonian Institution, remained in Chicago when the twentieth century artists returned home.



Fig. 23. Partial view of the stage at the Field Museum, 1 January 1977. Sujana Arja performs *Tari Topeng Tumenggung*. The musicians play the gamelan instruments acquired by the Field Museum following Chicago's World Columbian Exposition. Bodong on drums; Amud (center, seated) and Bulus (right, seated) on saron. ©1977 The Field Museum, A239\_6T. Photographer Ron Testa.

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<sup>405</sup> The troupe had purchased a gamelan specifically for the Asia Society tour with the frames made by Berkeley architect, wood carver, *topeng* aficionado, and Asia Society assistant tour guide, Ron Bogley. According to Bogley, because the gamelan had not been played in a very long time, the sound was understandably dissonant. Ron Bogley, pers. comm., 15 March 2009.



Fig. 24. *Topeng* artists relax during the US stint of the Asia Society tour. Left to right: Sandrut, Bulus, Bodong, Sujana Arja. Photograph courtesy of Ron Bogley.

The performers derived benefits from the tour as well, particularly Sujana Arja, whose studio/home in Slangit became a destination point in the 1970s and 1980s for artists who came from as far away as Japan, Hong Kong, Australia, Canada and the U.S.<sup>406</sup>

Attracting foreign students is perceived as prestigious, both to a *dalang*'s village and the district. Sujana received several invitations to perform outside of Indonesia in the 1970s through the 1990s, including Hong Kong (1979) and Australia (1994).<sup>407</sup>

They taught in many of the towns they performed in and as they encountered students from various backgrounds, their teaching strategies evolved too. For instance,

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<sup>406</sup> Pamela Rogers-Aguiniga, Rick North, and Michael Ewig trained with Sujana. Rogers-Aguiniga's 1986 Master's thesis is based on Sujana's Slangit-style. Pamela Rogers-Aguiniga, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis.

<sup>407</sup> Ajip Rosidi, ed, *Ensiklopedi Sunda. Alam, Manusia, dan Budaya. Termasuk budaya Cirebon dan Betawi*, (Np: Pustaka Jaya, 2000), 610-11.

they had to break down movements and define the meaning of specific movements, which was unusual with Indonesian students at that time. This influenced their teaching skills when they returned home. The new friends they made along the way also enriched their experience, which they recalled fondly for the rest of their lives.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This chapter describes continuities and ruptures that shaped *topeng* discourse, beginning with the Dutch colonizers who displayed the spoils of their colonies at the colonial fairs. Here, the West Javanese arts and practitioners, who were far removed from their social context and under the tutelage of wealthy plantation owners, metamorphosed quotidian village life into a performance of magnitude. For a fee, visitors could poke their heads inside the Java Village to watch the show. With the arrival of the Japanese in 1942, the majority of Indonesians were ready for change. Indeed, feelings of Asian solidarity briefly dominated. The toll the occupation would take on the people and the land was not anticipated. Many *dalang topeng* came into direct contact with the carnage of war. In the context of history, the nascent state's honeymoon was brief. It is hardly surprising that the number of card-carrying communists grew exponentially in Indonesia after the war. Paranoia ran deep between organizations, and artists and their activities were placed under a microscope.

If the aim of the *kartu kuning* was to enroll performers in the proletarian cultural army or to create a cash cow for local officials, there was a more invidious logic at work with the *tanda kenjataan*, which had the purely political function of clearing someone of suspicion. Registration and control are usually viewed entirely as negative, but their



meaning was multivalent for the people who were on the receiving end of these two cards. When the *kartu* was first distributed, its recipients were not alarmed. Why should they have been? Sukarno had positioned their artistry as both central to and emblematic of Indonesia's nationalist identity. Performance was viewed as something of value, although it was in the context of a government that wanted to exploit traditional arts for propagandistic purposes. Given the government's protracted role in regulating performance stretching back to the eighteenth century, the issuing of an identity card to artists need not have been perceived as particularly oppressive, but instead as continuous with practices performers already accepted as natural. And indeed, in this case, recognition of the individual artist gave a certain cachet to that person. It was only when the *tanda kenjataan* card surfaced that artists began to view the registration system with apprehension and dread. So while the *kartu* seems steeped in nostalgia and a nation identified with cultural traditions, the *tanda* bypassed such meaning completely. It was an unapologetic and unsentimental top-down affair whose singular purpose was to establish the parameters of the new military's role. It was also a harbinger of the new national cultural policies surrounding performance. Former *Golkar* representative, Padmadinata, said it best: "The *tanda* is *bukti* (proof) of the first time the military's role was made explicit."<sup>408</sup> It also ushered in the New Order's version of artist registration. From that point forth, former members of the defunct *PKI*, dead or alive, who bore any relationship to the current cardholder were plainly identified as such on the New Order artist cards that followed, signaling the permanence of these relationships. While doing so was likely intended to shame and admonish artists, on a deeper level it cinched their

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<sup>408</sup> Tjetje Hidayat Padmadinata, pers. comm. 21 March 2006.

meaning as portable, living relics of the moment that would change the arc of modern Indonesian history. These connections bore deeply into the fabric of subsequent generations by determining which artists could work and which ones would be shunned for generations; some permanently. The lucky ones packed their belongings and returned to what they knew best. They hit the road.

## CHAPTER 2:

### MOBILITY'S MUSE: FROM ITINERANCY TO STASIS AND BACK AGAIN

The previous chapter explored historical transformations in time and space and expectations about performance. This chapter seeks to address two related questions in more detail by focusing on the issues central to the political economy of cultural discourse. What happens to art at the moment it becomes work? In what way does art develop new protocols for working? And how is one's labor represented with integrity and honesty without conveying the corresponding drudgery? Is the marvelousness of work ever adequately represented? The question of community is critical here: Who supports itinerant artists? Who is being served? We shall first look at the itinerant form of *topeng*, before turning our attention to its later domestic domain in the academe and its transnational incarnation: tourism.

Itinerant performance is known by several names in the Cirebon region: *ngamen*, *barangan* (*barang*) or *bebarangan* (*bebarang*).<sup>409</sup> Local practitioners use these terms interchangeably. 'Bebarang' is the term most consistently cited by scholars and, hence,

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<sup>409</sup> *Bebarang* is not endemic to the Cirebon region, but developed its own style there. Jaap Kunst mentions "facetious and more or less drastic mask-plays (*topèng barangan* or *topèng babakan*), accompanied by a simple form of gamelan, usually provided with iron keys and kettles, which...in the middle-east of the island...bears the name of *gamelan janggrung*." Jaap Kunst, *Music in Java: Its History, Its Theory and Its Technique*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, [1934], 1974), 292.

The etymology of *ngamen* is "amen," whose contemporary Cirebon Javanese usage involves begging while performing or reciting prayers (Echols and Shadily 1989:16). The term does not appear in more recent Sundanese dictionaries; however, it is defined in Rigg's mid-nineteenth century dictionary as "to go about searching for employment; a strolling workman" See Jonathan Rigg, *A Dictionary of the Sunda Language of Java*, (Batavia: Lange & Co., 1862), 305. The contemporary usage of *ngamen* among *dalang* is more resonant with the older Sundanese definition, at least in the sense of reflecting workers—here, peasant artists—who perform for money. *Bebarang* refers more to how *topeng* travels and is the term used in this study.

is employed in this study to avoid confusion.<sup>410</sup> *Bebarang* has historically served four important functions: as a form of proselytization; rigorous mental and physical training; economics; and mobility. Inherent in mobility are the physical and spiritual aspects of aesthetics and the politization of ideas.

Prior to 1965, the *rombongan* walked from town to town. The *dalang*, in full costume, assisted the *nayaga* (musicians) with their instruments, a miniature chest for their masks, a small pot and cooking utensils in order to prepare rice and, when available, vegetables. Shelter and food were often provided by patrons.<sup>411</sup> At worst, the dancers were denied access to public space and encountered bouts of hunger.<sup>412</sup> *Padi* (unhusked rice) and clothing were, in fact, the most common form of payment and they were sometimes combined.<sup>413</sup> Money as payment is a relatively recent addition.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Among *topeng* scholars, R. Gaos Hardjasoemantri describes it as either *topeng barangan* or *wong bebaranag* (literally, traveling people); Endo Suanda uses the term “*barangan*,” which is more commonly employed in the Majalengka region; Toto Sudarto alternately privileges “*bebarang*.” In addition to the term *bebarang*, dancers often refer to the activity as *ngamen* or simply *keliling* (moving around a periphery or geographic area). R. Gaos Hardjasoemantri, *Cheribonsche Topeng*. Unpub. Manuscript. (NP, n.d.[c.1935]), 7; Pigeaud referred to it as *wong ambebarang*. Th. Pigeaud, *Javaanse Volksvertoningen: Bijdrage tot de Beschrijving van Land en Volk*, (Batavia: Volkslectuur, 1938), 35 (paragraph 9); Toto Sudarto, *Topeng Babakan Cirebon 1900-1990*. Master’s thesis, (Yogyakarta: Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2001).

<sup>411</sup> Dasih, pers. comm., 11 March 1978.

<sup>412</sup> Endo Suanda “Cirebonese Topeng and Wayang of the Present Day,” 98-99.

<sup>413</sup> Due to the weight of *padi* and the length of time away from home, water buffalo were often borrowed to carry the *padi* home. Tursini, pers. comm., 23 June 2009.

Pamela Rogers-Aquiniga describes a different form of exchange that occurs during *topeng hajatan* (life-cycle events) called *balang kaen* (“throw the cloth”). All guests of a *topeng* performance receive a *doa* (blessing) by sheer virtue of showing up. But female spectators who desire additional *doa*, may throw important articles of clothing - usually a traditional Javanese blouse called *kebaya*, or an heirloom batik clot with coins wrapped inside at the *dalang topeng*. The women aim for below the *dalang*’s feet. When the clothing fills up the performance space, the *bodor* gathers it together. Next, the *dalang* unties each item, removes the coins, and places them inside a basket in the *kotak*, which will later be divided among the troupe. The clothing is then sprinkled with scented holy water before being returned to its owner. The return of the clothing signifies the completion of the *doa*, in which good fortune is bestowed upon the receiver of the prayer while protecting everyone in her orbit from malevolent spirits. Those requiring a special *doa* will often make a *kaul*, or oath, in which she and her family promise to sponsor a future *topeng* event if her prayer is met. Rogers-Aquiniga, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master’s thesis, 38-40.

<sup>414</sup> Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master’s thesis, 72.



Fig. 25. *Bebarang*. *Topeng* (or *Doger*?) dancer. *Doger* is similar to *ketuk tilu*. Some *dalang topeng* performed both forms. Cidadap, West Java. Photo courtesy of *Koninklijk Instituut voor De Tropen* #404/20.

### PROPAGATING MYSTICAL ISLAM

It is widely believed that Islam was introduced in the Archipelago by Sufi traders and that *topeng* and *wayang* were important tools of proselytizing during Java's intense period of Islamization. Among the travel narratives in the Malay canon are the early

Javanese mystical poetic texts, *suluk*,<sup>415</sup> which at an earlier time may have been accompanied with music and *ronggeng*.<sup>416</sup> *Suluk* are lessons prompted by the disciple's questions to which the guide responds. Questions are posed in a variety of circumstances and contexts and are tropes of discovery in *tarekat* (the mystical path).<sup>417</sup> The Cirebon and Java chronicles (*babad*), although problematic as historical sources, are among the few early sources available. As such, the *Babad Cerbon* by Abdulkahar<sup>418</sup> (c.1820) is noteworthy for its description of the wandering *wali* (friend of God), Sunan Kalijaga and his son Sunan Punggung as masked dancers and puppeteers. It further delineates how Sunan Punggung was granted the title *Pangeran Punggung* (Prince of the Stage).<sup>419</sup> Most *dalang* families trace their genealogy to him. Some *dalang* consider Sunan Punggung to be Sunan Kalijaga, his son, or his disciple.

Although a sharp division is drawn between *bebarang* and *topeng hajatan*, the characters being portrayed and the practitioners performing them are the same. This volleying between popular entertainment and ritualism is understood in the context of their forefathers. The prerequisite for viewing these performances was the declaration of faith, *kalimat shahadat*.<sup>420</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> Metrical poems (*macapat*). These poetic writings were likely penned between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries along Java's northern coast region, and it appears that the genre may have first taken root in Cirebon. Matthew Isaac Cohen, "Reading 'Suluk Wayang': Javanese Shadow Puppets, 'Nala'-Vision, Private Self, Bodily Self," in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3,12 (2002b), 168; Theodore G. Th. Pigeaud, *Literature of Java. Catalogue Raisonné of Javanese Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Leiden and Other Public Collections in the Netherlands. I: Synopsis of Javanese Literature 900-1900 A. D.*, (The Hague: Martinus Nyhoff, 1967), 85.

<sup>416</sup> Pigeaud, *Literature of Java*, 1: 85.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>418</sup> The *pengulu*, or a Muslim official in Cirebon.

<sup>419</sup> Rinkes, D.A. "De heiligen van Java V. Pangeran Pangoeng, zijne honden en het wajangspel" in *Tijdschrift v. Indische Taal- Land- en Volkenkunde*, No. 54, 1912: 178; Brakel, Clara (1993) "Masked Dances, Spirit Worship and the Introduction of Islam in Java" in *Assaph: Studies in the Theatre* 9, 19-21.

<sup>420</sup> *Shahadat* is the first pillar of Islam. One cannot be a Muslim without this formal declaration.

*lā ilāha illā-llāh, wa muhammadan rasūlu-llāh*

[I bear witness that] There is no god but Allah, [I bear witness that]  
Muhammad is the Prophet of God.

This is the formal declaration, but informal ones were equally valid. Indeed, it is the latter that made Islam accessible to many non-literate villagers. This theory naturally flows from the *Quran* itself, which means “he collected things together.” It also signifies “he read” or “recited.” The Holy *Quran* is the word of God, whose medium, *Malaikat Jibril* (the Angel Gabriel) brought divine revelation to the Prophet Muhammad. The Cirebonese, thus, understand the living history of *topeng* as originating with one of the *wali*, with masks and puppets the symbolic language of Islam. In this light, *bebarang* was an obvious fit with the Sufistic aims of portable mobility, adaptation, and the translation of ideas.

#### **BEBARANG IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: THE RIGORS OF TRAINING**

Today, *bebarang* is often recalled in the nostalgia of *tempo dulu*.<sup>421</sup> The realities were quite different. *Bebarang* was grueling work that marked the young dancer’s first exposure to performing before a live audience while providing an opportunity to hone her or his craft. *Dalang topeng* Sudji (d.1982) once described *bebarang*'s rigors as “mental training for *topeng* dancers.”<sup>422</sup> As mentioned above, it was the sole source of income for most artists prior to the rice harvest. As such, the impetus to produce progeny who could be molded into superior dancers was great.

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<sup>421</sup> This refers to the earlier days of Dutch hegemony, which are viewed in a more positive light retrospectively.

<sup>422</sup> “*Melatih mental para penari topeng.*”

Prior to 1965, the onset of training varied greatly, although it usually began between six and nine years old. The methodology employed was as varied as the style and the individuals involved. Girls and women have long been gamelan musicians in Cirebon, however musical competency was not a prerequisite for them to become a *dalang topeng*. Boys, alternately, were expected to double as *dalang* and musicians. As part of the training, prior to accompanying a parent on *bebarang*, the young dancer was expected to have already memorized a few dances. The parent - an established *dalang* - performed first. The child would then be introduced and dance one or two *babak*. In addition to the necessary practice, it was an important factor in gauging the young dancer's competency. In addition to mastering the five main characters, Sujana Arja (1933-2006) stressed that repeated requests for a specific dancer were required to cement the title '*dalang topeng*.' Until then, one remained a *penari topeng* (mask dancer).<sup>423</sup> This, then, was the trajectory from child student-dancer to *dalang topeng*. A central part of the young dancer's training, then, was during *bebarang*.

In 2005, I asked Sujana whether his son, Inu, was already a *dalang topeng*. He replied unequivocally: "*Belum*" (Not yet). Although Inu was already performing and teaching regularly, Sujana stressed the importance of building a following, which was complicated with *bebarang*'s ban. There are fewer opportunities to perform any type of *topeng* than even one generation ago.

Rasinah, when asked the identical question about her granddaughter, Aerli, stated that the nineteen year old was already a *dalang topeng*, even though she had only begun studying what is arguably the most important character in the *topeng* pantheon,

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<sup>423</sup> A *penari topeng* is a generic term for a masked dancer without pedigree.



Panji.<sup>424</sup> The contrast in Sujana and Rasinah's definition of *dalang topeng* is instructive. Sujana was raised in an environment where its definition was inculcated from infancy, since one's future success depended upon a high level of mastery, including memorization of one's genealogy. Rasinah's experience was quite different. Her father died before she had learned all of the dances and, as such, the same rigorous standards were not imposed upon her. Nor does she trace her lineage to the *wali*. These distinctions also translate to a less cohesive *topeng* style. The lack of continuity, coupled with her inactivity over many years, likely informed Rasinah's different conceptualization of the title, *dalang topeng*.

My teacher, *dalang topeng* Dasih (nee Nesih, d.1985) began training with her father, Wentar (nee Kudung),<sup>425</sup> at age six, as did three of her four siblings, Ami, Mini, and Saca. Her younger sister, Sudji (1911-1982), who today is the best known of the siblings, began studying at such a late date that responsibility for her training fell upon Dasih,<sup>426</sup> whom her father considered the strongest dancer of his five children, having most often accompanied Wentar during *bebarang*.<sup>427</sup> Years later, the responsibility for teaching Sudji's only daughter, Tursini, was again placed on Dasih, ostensibly because

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<sup>424</sup> This distinction regarding what comprises a *dalang*, I believe is due to Rasinah's *topeng* training having been erratic. Her father died while she was still young and before she had learned all of the dances. Her *topeng* teachers were members of her second husband's family and performed in a different style. Furthermore, she herself did not dance for many years. So in this regard, although Rasinah is of the age of previous generation of *dalang* who clearly understood such concepts, her values were informed by the next generation (the current one) for whom such terminology is lax and sometimes non-existent.

<sup>425</sup> The name Wentar (from Kawentar), means "famous." It was bestowed upon Ki Kudung by the regent of Bandung, R. A. A. Martanegara (1893-1918), in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Interestingly, the name on his gravestone is Kudung.

<sup>426</sup> There is some confusion about Sudji's training history. Rosidi's *Ensiklopedi Sunda* states that Suji trained with her father. *Topeng* scholar Enoch Atmadibrata disagrees with this assessment as does Sudji's daughter, Tursini. According to Atmadibrata, Sudji was almost thirty when her studies began in earnest. Enoch Atmadibrata, pers. comm., 26 December 2003; Tursini, pers. comm., 21 June 2004.

<sup>427</sup> Enoch Atmadibrata, pers. comm., 1 January 2004.

Sudji was then married to a government official who forbade her to dance. Although she never complained, Dasih may have harbored some resentment for she and Sudji were bitter competitors who had long feuded. They were estranged during the last decades of their lives, although those lives intersected constantly. Even their homes were attached.<sup>428</sup> Tursini's first *bebarang* venture was in 1947, at the relatively late age of sixteen. The aunt/niece duo did not travel as far as Sumedang, but often sojourned to Majalengka where some of their relatives lived - including members of her pick-up *rombongan*, *nayaga* members Empek,<sup>429</sup> her brother-in-law and drummer, Entang, and Sana from Bongas. Dasih and Tursini were thus guaranteed shelter in Bongas. Touring Majalengka, however, was arduous. Travel itineraries included Jatiwangi, Cicerang, Kadipaten, and Rajagaluh. During the 1950s payment was typically one sheaf of rice per *babak*. Dasih referred to this exchange as '*topeng barangan bakdeng*.'<sup>430</sup> By the 1960s, payment included cash currency.

It could take several months to circle the territory. *Bebarang* was about much more than feeding one's family and practicing before a live audience; it was the nexus of critical engagement – both ideological and aesthetic. It was during Dasih's visits to Bongas, that Entang and Sana studied *topeng* with her. The "Palimanan-style" that was made famous by Wentar no longer exists there, yet continues in modified form among Dasih's heir, *dalang wayang/topeng* Sukarta in Bongas, Majalengka.

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<sup>428</sup> Endo Suanda has observed the ubiquitous jealousy that exists in many *dalang* families, particularly among siblings. Suanda suggests that it results from the highly competitive nature of their craft. Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, 26-27.

<sup>429</sup> Empek would much later add "topeng clown" to his credentials.

<sup>430</sup> Rice given in exchange for performing *topeng bebarang*.



Fig. 26. Three retired *dalang topeng*. Bongas, Majalengka. The women are descendents of Wentar, through his daughter, Mini (Dasih and Sudji's sister). From left to right: Merah, who is now blind (c. 72 years old); Inah (c.83 years old, is *dalang wayang/topeng* Sukarta's mother); and Eri (c.70 years old), who is the daughter of the late *dalang topeng* Minih.

*Dalang* in the southern part of Cirebon, not surprisingly, moved in a southern trajectory. Dasih sustained durable ties with Sumedang and Bandung in the 1920s and 1930s. She was, thus, well recognized in Sumedang's cultural establishment during the 1940s when Raden Ono Lesmana Karadikusumah, Kutakulon village's *lurah*, invited Dasih and her sister Ami to teach *topeng* there.<sup>431</sup> According to Sukarta, Raden Ono had studied *topeng* with their sister, Mini.<sup>432</sup> Dasih also continued in her father's footsteps by maintaining strong bonds in Bandung.

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<sup>431</sup> Sudarto, *Topeng Babakan Cirebon 1900-1990*, 82-105.

<sup>432</sup> Sukarta is Mini's grandson. Sukarta. Pers. comm., 1 October 2005,

Similar to Sudji's training, Sujana Arja was responsible for teaching his younger sister, Keni (b.1942). Perhaps as a reaction to his father's prodding, when Sujana became a parent, he did not force his children to dance. His two sons, Inu Kertapati (28 years old) and Astori (25 years old), began training relatively late. Inu was twelve years old when he decided to pursue *topeng*. Upon Sujana's death, he inherited the title *dalang topeng* as his eldest son. His younger brother, Astori, only began studying six years ago. Although Astori does not refer to himself as a *dalang topeng*, he is a very fine dancer.

Training, then, was systematic, rigorous, and sometimes unpleasant. But if one had the skill and the stamina, it was a prestigious and spiritual career path – and with talent, it could be lucrative as well.

#### **TOPENG BABAKAN IN CIRCULATION**

The type of *topeng* performed during *bebarang* is known simply as '*topeng*'. Mid-nineteenth century Dutch observers christened it '*topeng babakan*', a term still widely used, often incorrectly.<sup>433</sup> The Malay root, '*babak*' translates as "scenes" or "acts." *Topeng babakan* thus refers to mask acts. It is not a unified form in that it does not rigidly adhere to the chronological progression of characters associated with ritual

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<sup>433</sup> Maman Suryaatmadja, interview, 5 January 2004. Many scholars ascribe to '*topeng babakan*' a generic, all-inclusive definition that includes all forms of Cirebonese *topeng*, when in fact it describes a specific genre. Early in my fieldwork (before I understood this distinction), several dancers were confused by my using the term "*topeng babakan*" to describe the oeuvre, and one was offended. Responses to this term varied, with dancers from the district and city of Cirebon more accustomed to "*topeng babakan*," which likely is the result of long interest in the form by non-Indonesians. I posit that over time the term was absorbed into the lexicon as a generic term. Some *dalang* in the more marginalized regions of Indramayu and Majalengka, alternately, were confused by my use of the term and gently corrected me, for which I am much indebted.

events (*topeng hajatan*).<sup>434</sup> *Topeng babakan* is thus less restrictive, more improvisational and dependent upon a paying public. That the most spiritually imbued and important character in the pantheon, Panji, is rarely requested during *bebarang*, further indicates its secularity. By the early twentieth century, the battle scene between Tumenggung and Jinggaanom, *Tari Topeng Samba*, and *Tari Topeng Klana* were the main dances requested during *bebarang*, with Klana<sup>435</sup> the highlight of the performance.



Fig. 27. *Bebarang* performance (probably *wayang wong*), c.1940, from Jaap Kunst, “Waar Komt de Gong Vandaan?” *Cultureel Indië. Bloemlezing. uit de Eerste Zes Jaargangen 1939-1945*. Samengesteld door H. Hoogenberk. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1948), 206.

<sup>434</sup> Artists overwhelmingly preferred to perform at *hajatan*, which no doubt carried greater prestige and also involved minimal travel and effort: it was the host’s responsibility to provide the audience and performance space. Wangi, pers. comm., 18 February 2006.

<sup>435</sup> The character Klana is synonymous with Menak Jingga and Rawana, depending on the region.

Mid-late nineteenth century colonial accounts of *bebarang* describe troupes as having one *dalang topeng* plus a skeletal gamelan of approximately four to seven musicians, including the *kecrek*<sup>436</sup> player who doubled as the *bodor* (clown).<sup>437</sup> The sheer weight of the instruments required the gamelan be pared down to its absolute essentials. Ritter describes a single *kendang* (drum)<sup>438</sup> and a variety of metallophone instruments that, in addition to *kecrek*,<sup>439</sup> included *bonang* (pot gong),<sup>440</sup> a gong, and a *rebab* (stringed instrument).<sup>441</sup> By the twentieth-century, these portable orchestras expanded to include *saron*,<sup>442</sup> *ketuk* and *kebluk*,<sup>443</sup> and *kemanek* or *klenang*.<sup>444</sup>

*Bebarang*'s mission was both heuristic and financially driven. The *rombongan* walked long distances, stopping in each village, where they set up their instruments at the *alun-alun* (town square). As the musicians played, spectators gathered. Once a crowd had formed, the *dalang* would perform one or two *babak*, lasting approximately five minutes each. Wealthier residents often requested the troupe perform in front of their homes. If they enjoyed the performance, the artists were invited inside for a meal or rest before

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<sup>436</sup> Stacked sheets of brass that dangle from the *kotak topeng* (box housing the masks).

<sup>437</sup> W. L. Ritter and E. Hardouin. *Java's Bewoners in hun eigenaardig karakter en kleederdracht*. [The Javanese and their unusual character and costume] (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1872); V. de Serrière, V., "Javaansche volksspelen en vermaken," [The making of Javanese folk theatre] (*Tijdschrift Nederlandsch-Indie II*, 1873), 7-8.

<sup>438</sup> The *topeng* drums, or *kendang topeng*, consist of one large and one smaller *kendang* plus two small ones that are perched on top, named *ketipung*. Some areas, however, only employ one large and one small drum. Ritter and Hardouin, *Java's Bewoners in hun eigenaardig karakter en kleederdracht*, 109-10.

<sup>439</sup> Three small metal cymbals are described in Ritter and Hardouin, *Java's Bewoners in hun eigenaardig karakter en kleederdracht*, 109.

<sup>440</sup> There are either ten or twelve kettles that comprise the *bonang*. They are arranged in two rows in a woodframe rack.

<sup>441</sup> The *rebab* is known throughout the Muslim world. The Afghanistan *rubab* is often cited as its home of origin, which spread along Muslim trade routes. Ritter and Hardouin, *Java's Bewoners in hun eigenaardig karakter en kleederdracht*, 109.

<sup>442</sup> An iron or brass bar instrument with six to nine keys. There are two *saron* in a gamelan. Each one has a unique function, with the first *saron* playing the lead, and the second one responding, or answering.

<sup>443</sup> A single large and small kettle instrument.

<sup>444</sup> Endo Suanda *Topeng Cirebon*, 50. See the introduction of this study for descriptions of the gamelan instruments under discussion here.

departing for the next location.<sup>445</sup> There was, thus, a protocol and unspoken contract between the performer and the consumer. This relationship between the itinerant artist and wealthy commissioners of *topeng* (most often of Indo-Chinese ethnicity or the village chief), extended to the community-at-large. There was an unspoken contract inherent in having the performance in front of one's home: the interior home is private, but the space in front of the house is public space. This was a particularly potent symbol in Sino-Javanese affairs – a protracted olive branch – in light of the periodic riots that broke out in the Cirebon region (particularly Losari) during the formative years of *Sarekat Islam*.<sup>446</sup> Mona Lohanda links the burgeoning movement with the anti-Chinese sentiment (expressed in boycotts and outright violence) that erupted in Cirebon and other areas along the *pasisir* in the early twentieth century.<sup>447</sup> The politics of performance space were clearly demarcated and obvious to all. Inviting the troupe to one's home – but not inside it – allowed the entire village to enjoy the impromptu event. But it signaled social difference. This protocol epitomizes James Scott's "moral economy," in which "forced generosity, communal land, and work-sharing" comprise the brick and mortar of the relationship.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> Yo Djin Tjoe, pers. comm., 16 May 2006. Yo, a prominent businessman from Jamblang, Cirebon, recalls Sujana Arja (Slangit, Cirebon) and Bi Sudji (Palimanan, Cirebon) performing *bebarang* in his village in the early 1960s.

<sup>446</sup> *Sarekat Islam* (lit: Islamic Union) was founded in 1912. It grew out of the Arabic and Javanese trading union, and much of the anti-Chinese tensions in the region were between Arabs and Chinese. Mona Lohanda, *Growing Pains. The Chinese and the Dutch in Colonial Java, 1890-1942*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Cipta Loka Caraka, 2002), 134-35, 173-74.

<sup>447</sup> Other affected areas included Batavia (Jakarta), Surakarta (Solo), Lasem, Surabaya to Pasuruan. Lohanda, *Growing Pains*. 173-74.

<sup>448</sup> James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 3.

## THE MOBILE BODY

The circulation of artists was part of daily life long before Indonesia became a sovereign state and international tourism was implemented by the New Order regime. Artists were not the only mobile bodies. A quiet trail of inspired *bupati*, local businesspeople, and landowners were sending family members to the *kampung* to study *topeng* with the reigning *dalang* of the day. Nonetheless, most trajectories were as varied as the roads *dalang* traveled; one to four month sojourns were the norm. Likewise, respect for artists' territories ensured that boundary infringements by competing *dalang* were rare. This is clear from how locals remember *bebarang*: they tend to recall the name of the village or style (e.g. *Gaya Beber*, or Beber style), rather than the names of dancers who passed through town.<sup>449</sup>

There are many specific examples of mobile *dalang*. Dewi, whose training began at age five, was performing by age ten. Her sister, Sawitri, who began at age ten, was often accompanied by her father. Sawitri and her group frequently traveled from Astanalangar, Losari to nearby Central Java continuing eastbound to the regencies of Brebes and Tegal in Central Java. They also performed in West Java.<sup>450</sup>

Wentar of Ciliwung, Palimanan may have been the first *dalang* to introduce *topeng* to regions outside of the Cirebon region, particularly Bandung and Sumedang.<sup>451</sup> His daughter Mini traveled from Ciliwung to Kadipaten and Jatiwangi (both in

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<sup>449</sup> Within the regencies of Cirebon, Indramayu, and Majalengka, *bebarang* artists were more commonly referred to simply by the village of origin, e.g. “*topeng Palimanan*,” “*topeng Slangit*,” “*topeng Beber*,” etc.

<sup>450</sup> Juju Masunah, *Sawitri: Penari Topeng Losari* (Yogyakarta: Tarawang, 2000), 50-51.

<sup>451</sup> Pigeaud describes a troupe from Palimanan having cultural ties with middle Preanger regencies of Sumedang, Ciamis, Tasikmalaya and Bandung. Bebarang extended into the northern and western reaches of Krawang, Builaya, Cianjur, and Sukabumi. Th. Pigeaud, *Javaanse Volksvertoningen: Bijdrage tot de Beschrijving van Land en Volk* (Batavia: Volkslectuur, 1938), 115 (106).



Majalengka) en route to Sumedang and Bandung.<sup>452</sup> Dasih frequently took exactly the same pathway when performing with Wentar.<sup>453</sup> Mini eventually settled in Bongas, Majalengka. Her daughter Erih, traveled with her as far as Cikoneng, Ciamis, and the Situraja sub-district of Sumedang.<sup>454</sup>

Likewise, *dalang topeng* Tarmi and Kewes of Kreo (north of Palimanan), walked to Ciparay, Manggahang, Majalaya, en route to Garut and Ciamis, in the southern part of West Java.<sup>455</sup> Bulus recalls traveling with his Slangit troupe as far as Majalengka and Sumedang.<sup>456</sup>

Within this context, Rancaekek, figures prominently. It was home to *Tari Kursus*' co-founder, the *lurah* (district chief) of Rancaekek, *Raden Sambas Wirakukusuma*.<sup>457</sup> *Raden Sambas* was Wentar's most celebrated non-lineage disciple. He respected *Raden Sambas*' creative thirst and the two men eventually collaborated on a new unmasked dance form that melded character types drawn from *topeng* with *tari tayub*.<sup>458</sup> It was first taught during the Dutch period to elite high school students. Its durability today hinges on its important role at Bandung's elite art academy, *STSI*, where

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<sup>452</sup> Sumedang is roughly midway between Bandung and Cirebon. Sudarto, *Topeng Babakan Cirebon 1900-1990*. Master's thesis, 105.

<sup>453</sup> Dasih, pers. comm., 21 December 1977.

<sup>454</sup> Taman Ismail Marzuki, *Pesta Topeng Cirebon*, 56.

<sup>455</sup> Sudarto *Topeng Babakan Cirebon 1900-1990*, Master's thesis, 105, citing Risyani, et al. 1984/1985, 18.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>457</sup> Raden Sambas' grandson, Abay Subardja (1943-2002), perpetuated his grandfather's legacy until his untimely death.

<sup>458</sup> Abay Subardja, pers. comm., 6 September 1977. For an analysis of the collaboration and cross-pollination of Racaekkek, Bandung, and Cirebon artists, see Irawati Durban Ardjo, *Perkembangan Tari Sunda. Melacak Jejak Tb. Oemay Martakusuma dan Rd. Tjetje Somantri*, (Bandung: Sastrataya-Masyarakat Seni Pertunjukan Indonesia 1998), 54-62.

The types are *lenyep* (a/k/a *Liyep*) which is reserved for refined characters (Panji, in *topeng*) *lanyap* is for lively, agile ones (Samba and Rummyang in *topeng*); and *gagah* are the strong types (relates to Tumenggung and Klana in *topeng*).

it continues to form part of its core dance curriculum.<sup>459</sup> *Kraton Kecirebonan* introduced a Cirebonese version of *tari kursus* at the village level in 2009, where it is now part of *topeng* classes in Slangit. The goal is to build a *wayang wong* repertoire.

### SHIFTING MOBILITIES IN *BEBARANG*

During the early twentieth century, *bebarang* flourished along the main southern road connecting Bandung with Cirebon and Sumedang. The highway made travel possible between communities and allowed for artistic exchange. Those villages furthest removed from the main thoroughfare had fewer opportunities to observe their neighbors' *topeng* styles; hence, their styles are often viewed as older. Generally speaking, these regions borrowed less and were more faithful to regional traditions.<sup>460</sup> Losari, the most isolated region in West Java, rests on the cusp of East Java. It may harbor the oldest extant form of *topeng*. As mentioned, *bebarang*'s geo-trajectory from Losari was periodically westbound, but more often movement was to Central Java's mountainous terrain. It is possible that this route corresponds to the early nineteenth-century Dutch cultivation system, where Cirebon – Pekalongan – Semarang formed a crucial network for a range of commodities earmarked for international trade. Cirebon, in particular, included both individual landholders (*lurah*) and an active work force centered on sugar cane production. The *lurah* - powerful contenders in the region - strengthened their

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<sup>459</sup> Guidelines for *tari kursus* are detailed in *Silabus Tari Kursus*, (Bandung: Proyek Peningkatan / Pengembangan ASTI, 1977).

<sup>460</sup> It is natural, albeit taboo, for artists to borrow ideas, techniques, or specific movements from one another, part of which they deliberately take, but part of which they unconsciously absorb as influence.

position by enforcing their land rights.<sup>461</sup> Thus, there was active trade and disposable income that may have made this an attractive travel route for Losari *rombongan* and defined their trajectory from Cirebon to Pekalongan, Central Java, in much the way that *peranakan* Chinese<sup>462</sup> neighborhoods shaped *bebarang* travel routes.

### **Bebarang during the Japanese Occupation**

As discussed in the previous chapter, Japanese cultural policy during the Japanese occupation of Java was constellated around propagandistic aims. Performance modalities linked with the island's Dutch predecessors were banned; others were severely curtailed.<sup>463</sup> According to R. Moh. Achmad Wiriaatmadja, Sumedang's chief administrator and the curator of its historical museum,<sup>464</sup> *bebarang* was spared. Although viewed as a popular entertainment, it was not appropriated for propagandistic purposes. Perhaps it fell beneath their radar because the *dalang topeng*'s voice is muted.<sup>465</sup> It remained one of the few durable indigenous performance modalities during this brief period.<sup>466</sup> One should not conclude, however, that mobility was easy.

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<sup>461</sup> Robert Van Niel, *Java Under the Cultivation System: Collected Writings*. (Leiden: KITLV, 1992), 48, 79, 221.

<sup>462</sup> Indonesian descendents of Chinese immigrants.

<sup>463</sup> Weintraub, for example, describes *wayang golek* performances condensed to three hours due to curfews, adding that these stipulations did not go uncontested, with *dalang* sprouting new forms and veiled critiques into their songs and dialogue. Andrew N. Weintraub, *Power Plays: Wayang Golek Puppet Theater of West Java*, (Athens, Ohio: Institute of South East Asian Studies, 2004a), 31; Cultural policy during the Occupation is discussed in Tod Jones, *Indonesian Cultural Policy, 1950-2003: Culture, Institutions, Government* (Np [Australia]: Curtin University of Technology, 2005), 73-91.

<sup>464</sup> *Museum Prabu Geusan Ulun Yayasan Pangeran Sumedang*.

<sup>465</sup> They appear to have missed the crucial role of the clown, whose antics included mimicking the dancers movements. The clowns were perceived as slapstick without substance, since there was no dialogue between the two.

<sup>466</sup> Japanese folk performance for propagandistic purposes, however, flourished during this period (see chapter 1). Sudarto, *Topeng Babakan Cirebon 1900 -1990*. Master's thesis, 105. The ban did not include forms that were used to entertain the Japanese troops, including the initiation of new art forms such as *ayun-ayunan*.

While travel restrictions were not imposed on *bebarang* practitioners, Japanese soldiers flexed their muscle by disbanding the only train line connecting the critical travel route between Sumedang, Bandung, and Rancaekek.<sup>467</sup> The trains were shipped to Japan to strengthen their compromised transportation system. Industrious Indonesians – recyclers long before it entered global consciousness – removed the train tracks and used them to construct new homes.<sup>468</sup> For their part, *dalang* were undaunted by the missing trains; they were too poor to take public transportation. They walked.

Stories abound about diminished mobility during the occupation. Nowhere was this more keenly felt than in Indramayu, where the Japanese first landed and built a large base.<sup>469</sup> *Dalang topeng* Rasinah grimaced when recalling the corpses dumped in the killing fields and lakes of Cabang, Indramayu, where she lived. Death permeated the air and contaminated the local food supply. Villagers steered clear of locally grown rice and farmed fish during this period. Her family starving, Rasinah's parents reluctantly sent their twelve-year old daughter off to *m'barang*<sup>470</sup> far from home.<sup>471</sup>

After Japan lost the war in 1945 the Netherlands tried to reinstate hegemonic control of the region. A long, difficult four-year war followed between determined Indonesian nationalists and Dutch forces. The protracted conflict depleted the Netherlands of much of its resources. Indonesia prevailed, achieving sovereignty in 1949. With independence, creative expression slowly re-emerged, including *bebarang*.

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<sup>467</sup> R. Moch. Achmad Wiriaatmadja. *Peninggalan Instalasi Militer Hindi Belanda Era Perang Dunia I 1914-1918 di Kota Sumedang*, (Sumedang: np, 2002), 12.

<sup>468</sup> R. Moch. Achmad Wiriatmadja, pers. comm., 1 April 2006.

<sup>469</sup> Paramita R., Abdurachman, ed., *Cerbon* (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1982), 65.

<sup>470</sup> The verb form of performing *bebarang*, i.e. performing *bebarang*.

<sup>471</sup> Rasinah, pers. comm., 24 May 2005.

During this defining moment, *peranakan* Chinese were among the *dalang*'s most important patrons.

### **The Sino-Cirebonese Connection**

Many local Indo-Chinese were landless farmers in Java during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. By the nineteenth century, many worked closely with the Dutch as moneylenders and shop owners.<sup>472</sup> They were also landowners. In the Cirebon region, they were the core patrons of *topeng*. *Peranakan* Chinese who worked closely (and sometimes in competition) with the Dutch in the 1920s were eager to promote both their status and generosity. Entertainment was a viable vehicle for establishing these parameters. The benefits of *topeng* patronage were both personal and philanthropic, contributing to the "moral economy" of two cultures: the local community, on the one hand; and talented, but impoverished artists on the other hand, who depended upon the income generated during the abbreviated time between *Imlek* and *Cap Go Me*, the Chinese New Year.<sup>473</sup>

Multicultural events were an important if, at times, conflicted arena of daily life in Cirebon.<sup>474</sup> One could well imagine that feelings ran the gamut from warm to deeply

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<sup>472</sup> Margaret J. Kartomi, "Indonesian-Chinese Oppression and the Musical Outcomes in the Netherlands East Indies" in Ronald Radano and Philip Bohlman, eds. *Music and the Racial Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 273.

<sup>473</sup> Sudarto, *Topeng Babakan Cirebon 1900 -1990*, Master's thesis, 92-93; Liem Thian Joe. *Semarang Tempo Doeloe* [The Olden Days of Semarang] (Semarang-Batavia: N. V. Java Ien Boe Kongsie, 1933), 9. *Imlek* and *Cap Go Me* are often collapsed; however, they are different. *Imlek* is the first day of the Chinese New Year and of the lunar calendar. It is a time of renewal, for visiting family and friends. Only *barangsai* is performed during *Imlek*. *Cap Go Me* is the fifteenth (final) day of the Chinese New Year. It is part festive/part ritual. For an interesting discussion of *peranakan* sponsorship of wayang and its blending with Chinese arts during *Cap Go Me*, see Helen Pausacker, "Peranakan Chinese and Wayang in Java," *Chinese Indonesians: Remembering, Distorting, Forgetting*, Tim Lindsey and Helen Pausacker, eds., (Singapore: ISEAS, 2005), 186-94.

<sup>474</sup> Matthew Isaac Cohen, citing various colonial Cirebon articles published between 1898 and 1926, describes a variety of brawls between Chinese and Arabs, and Madurese and Javanese. Matthew Isaac

ambivalent between groups. By the early twentieth century, some *dalang* and their families were toiling on Chinese-owned land, with *padi* often traded for labor. *Padi* was also the preferred mode of payment for *topeng* lessons. The other important connection was strong *peranakan* presence in Cirebon and Indramayu's batik industry. Its influence is visible in the *lokcan* cape, whose seagrass and cloud batik motifs are favored by *dalang* [see figs. 26, 87]<sup>475</sup> Chinese iconography most likely gained currency in *topeng* during *bebarang*, when batik was often borrowed from patrons to complete their costumes.<sup>476</sup>

Pigeaud was the first to acknowledge the important role of Cirebon's appointed Sino-Cirebonese head, Mayor Tan Tjin Kie (d.1919), who worked with the Dutch and was an avid fan of *topeng* and *wayang wong* masks.<sup>477</sup> He was a major mask collector, though the collection was later dismantled. Anderson speculates that this may have occurred during the Japanese occupation. He claims to have later purchased a mask from the Major's collection at a flea market in the 1960s.<sup>478</sup>

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Cohen, "'Multiculturalism' and performance in colonial Cirebon" in *The Indonesian Town Revisited*, ed. Peter Nas, (Berlin: LIT Verlag 2002), 351; Matthew Isaac Cohen, *The Komedi Stamboel: Popular Theater in Colonial Indonesia, 1891-1903*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 6.

<sup>475</sup> The *lokchan* is an important part of *topeng*. The seagrass motif is considered sacred as is the cloud motif; however, its connection to the *topeng* costume is more recent and has grown steadily over the past two generations.

<sup>476</sup> As mentioned elsewhere in this study, it was very common, and not the least bit looked down upon, for hosts to loan batik and other items to *topeng* troupes.

<sup>477</sup> Th. Pigeaud, Th. (1938). *Javaanse Volksvertoningen: Bijdrage tot de Beschrijving van Land en Volk*. Batavia: Volkslectuur, 1938, 114. Anderson, "A Language Learned in Java."

[http://210.34.3.199/mirror/cornell/outreach/SEAPBulletin/bulletin\\_sp99/home\\_sp99.htm](http://210.34.3.199/mirror/cornell/outreach/SEAPBulletin/bulletin_sp99/home_sp99.htm) (accessed 19 January 2009).

Iwan Satibi, a Majalengka physician and historian of *peranakan* culture, translated Tan Gin Ho's monograph on Tan Tjin Kie tenure in local politics from Chinese Malay to Indonesian: Tan Gin Ho, *Mayor Tan Tjin Kie (1853-1919). Mayor Tituler Warga Tionghoa Cirebon. Kenang-kenangan untuk para Keluarga Berkaitan dengan Saat-Saat Wafatnya, Ayah Mayor Tan Keng Bie (Mayor Tan Tjin Kie) Sampai Selesai Pemakamannya*. (Majalengka, n.d. c.2004).

<sup>478</sup> Anderson, "A Language Learned in Java."

Yo Djin Tjoe, a *peranakan* baker from Jamblang, lives near one of Cirebon's oldest Buddhist temples, *Kelentang Jamblang*. He recalls *topeng* troupes from Kalianyar and Slangit passing through Jamblang every Chinese New Year during the 1940s and early 1950s.<sup>479</sup> By the mid-1950s, however, mounting antagonisms had a cooling effect on the *peranakan-topeng* connection. *Bebarang* became a casualty of the frosty relations in Jamblang long before it was banned in 1965. Moreover, the popularity of the old Chinese glove-puppet theatre, *po-té-hi*<sup>480</sup> had eclipsed *wayang* and *topeng* by the 1950s.<sup>481</sup> Relatedly, the Chinese New Year holiday coincides with the off-season for *sawah* (wet rice) farming. These were tough financial times for the *topeng* community who looked forward to performing for Indo-Chinese. In addition to their fiscal generosity, they usually provided ample food and drink for the troupe.<sup>482</sup>

A unique feature of *topeng* performances for *peranakan* patrons was the mode of payment. A coin would be inserted in the special *amplop merah* (red envelope)<sup>483</sup> and placed on a table. At the end of the *babak*, the dancer would pick up the envelope in front of the audience. The more creative their gesture, the higher the tip would likely be the next time.

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<sup>479</sup> Yo Djin Djoë, interview, 16 May 2006; Anderson, "A Language Learned in Java."

<sup>480</sup> Chinese hand-glove puppet theatre *Po-té-hi* originates with the Hokkein-speaking population of Fujian, from where the majority of Chinese immigrants to Java originate. *Po-té-hi dalang* were imported from East Java and performed during the New Year in addition to *wayang* and *topeng*. For more on *po-té-hi*, see Victoria M. Clara van Groenendaël, "Po-té-hi: The Chinese glove-puppet theatre in East Java," in *Performance in Java and Bali: Studies of narrative, theatre, music, and dance*, edited by Bernard Arps (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1993), 11-33.

<sup>481</sup> Ironically, the majority of the highly specialized *dalang po-té-hi* were of Javanese descent, whose home base was Semarang and Surabaya; however, they managed a bustling business among the *pasisir*'s Buddhist temples during the Chinese New Year. Didik Nini Thowok, pers. comm., 18 April 2006. According to Didik there are only three or four active *dalang po-té-hi* today, including Tio of Semarang and his student Sibur of Surabaya.

<sup>482</sup> Sukarta, pers. comm., 15 May 2006.

<sup>483</sup> The red envelope suggests good fortune or luck.

Wentar once remarked to Enoch Atmadibrata that the Losari dancers had perfected this skill. During *bebarang* in the 1940s, Wentar observed a Losari *dalang* pick up the envelope backwards with her teeth during the movement *galeong*. *Galeong* is found in every *topeng* repertoire; however, it takes on acrobatic proportion in Losari, where dancers begin perfecting the movement at a very young age. The back is so fully extended and the legs flexed in such a deep plié, that more accomplished Losari *dalang* can extend their backs so far that their heads reach within a few feet off the ground [fig. 28].<sup>484</sup> From this seemingly impossible position, Wentar observed the *dalang* grip the envelope between her teeth as a final flourish. That the Losari-style's signature movement occurs in a community with a large Indo-Chinese population is not surprising. It is likely, then, that the origin of the Losari-style's fully arched *galeong* was honed during *bebarang*.



Fig. 28. Losari *dalang*, Noor Anani, performs *galeong* at *Kraton Kanoman* on the occasion of *Shawal* (12 Rabiul Awal 1427 H. 11 April 2006).

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<sup>484</sup> Enoch Atmadibrata, pers. comm., 18 November 2005.



## CIRCULATION IN THE AGE OF ANXIETY: *BEBARANG* AND THE ‘COUP’

Most Cirebon-region *dalang* concede that although Sukarno appreciated *topeng* (for which they were indeed grateful) he was intolerant of itinerancy in any form. This included *bebarang*. The *dalang* interviewed for this study described being informed by the *lurah* that “begging” was an embarrassment to the government.<sup>485</sup> While a full-fledged ban appeared imminent, it would only be realized under Soeharto.

Not surprisingly, some of these attitudes trickled down to the village level, where responses to the roving performers ranged from pleasure to disdain. Some locals had a genuine appreciation for the artists’ skill and effort, while others viewed *bebarang* as negative. The latter made for some fragile social relations. According to Suanda, food lost its cachet in favor of hard cash following a culture department-sponsored artist conference (*musyawarah seniman*), wherein it was stated that the food-as-payment tradition created a “dirty” appearance for artists. In the 1960s, younger musicians began carrying “modern-looking bags” to camouflage their portion of the food during hosted events. By the late 1960s, cash was preferred by most artists, signalling the shift to a cash economy.<sup>486</sup>

The new regime wasted no time in linking itinerancy and art to communist activity. The very notion of travel became code for “detractor” and *bebarang* was

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<sup>485</sup> Similar to the way that censorship prevailed during this same period, such communications were filtered through many organizations, including the Internal Security Police (*DPKN*) and *Kementerian Penerangan* (Ministry of Information), with performance permits (*izin pertunjukan*) being strictly adhered to during this period. For Sukarno’s employment of censorship during this period, see Brandon, *Theatre in Southeast Asia*, 230-32.

<sup>486</sup> Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, 71-72. Penny Edwards points to similar trends elsewhere in South and Southeast Asia, including Cambodia’s former ruler, Sihanouk’s push to legislate sanitation in the 1950s and 1960s, effectively binding cleanliness with purity and morality. Penny Edwards, pers. comm., 4 June 2009.

swiftly banned.<sup>487</sup> Most *dalang* first learned of the ban when the *lurah* instructed them to report to the Regency and District Office (*Kantor Kabupaten dan Kecamatan*) to register their groups with the ad hoc military. Sujana recalled that when he arrived he was admonished: “Do not perform *bebarang* or [otherwise] embarrass the government.”<sup>488</sup> Another popular *dalang* described a letter he received from the same office in which the new protocol was laid out in black and white. “In the end, [local official] Pak Daud prohibited us from performing.”<sup>489</sup>

The ban on *bebarang* undoubtedly depleted *topeng* of its insularity. Many *dalang* had no choice but to sell their masks, and puppeteers sold their puppets in order to feed their families. This coincided with a movement of Islamic “purification” (*pemurnian Islam*). Neighbors turned on neighbors whom they felt were not Muslim enough. Some of Sawitri’s neighbors thought *topeng* contradicted Islam. When restrictions loosened in the 1970s, *dalang* began teaching outsiders in order to earn a living. This marked the most critical shift in *topeng*’s transmission. It also iron-stamped *topeng*’s future as a popular entertainment.<sup>490</sup> The new crop of *topeng* students covered the gamut from villagers to foreigners. Suddenly, the geo-politically marginalized region was on the cultural map, with Cirebon a destination point for Western students of theatre and dance.

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<sup>487</sup> According to a Majalengka former culture department employee, *Topeng Banjet* (a/k/a *Topeng Betawi*) and *Reog* were also banned at this time. E. Kusnadi, pers. comm., 28 June 2006.

<sup>488</sup> ‘*Jangan bebarang atau mencemarkan pemerintah.*’

<sup>489</sup> “*Mereka bilang kepada para dalang topeng untuk tidak bebarang atau mencemarkan pemerintah. Akhirnya Pak Daud sendiri melarang.*”

<sup>490</sup> As mentioned earlier, *topeng* was taught to outsiders before, but it was restricted to *bupati* and wealthy locals.

The *topeng* community's resilience was apparent even before the Asia Society tour. *Dalang* attempted to resurrect their careers by resuming what they knew best: *bebarang*. When the New Order was firmly entrenched in the early 1970s, tensions surrounding itinerant performance began to thaw in Majalengka and the previous communist stronghold, Indramayu. Former Majalengka culture department official E. Kusnardi said that, unlike Cirebon, there was no ban on *bebarang* in Majalengka during his tenure (1986 to 2000). He recalled a *dalang* from Beber, Majalengka who often toured the region without repercussions.<sup>491</sup> Endo Suanda recalls *bebarang* performed in Majalengka even earlier, in 1973, with a group from Kalianyar, Cirebon. Their fee ranged from fifteen to twenty-five *rupiahs* or one liter of rice per *babak*; or between one and two hundred *rupiah* for an hour performance.<sup>492</sup> *Dalang topeng* Wangi Indriya recalls *bebarang* being performed in her Indramayu village as well as in Beber.<sup>493</sup> These paths of circulation define the fluid borders of *Wilayah III Cirebon* and the sheer tenacity of these artists to pursue their craft. *Bebarang*'s prolonged absence in the city and regency of Cirebon after 1965 suggests that performance activities were more closely monitored there, forcing troupes to travel further and at greater personal peril.<sup>494</sup>

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In the final decade of the New Order, there was a big push for what Hughes-Freeland calls "image enhancement" by way of "cultural diplomacy," which was promoted by Mochtar Kusumoatmodjo, a former Foreign Minister. The idea was to

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<sup>491</sup> E. Kusnadi, pers. comm., 28 June 2006.

<sup>492</sup> Endo Suanda, "Cirebonese Topeng and Wayang of the Present Day," 98.

<sup>493</sup> Wangi, pers. comm., 9 October 2005.

<sup>494</sup> The fact that *topeng* continued relatively unscathed in Indramayu is surprising, since it was the regency with the most police-inflicted bloodshed in late 1965.

promote Indonesia on a grand scale in the U.S. in anticipation of “Visit Indonesia Year” and “Visit ASEAN Year.” The two events were planned for 1991 and 1992, respectively.<sup>495</sup> The initiative appears to have been met with success as Sujana Arja and his sister Keni Arja performed at Columbia University and other locations as part of the 1991 “Festival of Indonesia” tour.<sup>496</sup> Two years later Sawitri (then sixty-three years old) performed in New York under the auspices of UNICEF. Although the goal of cross-cultural exchange was largely met, it remained a complicated venture for those Indonesians being promoted. Like her predecessors, Sawitri first had to be cleared by the government.<sup>497</sup> It is clear that in the sixteen years between the Asia Society and UNICEF-sponsored performances, the New Order remained ambivalent about the art they sought so hard to promote abroad. On the one hand, they sought global recognition; while on the other hand, artists were pressured to ensure Indonesian national identity was viewed in the most positive light.

In 1999, The Japan Foundation Asia Center Performing Arts sponsored Rasinah’s first performance in Japan and she has since performed with Didik Nini Thowok in Canada a few times. Several months after she returned from her July 2005 UK dance tour (Bristol, Devon, and London) Rasinah suffered a debilitating stroke. She was under contract to perform with Didik again in Canada in 2006, but poor health

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<sup>495</sup> Felicia Hughes-Freeland, “Indonesian Image Enhancement,” *Anthropology Today*, 5,6 (1989), 3.

<sup>496</sup> Sandrut bin Sarwiti, who was primarily known as a puppeteer, was one of the musicians during the 1977 Asia Society tour. This time, he filled in the late Bulus’s shoes, playing the *bodor*.

<sup>497</sup> See articles: *Pikiran Rakyat*. Cirebon edition. “Kesenian Topeng Losari akan Tampil di New York. Untuk Membantu Program Unicef.” [Topeng Losari Arts will appear in New York to help UNICEF]. October 1993: 2; *Suara Pembaruan* “Sawitri: Biarapun di New York Tarian Saya, Ya Begini...” 15 November 1993, 14.

dictated that her granddaughter, Aerli (then nineteen years old) be sent in her place, marking the young mask dancer's first trip abroad.

One of the most noteworthy overseas tours by a *dalang topeng* had little to do with *topeng* proper. Wangi Indriya, one of the few practicing *dalang* of her generation (she is in her late forties) played the part of the queen of Cina in the orally-transmitted epic based on *Sureq Galigo* in Robert Wilson's adaptation, *I La Galigo* in 2004-05.<sup>498</sup> The New York Times describes the majority of dancers in the production as originating from Sulawesi,<sup>499</sup> in fact, many of the coveted spots went to dancers from Makassar, Papua, Padang, Yogyakarta, and Solo; dancers plucked from Indonesia's elite art academies.<sup>500</sup> Not surprisingly, the multi-cultural cast impacted the choreography. According to Wangi, some movements were "borrowed" from Papua, courtesy of the company's sole Papuan member.<sup>501</sup> Unlike the majority of performers hired for the production, Wangi is not affiliated with a formal institution. She shares a studio in Indramayu with her father, puppeteer Taham. Rhoda Grauer, who adapted the text for Wilson's production learned from Rasinah of Wangi in 2004 and invited her to audition for Wilson's company in Bali.<sup>502</sup> Wilson met the cast in Singapore where rehearsals were held for three weeks in 2004 before the onset of the tour.

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<sup>498</sup> Also in the original company was the important Minangkabau (West Sumatra) poet, literacy advocate, and co-author of the book about *Manifesto Kebudayaan*, Taufiq Ismail. *I La Galigo* toured ten countries between 2004 and 2008, including Singapore, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Madrid, Lyon, Ravenna, New York, Jakarta, Melbourne, Milano.

<sup>499</sup> *New York Times*, 7 April 2004.

<sup>500</sup> Wangi, pers. comm., 9 October 2005.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid.

<sup>502</sup> Most people assume Wangi studied *topeng* with Rasinah, but she studied with Nargi. Furthermore, Rasinah was still on hiatus from performing *topeng* at the time. She did, however, study contemporary dance, or *kreasi baru* with Rasinahc.1994.

While most *dalang* encounters overseas have been positive, beginning in the mid/late 1990s through the early 2000s, reports surfaced regarding young female *topeng* dancers from the Cirebon region who auditioned and were selected to perform in Japan and other foreign lands. The fledgling dancers' plans to introduce *topeng* to a wider audience, however, were dashed when it became clear they were being sent overseas under false pretenses. Rather than performing with masks, the young dancers were put to work in discotheques, topless bars, and other places of prostitution.<sup>503</sup> During the course of his fieldwork in the mid-1990s, Matthew Cohen had many conversations with "anxious (and sometimes embarrassed) relatives of female dancers who went to Japan."<sup>504</sup> The newspaper *Gatra* contends that more than 1,000 young dancers from Indramayu alone were sent to Japan to work in this capacity.<sup>505</sup> In fact, aside from Rasinah's granddaughter, Aerli, I only know of one other female mask dancer who performed overseas during the course of my fieldwork, a professional dancer from Bandung, Wiwin, who performed in France in 2005 and whose travels were uneventful. I subsequently learned of several other *topeng* dancers from *kabupaten* Cirebon, who in 2000-2001 purchased complete costumes and masks at great financial expense when hired to perform *topeng* in Japan. Only upon their arrival in Jakarta did they surmise the real objective of the "tour." They returned to their villages immediately.

Not every *dalang topeng* went abroad with the intention of performing. At the time of my fieldwork, Tursini's daughter, Erli, who was trained as a *dalang topeng* and

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<sup>503</sup> I am indebted to Matthew Cohen for bringing to light the issue of sex trafficking among *topeng* dancers.

<sup>504</sup> Matthew Isaac Cohen, pers. comm., 19 October 2007.

<sup>505</sup> "Gatra "Menari topeng, pakai tank top" in [http://www.gatra.com/2002-10-08/versi\\_cetak.php?id=21179](http://www.gatra.com/2002-10-08/versi_cetak.php?id=21179), 8 October 2002 (accessed 2 April 2008).

is now in her early fifties, had spent more than a decade employed as a *pembantu* (housekeeper; maid) in Saudi Arabia. She returned from her fifth two-year stint in 2009. Erli has made the hajj nine times, an unusual accomplishment for a *dalang topeng* or farmer. The majority of overseas travel visas today are granted to rural Indonesians – not in connection with performing the hajj, but seeking employment as maids, chauffeurs, and cruise ship employees. In 2006, one of Erli’s children was employed as a *pembantu* in Hawaii. Thus, we can see that overseas careers are taking root. Many employers are from Saudi Arabia.<sup>506</sup> It would not be hyperbolic to state that in some cases, the term *pembantu* is little more than a euphemism for indentured servant.<sup>507</sup> Overseas jobs such as housekeepers, chauffeurs, and luxury ship stewards are sought by many rural Cirebonese today. Contracts are usually for two years and the pay scale significantly higher than one could dream of earning at home. It has dividends for the government as well, since overseas workers support their families back home.<sup>508</sup> Thus, it has become a lucrative career path for some *topeng* families.

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<sup>506</sup> There were many billboards in June 2009 that advertised special cellphone rates to Saudi Arabia.

<sup>507</sup> I first became aware of this phenomenon in 1979, when my former housemate from Bandung had taken a job as a *pembantu* for an upper middle-class Javanese family in Long Island, New York. Although the young woman was from a well-to-do family in Bandung (her father was a pilot for Garuda Airlines), she was forced to leave home when the unwed woman became pregnant for the second time (the mother was raising her first born). I visited her several times in Long Island, where her employers viewed me with suspicion. My friend was forced to work long hours under abusive conditions. She successfully hid her pregnancy from her employers until just a month before the baby was due. The newborn was snatched from her mother by her employers who had already lined up a black market adoption assisted by their American lawyer. My friend was able to escape from the house soon thereafter but, to the best of my knowledge, her child’s whereabouts remain a mystery. Since the passage of the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act in 2000, similar cases are not only coming to the forefront, but are being tried in American courts of law in record numbers. Most recently was the well-publicized case of two Indonesian female housekeepers tortured by their employers, naturalized U.S. citizens from India (also in Long Island, New York). See “From Stand in Long Island Slavery Case, a Snapshot of a Hidden U.S. Problem,” in *The New York Times*, 3 December 2007.

<sup>508</sup> Within a few months of returning home in 2009, Erli had already spent her entire earnings on home improvements.

## WHAT'S OLD IS NEW: BEBARANG POST-SOEHARTO

The ban on *bebarang* in Cirebon was never formally lifted. In spite of this, and perhaps because the artist registry is no longer strictly enforced, new itinerant forms have emerged in post-Soeharto Indonesia [Fig. 29]. One form, known either as *ronggeng monyet* or *topeng monyet* (“monkey show”)<sup>509</sup> may have originated in Jakarta. Here, a real monkey, controlled by a very different kind of *dalang*, parades in masks that he puts on himself,<sup>510</sup> rides toy horses, and manipulates various other objects. The monkey is accompanied by a rudimentary two-piece gamelan composed of *saron* and *kendang*. Also gaining currency is a free-form itinerant masked dance performed by young male transvestites, who sometimes dress in traditional Javanese blouses (*kebaya*) and sarong, complete with contemporary, ready-made plastic masks. They go door-to-door frequenting busy traffic intersections, where they dance to *dangdut* music<sup>511</sup> for a few *rupiah*. In an interesting and quite unconscious inversion of the past, many of these new *bebarang* practitioners travel in a westbound trajectory from Central Java to Cirebon. Like their predecessors, they are among the poorest of the poor. What has changed is that they now take public transportation to Cirebon.

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<sup>509</sup> Itinerancy is implicit in the name.

<sup>510</sup> Several *dalang monyet* expressed a marked preference to work with male monkeys. Female monkeys are viewed as problematic, ostensibly because they are irritable in the days leading up to their menses and when they are menstruating they cannot perform.

<sup>511</sup> An Indonesian (and more recently, Malaysian) popular music genre that incorporates Arab and Indian influences.





Fig. 29. A young, male transvestite itinerant performer from Pekalongan wearing a Muslim head covering. The box worn around his neck is his sound system.

## SUMMARY

It is logical to think that as opportunities for travel expanded with the opening of the Cirebon-Bandung Highway that *topeng*'s popularity would also rise; however, the opposite has proved true. Those districts in closest proximity to the main road – chiefly Palimanan, Plumbon, Jamblang, Trusmi, and Plered – have been extinguished, while those *topeng* districts farthest removed from it – particularly Slangit, Gegesik, and Losari – still flourish. The main highway and new forms of transportation provide villagers access to contemporary genres, such as *dangdut* and *tarling*. Alternately, both

Indramayu and Majalengka are far removed from Cirebon, yet continue to have vibrant masking traditions today. Curiously, those communities with failed *topeng* lineages had enjoyed the most dynamic exchange with other *topeng* communities prior to *Gestok*. If, as Charles Darwin suggests, nature was bound to a genetic order in which organism was pitted against organism in an effort to ensure reproductive success,<sup>512</sup> then the extinction of *topeng*'s most vibrant branches dotting the Cirebon-Bandung highway depended upon the inherent weakness of technologies. But it also points to the resilience of marginalized performers who cling tenaciously to their tradition despite protracted ruptures manifested in the silenced, but not forgotten, memories of the past. Who were these artists and what kind of psychic ammunition was in their arsenal is the subject of the next two chapters.

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<sup>512</sup> Charles Darwin, *Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection; or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*, (New York: The Modern Library, [1859], 1936).

## CHAPTER 3: THE DALANG TOPENG AND THE BODOR

### DALANG IN LOVE: MARRIAGE, CONTINUITY, AND BREAK-UPS

The personal lives of *dalang* play an important role in *topeng*. The tradition often draws two people together like a magnet, but it can tear them apart with equal tenacity. Second only to being blacklisted in 1965, spousal jealousy is typically the insuperable object that terminates a *dalang*'s career. Some female *dalang*, including Dasih and Rasinah, were inclined to marry other artists who allowed them to continue dancing and were more sensitive to the rigors of the craft. Dasih and Rasinah married *tukang kendang* and often performed in the same *rombongan*. This is an interesting pairing, since the relationship between the drummer and the *dalang* is, by definition, intimate. The drummer is the leader of the gamelan and responsible for following the dancer's movements. This is particularly true with mature *dalang topeng* who are more likely to improvise. As such, there is a fine-tuned anticipatory quality inherent in good drumming and the *dalang*'s engagement on a subliminal, intuitive level.

Serial marriages are ubiquitous in rural Cirebon. It is not uncommon for first marriages to be arranged between families or as a "practice" marriage prior to the onset of menses. When unions between female *dalang topeng* and their non-artist husbands dissolved – and with few exceptions, they did – the division of property was based on *shari'a*, with the husbands reaping the greatest financial benefit.<sup>513</sup> The founder of Sisters in Islam, Muslim Zainwah Anwar argues that this failure to protect women's assets is a relatively modern phenomenon. The *Quran* is explicit in its equal treatment of women, particularly regarding the ex-spouse responsibility to sustain his former wife

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<sup>513</sup> The known exceptions occurred when the wife/*dalang* consented to early retirement.

and children for a reasonable period;<sup>514</sup> nevertheless, she argues that historically men have been responsible for interpreting its doctrinal meaning.<sup>515</sup> Poor women lack the financial resources to contest the situation, resulting in their dependence on family members until they either resurrect their careers or remarry.<sup>516</sup> Usually, career came first. The reason is two-fold. First, most *dalang* hungered to perform and, second, it was while performing that the *dalang* was most likely to attract a new mate. The circulation of performance opportunities and partners energized *topeng* whose practitioners cycled between work and nesting.

Sisters Dewi and Sawitri of Losari had nine siblings, all of whom were *dalang topeng* and *gamelan* musicians. Dewi's career was frozen for many years in the aftermath of *Gestok*. She married twice, first to a performer. Her second marriage was to a man who cut hair for a living. Her daughter, Mutri, describes Dewi's life as "difficult": "Mimi Dewi never felt content because her husband was merely a hair cutter."<sup>517</sup> Her sister Sawitri married six times. Her first marriage was arranged by her father to fortify the family lineage when Sawitri was ten years old. She requested and eventually was granted a divorce. The marriage had not been consummated, making Sawitri a *janda*

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<sup>514</sup> According to Fathi Osman, if the husband requests the divorce, he should assume full responsibility for the care of his wife and children, but if the woman initiates the divorce, the courts decide the amount and extent of the ex-husband's financial responsibility. Fathi Osman, *Muslim Women in the Family and the Society*, (Berhad: SIS Forum, 1996), 15-20.

<sup>515</sup> Zainah Anwar lecture "What Islam, Whose Islam? The Struggle for Human Rights within a Religious Framework and the Experience of Sisters in Islam," University of California, Berkeley, 2 October 2007.

<sup>516</sup> Many *dalang* transitioned into teaching when they divorced at a later age or their health had deteriorated. This was the case with my teacher, Dasih. For those with the stamina, combining performance with teaching was the goal.

<sup>517</sup> "Mimi Dewi tidak pernah merasa senang karena pekerjaan suaminya hanya tukang potong rambut." Mutri, pers. comm., 9 September 2005.

*kembang*.<sup>518</sup> Her second marriage at age fourteen produced one child, who died a few years later. She bore no more children. Her other husbands included a police officer, a Muslim religious teacher from Banjarmasin (Kalimantan), and a pilot who deceived her into believing she was his only wife. She promptly left him. Her longest marriage (sixteen years) was to a civil servant from Palembang, South Sumatra.<sup>519</sup>

In the world of finance, some artists fared better than others. Sujana Arja was by far the most celebrated *dalang* during most of the Soeharto administration.<sup>520</sup> I present four hypotheses for his unparalleled success, of which the first two are indubitable: first, Sujana did not engage in politics and, second, he was an extremely gifted dancer. These combined qualities were central to the government's project of culture-inflected nationalism through the exportation of *topeng*. Third, Sujana was a man. Male *dalang* – and they are few and far between today – usually continue performing when married. Jealousy, however, occurs with equal frequency and intensity among the wives of male *dalang* as the other way around. The difference is that a successful male artist is usually the primary source of income.<sup>521</sup> The final reason for Sujana's success was his position as resident master *dalang topeng* at Bandung's nationally-sponsored performance

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<sup>518</sup> A woman who divorces prior to bearing children. Literally: 'flower widow.' Wulff 2006a: 7.

<sup>519</sup> Juju Masunah, *Penari Topeng Losari*, (Yogyakarta: Tarawang, 2000), 55-60; Monica Wulff, "Ibu Sawitri and the a/occidental Oriental," *Portal: Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*, 3, 2 July 2006b, 8-9. <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/ojs/index.php/portal/article/view/169/305> (accessed 22 January 2009).

<sup>520</sup> Rasinah was only active late in the administration. In addition to several college theses on Sujana and the Slangit style and Pamela Rogers-Aquiniga's Master's thesis, there is a short film narrated by Rogers-Aquiniga with Sujana as the featured *dalang topeng*. See Jim Kallett and Mark Manoff, producers and directors. *Topeng Babakan: Solo Masked Dance of West Java*. 10 minutes. (Lebanon, New Hampshire: American Gamelan Institute, 1984).

<sup>521</sup> I am only familiar with one male *dalang*, Cangkol, from Indramayu, who stopped performing due to his wife's jealousy. The couple eventually settled in Jakarta where Cangkol was able to find work in an unrelated field. Although Cangkol is *dalang topeng* Carpan's only son, he is good-humored about the situation, saying that Cangkol's wife feared her husband would bring women to the house. Carpan, pers. comm., 22 March 2006.

academy, *Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia* (ASTI, Indonesia's Academy of Performing Arts in Bandung) and at *IKIP*, Bandung, and cultivated for the tour circuit. Sujana's *bodor*, Bulus, a farmer and *tukang bebek* (duck herder) by day,<sup>522</sup> was the most politically attuned clown in post-1965 Cirebon. That he could only speak Cirebon Javanese and some Indonesian proved a boon to Sujana's international career, because Bulus' critiques were unintelligible to audiences abroad and, hence, could not embarrass the government.

Sujana's sister, Keni Arja's situation is unusual. Although she and Sujana were embattled siblings most of their adult lives, they often partnered for performances of the fittingly called *kupu tarung* ("battling butterflies").<sup>523</sup> Keni married a teacher-cum-mask maker who appreciated her work, though his civil servant parents forbade him to marry her because she did not pray five times daily and thus in their minds was not a "good Muslim."<sup>524</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> *Tukang bebek* play an important agricultural role, for ducks eat insects, which minimizes crop failures.

<sup>523</sup> *Kupu tarung*'s origins are unknown, though is widely believed to have begun in Slangit. Certainly, it has been most consistently performed there until recently with one male and one female *dalang*. This, however, appears to be a relatively recent phenomenon (possibly beginning in the 1960s). *Dalang wayang/topeng* Wita from Gegecik recalls his father and Sujana's father, Arja performing it together in the 1950s. The form is a kind of friendly competition between at least two different troupes, including their clowns and musicians (the gamelans sometimes use different tuning systems and deliberately play out of phase with one another to further accentuate their differences). The dancers simultaneously perform their versions of the dance side-by-side and interact with each other. The most recent performance I saw showcased Sujana Arja and Rasinah at the Dago Tea House in Bandung in 2005. At that time it had not been performed in many years and was something of a *cause célèbre*, as it involved the two surviving 'maestro' *dalang topeng* and they had never performed together. Furthermore, the performance did not support a *hajatan* (its intended environ and audience). It has been performed twice in 2009: *Festival Nusantara* at *Kraton Kasepuhan* with Wangi (Indramayu) and Inu Kertapati (Slangit); and at Pasar Manbo with Noor Anani (Losari), Inu (Slangit) and Aerli (Indramayu). For more on Slangit-style *kupu tarung* (*kupu tarung*) see Rogers-Aguinga, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis, 41-47.

<sup>524</sup> Keni Arja, pers. comm., 2006. Most *dalang* did not pray five times daily prior to the Islamic resurgence that reached the village level in the 1980s. The majority of older *dalang* follow mystical forms of remembrance, such as *dzikir*. Keni's son, Wiyono, who is both a *dalang topeng* and civil servant in the culture department of the city of Cirebon, prays five times daily.



Fig. 30. Keni (left) and Sujana (right) perform *kupu tarung*, *Tari Topeng Rummyang*, early 1970s. Slangit, Cirebon. Photographer Unknown.

After Sujana, Sudji was perhaps the most famous *dalang* during the 1970s, although she did not enjoy the same financial riches. She was forced to lay low for several years after *Gestok*, due to persistent rumors that one of her former husbands had *PKI* ties. But she was luckier than most of her peers in having managed a spectacular, if

short-lived, return in the 1970s. Sudji, Dasih, Sawitri<sup>525</sup> and Rasinah, comprised the few other *dalang* who attracted non-local and international students – a boon to their pocketbooks and careers. In addition to the now internationally known Yogyakarta artist, Didik Nini Thowok from Yogyakarta, American dancer Deena Burton (d.2005) studied with Sudji at roughly the same time I studied with Dasih. Even so, Sudji and Dasih’s careers were punctuated with stops and starts. One of Sudji’s husbands had been accused of *PKI* activities, which culminated in her being blacklisted for several years. However, the majority of her marriages were driven more by comfort than love. Her non-artist husbands were predictably jealous of her time on the road and access to other men. Jealousy was typically accompanied by the oft-heard complaint that *topeng* was “low-class” and associated with prostitution. Consequently, Sudji was prohibited from dancing for the duration of most of her marriages.<sup>526</sup> Ironically, had the majority of Sudji’s husbands believed what they preached, they would not have met her in the first place. As previously mentioned, initial encounters between *dalang* and their mates frequently occurred during palace engagements or during *bebarang*. Sudji’s skill as a dancer was matched by her exceptional beauty, which is still commented on by those old enough to remember her today. The cocktail of skill and beauty translated to Sudji rarely being single. She married eleven times during the course of her life, with the majority of

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<sup>525</sup> Success came to Sawitri late in life. She was in her sixties when UNICEF invited her to perform at the Triplex Performing Arts Center in New York in 1993. The performance was organized in collaboration with the Indonesian government-owned company *Gaung Cipta Semesta* and the Indonesian Consulate General of New York. She was accompanied by her young nieces, Kartini Kacip, Taningsih Lasmad and Noor Anani. See “Sawitri: Biarpun Di New York Tarian Saya, Ya Begini...” *Suara Pembaruan*, 15 November 1993, 13.

<sup>526</sup> Tursini, pers. comm., 12 June 2006.



the unions ending in divorce.<sup>527</sup> Most of her betrothed were cosmopolitan. Her first marriage (age twelve) was to a *dalang wayang kulit*. It was apparently a “practice marriage” and soon ended in divorce. She next married a schoolteacher, a union that lasted two years. Her subsequent marriage was to a doctor, Duriyat, with whom she bore her only two children. The marriage lasted ten years. Near the end of her life, she waxed philosophical on this unlikely coupling: “*Kalau tidak ada jodoh, kita mesti terpisah*” (“Without true love, we are bound to part ways.”)<sup>528</sup> She then went on to marry a *kepala desa* (village chief). Her final marriage was to a *Haji Kasan*. Sudji felt this was a good marriage and that she had finally created a real home. When he died in the late 1970s, she vowed not to remarry.<sup>529</sup> She kept her vow.

Roughly ten years Sudji’s senior, Dasih outlived her younger sister by three years and nearly tripled her in the nuptials department.<sup>530</sup> Dasih married twenty-nine times.<sup>531</sup> With the exception of a few Cirebon *kraton* princes who forbade her to dance and one other husband, Kamsi who took her to Jakarta,<sup>532</sup> Dasih, wisely, followed her heart in love, gravitating to other artists simpatico with her lifestyle. She was very

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<sup>527</sup> Endo Suanda records Sudji as having married nine times. An article published shortly before the *dalang*’s death mentions only five marriages. Sudji’s daughter, Tursini places the total at eleven. It is possible that some of those marriages were so brief as to be beneath others’ radar. Endo Suanda, “The Social Context of the Cirebonese Performing Artist,” 33; Tursini, pers. comm., 12 June 2006; *Pikiran Rakyat, Edisi Cirebon*, “Ibu Sudji, Tokoh Topeng Cirebon: Mencari Makna Hidup Dari Tarian Topeng Cirebon,” September 1982.

<sup>528</sup> *Pikiran Rakyat*, Edisi Cirebon, “Ibu Sudji, Tokoh Topeng Cirebon: Mencari Makna Hidup Dari Tarian Topeng Cirebon,” September 1982. Sudji died on 15 September 1982 apparently days or weeks after this article appeared.

<sup>529</sup> *Pikiran Rakyat*, Edisi Cirebon, “Ibu Sudji, Tokoh Topeng Cirebon: Mencari Makna Hidup Dari Tarian Topeng Cirebon,” September 1982.

<sup>530</sup> The sisters were estranged when I was Dasih’s student.

<sup>531</sup> Endo Suanda, “The Social Context of the Cirebonese Performing Artist,” 33.

<sup>532</sup> This did not deter Dasih, who began developing *topeng* there.

private about her love life. Although we shared a bedroom for nearly a year and grew very close during that time, she rarely mentioned any of her paramours.

Sudji's daughter, Tursini (age 73), married a man from Banten where she lived for many years and raised her family. She returned to Palimanan, Cirebon in 1980 to care for her ailing mother. Tursini inherited the family home when her mother died and lives there today with her daughter Erli's extended family. Tursini never performed when she lived in Banten, and only sporadically after her mother's death. Instead, she has dedicated her life to caregiving for the dead and dying as a *penolong*.<sup>533</sup> Even so, she continues her filial obligation to teach her progeny to dance. Of her eight children and (at the time of my research) thirty-three grandchildren, only Erli received *topeng* training, though she too, no longer performs.<sup>534</sup>

The once-prominent *dalang topeng* Tien Sutini, from Kalianyar, Cirebon, is nearly forgotten today. Her exclusion from the *topeng* circuit resulted from having been previously married to a man who, reportedly, was once a communist. In the 1980s she was invited to perform in Japan and Australia, but the invitation was revoked by the district military command, *Kodim (Komando District Militer)*.<sup>535</sup> She received an important break in 1993 as one of the *dalang* highlighted at the *topeng* retrospective,

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<sup>533</sup> literally: "helper," which in this context translates as "washer of the dead." The Arabic term is *ghassāl*. See chapter 7 this study.

<sup>534</sup> I observed Erli assisting her mother during informal *topeng* instruction with neighborhood girls who were preparing to compete in a local competition (*lomba*). *Lomba* is one of the few performance opportunities available to young dancers in training, replacing the experiential role that in generations past was the province of *bebarang*.

<sup>535</sup> Tien Sutini, pers. comm., 4 September 2005. Retired Cirebon culture department official, Ishak Herdjan confirmed this. Pers. comm., 6 August 2005. Sutini was optimistic, but also prescient, when in the only article I could find on her, she remarked: "*Mudah-mudahan Tuhan Mengijinkan [sic] dan tak ada aral melintang*" ("I hope Allah will grant permission and [that I will] not encounter obstacles or be otherwise hindered.") *Pikiran Rakyat*, "Kedok Rahwana Milik Nyi Sutini Suka Klatak-klutuk Tanda Protes." Cirebon Edition. February 1984.

*Pesta Topeng Cirebon* sponsored by Jakarta's prestigious center for the arts, *Taman Ismail Marzuki*.<sup>536</sup> Today she is more often seen playing *saron* on a contingency basis than as a *dalang*.

### BEHIND EVERY GREAT *DALANG*...

The *bodor* is the engine that fuels *topeng*. While the *dalang* is the main event, without the banter provided by a clown or two, a performance is never felt to be quite complete.



Fig. 31. Two *bodor*, from the chapter “*De Topeng Babakan*” in Ritter and Hardouin *Java's bewoners in hun eigenaardig karakter en kleederdracht* [The Javanese and their unusual character and costume], 1872.

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<sup>536</sup> Taman Ismail Marzuki, *Pesta Topeng Cirebon*, 81-83. The retrospective highlighted well-known, but also many lesser-known *dalang topeng* from Majalengka, Losari, and Indramayu. It marked the last time many of these *dalang* performed, including Ening (Beber, Majalengka) and Erih (Bongas, Majalengka).

In contrast with the *dalang*'s rigorous training, becoming a *bodor* is not a formal affair. Rather it unfolds over decades through observation and mimesis. Like *topeng*, it is often inherited from a parent (usually the father). In addition to being just plain funny, the *bodor* is expected to master the music and *topeng* movements and execute them with hyperbolic flourish. While the *bodor* has long held an esteemed position in the community second only to the *dalang*, their numbers shrunk substantially during the New Order years.<sup>537</sup> The experience of one of the few female *bodor* from Indramayu, Rokani, is instructive. She retired soon after *Gestok*, which coincided with her marriage. She lamented that she did not return to her career even after it was safe to do so.<sup>538</sup> The majority of *bodor* never recouped their former brio. This was no minor glitch for the troupes they left behind. Their departure dictated that those *dalang* who lacked a *bodor* were often forced to hire one from disciplines outside of *topeng*'s domain, including such divergent theatre and music forms as *sandiwara*, *reyog* and *tarling*. *Bodor* Plongo, from Indramayu, works with Wangi of Tambi, Indramayu and also worked with Rasinah prior to her 2005 stroke. Other clowns active today include Dobleh of Gesik, Bolong of Kalianyar and Warsono of Losari.

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<sup>537</sup> In the case of the few remaining female *bodor* I interviewed in 2005 and 2006, marriage triggered their early retirement while, for male clowns, it was the putsch. This suggests that female *bodor* were less likely to engage in political narratives than their male counterparts.

<sup>538</sup> Rokani, pers. comm., 28 May 2005.



Fig. 32. Two *bodor* from Losari: Jum'at (front) and Suyat (rear). Losari, 1983. Photo courtesy of Sonny Sumarsono.

The *bodors*' physical comedy and slapstick skills are as essential today as in generations past and, though they may be technically replaceable, they are not easily replaced. When a gifted *bodor* dies, many *dalang* hesitate (and some outright refuse) to replace him or her. The reasons are at least in part sentimental, for the *dalang/bodor* dyad is a marriage often forged in childhood. And like the promise of traditional marriage, the bond is expected to last until death. The *dalang*'s reticence about replacing their partner also reflects the chemistry required both for the *dalang* and among spectators who are the ultimate arbiters of taste. Sujana tried out other *bodor* after Bulus passed away. He eventually worked with Bulus' grandson, Carmin, and Dobleh, a *bodor* from Gesik. Hiring an outside *bodor* was rare two generations ago, but Dobleh was the only *bodor* who could perform the character, Jinggaanom, to Sujana's satisfaction,

albeit not in the Slangit style. Sujana once told me: “The *bodor* is to clarify the expression of the *dalang*. He not only explains his movements, but also provides guidance. There is no *topeng* without the *bodor*.”<sup>539</sup> His son, Inu, elaborates:

The clown clarifies the *dalang*'s movements. Where there is a *dalang*, there is a *bodor*. Where there is a chief, there is a secretary. The function of *bodor* is almost identical with the *dalang*. What the *dalang* explains through movement, the *bodor* accomplishes with words.

*Bodor adalah penjelas gerakan dalang. Jadi dimana ada dalang topeng, disitu ada bodor. Seperti halnya diumpamakan di mana ada ketua pasti ada sekretaris. Jadi kalau dikatakan bodor itu tinggi memang betul karena fungsinya hampir sama. Dalang menjelaskan dengan gerakan, sedangkan bodor dengan kata – kata.*<sup>540</sup>

Even so, Sujana elected to work alone for most of the last two decades of his life. When he performed the dual scene between Jinggananom and Tumenggung, Sujana eventually played Jinggananom with one of his two sons performing Tumenggung. Carpan never replaced his *bodor*, Saping, after his 1990 death. When Dasih was at her heights as an artist, her *bodor* was Permana, a relative from Bongas and later Saleh. When he died, Dasih did not replace him. She retired. Her nephew Empek became Dasih's relatives' *bodor* and performed with her extended family.<sup>541</sup> Sudji was a rebel, electing to work with Sujana's musicians and clown, much to Dasih's dismay.<sup>542</sup> After 1965, the *bodors*' social critic function diminished. Instead, they were reassigned to be the collective mouthpiece of public policy issues most pressing to the Soeharto administration –

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<sup>539</sup> Sujana Arja, pers. comm., 25 June 26 2005.

<sup>540</sup> Inu, pers. comm., 26 June 2005.

<sup>541</sup> Empek's son, Waryo, trained to be a clown with his father from the time he was very young. He sometimes performs in this capacity although he majored in gamelan (*karawitan*) in college and prefers music, mask making, and other Cirebonese art forms today.

<sup>542</sup> According to Sujana, among Sudji's numerous marriages was a union with his grandfather, *dalang wayang* Duarta, which may have accounted for her “transgression.”

notably, family planning. Most *bodor* were too fearful to attempt a critique of the new regime, even a veiled one. The *bodor*'s role was not merely to make people laugh, but to guide the performance through the events of the day. If the female servant, Tembem performed, for instance, everyone knew the character Samba would soon make an appearance; Jinggaanom signified the introduction of his fight scene with Tumenggung, etc. The *bodor*'s diminished role circumscribed its popular entertainment status. Without exception, every *bodor* I interviewed who is still active insists upon her or his dual role as comic entertainer and as providing the exhausted *dalang* with periodic respites. Even the most seasoned clowns are reluctant to reach too far back in their creative portfolios for more risqué material.



Fig. 33. Bulus, right, mixes things up with the audience, while Miska performs the female clown-servant, Tembem, c.1970s. Photographer Unknown.

Bulus' local performances had to be tamed down considerably. He once accused a local supervisor of stealing asphalt earmarked for road construction, and selling it to line his own pockets instead. Sujana instructed Bulus to tone things down. Fortunately for Sujana and the rest of his vulnerable troupe, he did just that.<sup>543</sup>

Bulus' inability to connect with his overseas audiences linguistically proved troubling for him. The success of his offshore performances was solely dependent upon his physical timing and comic skill (which were considerable). He was a superb physical comedian but, for Bulus, the word was king. Ron Bogley, who assisted the Asia Society tour, recalls Bulus had more trouble than the other artists adjusting to his new environs because the content of his message was lost on the English-speaking audiences. Bulus had an epiphany near the end of the tour, however. He realized that his physical skill was sufficient to make his point. He was able to let go of his disappointment, which reportedly showed in his last few performances. They shined.<sup>544</sup>

#### **THE *DALANG* AT WORK**

In generations past, the majority of *dalang* could count on seasonal work in *sawah* (wet-rice) farming, though it was seldom sufficient for an entire family. Secondary and often tertiary revenue sources were required. Monica Wulff describes a series of ephemeral jobs held down by *dalang topeng* Sawitri and troupe members in the

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<sup>543</sup> Sujana Arja, pers. comm., 26 June 2005.

<sup>544</sup> Ron Bogley, pers. comm., 14 March 2009.



1990s, among them, “rolling cigarettes, peeling onions for local industries, cooking and selling food, selling clothing door to door, and working as seasonal labourers...”<sup>545</sup>

Success came to sisters Dewi and Sawitri’s late in their careers. Their belated, well-deserved recognition was due to two factors. First, *topeng Losari*’s unique movement lexicon was unknown outside of their region until the 1980s due to Losari’s geographic isolation and years of inactivity. Their village was approximately five kilometers from the Central Java border. But it was the sisters’ concentrated, mystical orientation, subsiding in most other regions, combined with their style, intensity, and performative power that compelled dramaturg W S Rendra to bring their artistry to a wider audience.<sup>546</sup> Rendra first saw the sisters perform at *Taman Budaya* in Yogyakarta in 1982. He invited them to offer a workshop for members of his theatre company, Bengkel Teater.<sup>547</sup>

When Rendra visited the dancers in Losari, he was disturbed by their impoverished living conditions. Noting that the sole remaining instrument in their

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<sup>545</sup> Wulff, Monica (2006a). “Dancing in the ‘Contact Zone’” *PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 3, 2 (2006a), 17. <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/ojs/index.php/portal/article/view/168> (accessed 22 January 2009)

<sup>546</sup> The reader may recall that Rendra refused to support *Manipol-USDEK*, much to the chagrin of Sukarno and put his full support behind the cultural manifesto, *Manifes Kebudayaan* in 1964. He was imprisoned in 1962 and 1963 under suspicion of subversion. His human rights activism would later be at odds with Soeharto as well.

<sup>547</sup> W S Rendra, interview, 8 July 2006.

The Bengkel Theater was founded by Rendra in 1967 in Yogyakarta. The company’s current home is Depok, near Jakarta. Rendra minimizes his role in *topeng Losari*’s success, yet he was actively engaged in its promotion. He wrote articles about the sisters, including “*Keanggunan Penari-Penari Losari*” [“The Elegance of the Losari Dancers”], which years later was expanded to an entire chapter of his memoir.. *Mutiara* 282, 24 November – 7 December 1982. See also Zair Mahessa’s article on the Rendra and *topeng Losari*, “*Saya Menulis Jawaban Baku*” *Pikiran Rakyat*. 30 January 1994; Rendra, *Memberi Makna pada Hidup yang Fana*. Edi Haryono, ed. (Jakarta: Penerbit Pabelan Jayakarta, 1999).

*gamelan* was a single *kendang gede*,<sup>548</sup> Rendra approached the Indonesian daily newspaper *Kompas*, which agreed to commission a full *gamelan* for the sisters. In the interim, a loaner was located at a neighboring Buddhist temple until the *gamelan* was completed. *Kompas* was an interesting and logical choice as it is the largest daily newspaper in Indonesia and has funded other visual art projects.<sup>549</sup>

In addition to Rendra, *ketoprak* and transvestite mask dancer, Didik Nini Thowok, who studied *topeng* with Sudji and later championed Sawitri, has been an important advocate of *topeng* outside of Cirebon. He honored his two teachers at his Yogyakarta school in commemoration of his fortieth birthday on 13 November 1994.<sup>550</sup> Sawitri danced “*Tari Topeng Klana*,” as did Tursini, who represented her late mother, Sudji, and the Palimanan style.

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<sup>548</sup> The *kendang* configuration for *topeng Cirebon* is comprised of two large drums [*kendang gede*] and two smaller ones [*ketipung*]. The *ketipung* are positioned on top of the *kendang gede*. For more on Cirebon *gamelan* structure, see Michael Wright’s *The Music Culture of Cirebon*. PhD dissertation. (University of California, Los Angeles, 1978).

<sup>549</sup> Rendra, pers. comm., 8 July 2006.

*Kompas* was founded on June 28, 1965 and published by the late Chinese-Indonesian P. K Ojong and Jakob Oetama as a Catholic initiative associated with the *Partai Katolik* [Catholic Party]. When the Party, however, was merged with the Indonesian Democratic Party in 1973, *Kompas* tried to position itself as an independent newspaper, although most Indonesians still link it to its Catholic roots. *Kompas* runs an art gallery in Jakarta and has occasionally sponsored exhibitions. See Jennifer Lindsay, *Cultural Organization in Southeast Asia. A Guide for Artists, Performers and Cultural Workers*. Sydney: Australia Council, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Myer Foundation, (1994), 12; Peter van der Veer and Shoma Munshi. *Media, War, and Terrorism: Responses from the Middle East and Asia*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 161.

<sup>550</sup> Didik Nini Thowok, pers. comm., 21 December 2007.



Fig. 34. Left to right: Didik Nini Thowok, Sawitri, Tursini, Bekti Budi Hastuti (the choreographer of Didik's namesake, *Tari Nini Thowok*), Sultan Hamengku Buwono X, Professor R. M. Soedarsono, and Niesby Sabakingkin (from *Minggu Pasar* newspaper in Yogyakarta). 1994. Photo courtesy of Didik Nini Thowok

It is clear, then, that those artistic debates first sparked in the 1950s and 1960s determined the subsequent discourse in which all kinds of borders would be crossed. This applied not only to boundaries between artists (the majority of whom were impoverished, divorced, elderly, and/or widowed women), but between racial categories, intra-religious discourse, and within the print media to whom Ben Anderson and Marshall McLuhan ascribed intractable power.<sup>551</sup> Clearly, this great divide was being bridged in previously unexamined, creative ways.

Few *dalang* can earn a living solely from performing and/or teaching. Teaching *topeng* at the *Kraton Kecirebonan* and *Kraton Kanoman* has historically been the

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<sup>551</sup> Anderson, "Idea of Power in Javanese Culture," 17-77; McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 170-75.  
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province of *dalang* who trace their lineage to the *walisanga*. This genealogy is the most important feature in establishing a *dalang*'s career. Unlike the *kraton*'s *wayang* tradition, no single *topeng*-style dominates today. Sudji's last student, Nani Kadmini, for example, who is now in her late thirties, teaches Palimanan style at *Kraton Kasepuhan* and *Kraton Kanoman*.<sup>552</sup> While Nani is not Sudji's descendent, she is "like family" and the only active *topeng* dancer from Cirebon who studied most of the dances with her. In fact, different *topeng* styles alternate today in classes at the two palaces: *topeng Losari* is taught by Noor Anani, and *topeng Slangit* by Inu, Astori, and Tomi. Tomi is one of the most frequently hired *topeng* dancers in Cirebon today, even though he lacks *keturunan*. Their esteemed *kraton* posts, then, signal the changing climate of *topeng*'s prestige and its mystical underpinnings.

With *kraton* teaching positions scarce and Western interest in *topeng* in decline by the mid-1980s, *dalang* had to cast their nets further in order to attract students. During the course of my fieldwork (2003, 2004, 2005-06), I observed many *topeng* classes in Palimanan and Slangit, Cirebon, taught by Tursini and Sujana Arja, respectively. Other classes were held by Wangi in Tambi and Rasinah in Pekandangan, Indramayu. Pedagogical praxis and student populations varied greatly across locales. While Tursini of Palimanan has not performed in many years, she teaches her

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<sup>552</sup> This is a problematic designation, for Nani only studied three Palimanan-style dances with Sudji: Rummyang, Tumenggung, and Klana. She later studied Panji with Sujana Arja (Slangit style) and Pamindo (Samba) with Pa Kayat, a Priangan-style *wayang wong* performer. Nani Kadmini, pers. comm., 1 April 2006.

After Sudji's death, her nephew Sana, a *tukang kendang* trained also as a *dalang topeng* corrected Nani's movements, many of which Sudji had "borrowed" from Sujana's style. Borrowing has been a prevalent (though unspoken) activity among *dalang topeng* since at least the nineteenth century. Sudji's borrowings, however, were more obvious than how other dancers integrated movements and continues to be debated among *dalang*, musicians and *topeng* historians.

grandchildren. The informality of her classes most closely resembles the transmission of *topeng* prior to *Gestok*, when those receiving instruction were the *dalang*'s family. It most definitely was not a for-profit enterprise. Palimanan no longer has an active *gaya*. When the Palimanan style is mentioned today, it is typically nostalgic with references to Wentar or his daughters Dasih or Sudji as they were the most important *dalang* to emerge from Palimanan in the mid-twentieth century. Of the remaining *topeng* classes I attended, teaching was financially driven to some degree, with students comprised mainly of young girls. Slangit *topeng* classes are held daily. Each Sunday classes are accompanied by the *gamelan*. The students were all local villagers. Some students walked several miles to and from class. The typical Slangit class numbered between fifteen and twenty students. Inu and Astori led most classes. Their father, Sujana Arja, who was then ill, nonetheless presided over each class, correcting students' movements as necessary. At the end of the class, all of the female students lined up, thanked Sujana, and handed him payment for the class, either in the form of *kretek* cigarettes, a few coins, or a cup of rice, before embarking on the long walk home.

Most of Rasinah's students hailed from the city of Indramayu in 2005 and 2006, with private instruction and small classes of two or three students the norm. With few exceptions, the students who came to her home studio were the progeny of bankers and civil servants. She also taught a large class at a neighborhood school once a week. While Indramayu is an impoverished regency, Rasinah's students comprise a higher socio-economic strata than Sujana's. The children I observed at Rasinah's studio in 2005 were chaperoned by one or both parents. They were served coffee and fruit while observing class. Mothers sometimes corrected their childrens' movements or critiqued their

technique during the breaks. I did not observe this at any other studio; however, it was unusual for parents to be present at class. Endo Suanda points out that it is considered unacceptable to be critical of the *dalang*.<sup>553</sup> Indeed, the parents' critiques were not aimed at the *dalang*, but at their children. Nonetheless, it could be argued to constitute a passive critique of the guru.

Rasinah's teaching style is unique for her generation. This likely resulted from ruptures in her own training. In addition to the Japanese occupation that affected all *dalang*, her father's premature death when Rasinah was still a child meant she grew up fast.<sup>554</sup> This disjuncture dictated that she complete her *topeng* studies years later with one of her husbands, a *tukang kendang* from another village. Moreover, her absence from the *topeng* circuit for roughly forty years likely impacted her teaching style – at least with her non-*keturunan* students, including myself.<sup>555</sup> Rasinah became the most financially savvy *dalang* of all though she only began dancing again in 1994 at the urging of *topeng* scholars, Endo Suanda and Toto Amsar Suanda. Rasinah's kindness translated to the class, yet she displayed equal skill in business. Her interactions with students were more formally regimented than I observed with other *dalang*. Many of

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<sup>553</sup> Endo Suanda, "Cirebonese Topeng and Wayang of the Present Day," *Asian Music*, 16:2 (1985), 118.

<sup>554</sup> Her father was primarily a *dalang wayang* and her mother a *ronggeng*. Sadly, her father died before she had learned all of the *topeng* dances, and she studied the rest with her second husband, a drummer from a different village in Indramayu. Rasinah incorporates many different regional styles of *topeng*, borrowing heavily from her first husband's style (also of Indramayu, but a different village), as well as that of Suji and Sujana. Likewise, as mentioned above, she was not an active *dalang topeng* for many years, beginning with the Japanese occupation. During this time, Rasinah felt it was too dangerous to perform and changed her focus to choreographing and performing modern dances (*kreasi baru*)

<sup>555</sup> In addition to observing many classes at Rasinah's studio and the local elementary and junior high school, I studied one dance with her.

Rasinah's students were active in the *topeng* competition circuit. She ran a tight ship, complete with schedules, costume fittings, and mask sales.<sup>556</sup>

Rasinah's sole surviving child (of four), Wacih, is a former *bodor* now in her forties. She assisted her mother, orchestrating the sale of *topeng* costumes to her students. Wacih's son, Ade, though only in his twenties, was Rasinah's business manager until her stroke in 2005. She continued teaching neighborhood children until early 2008, when her health took a serious turn.<sup>557</sup>

I observed one of Wangi's classes, also in Indramayu, whom the reader will recall toured in Robert Wilson's production, *I La Galigo*. Wangi's class in Indramayu was intimate; it was composed of four teenage girls who had been studying with her for some time. Wangi, who is in her late forties, was hands-on with her students, observing and correcting their movements as they moved through space.<sup>558</sup> The majority of Wangi's students, and some of Rasinah's, wore the Muslim head covering, *jilbab* during class. This was in sharp contrast with the Slangit students who are disinclined to cover their heads except when required.<sup>559</sup>

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<sup>556</sup> Since many of Rasinah's students participate in *topeng* competitions, her *bodor*, Karwita Plongo (alias Plongo), turned his attention to mask making in the past decade and sells masks to her students. Karawita Plongo, pers. comm., 29 May 2005.

<sup>557</sup> Kompas, "Maestro Tarian kehidupan Rasinah," 23 February 2008.

<sup>558</sup> This was similar to how Dasih worked with me in the late 1970s. Dasih, who was elderly and infirm, sat in a chair within inches of where I stood, clicking and humming the melody as I moved, while simultaneously pushing and pulling my limbs as necessary.

<sup>559</sup> Veiling in Java is a relatively recent phenomenon that has grown in both meaning and popularity over the past generation among middle- and upper-middle class girls and, more recently, their mothers and grandmothers. This shift, most notable in Java's large cities, resulted from the Islamic resurgence. An analysis of veiling among young cosmopolitan Javanese women since *reformasi* is found in Nancy J. Smith-Hefner, "Javanese Women and the Veil in Post-Soeharto Indonesia," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 66 (2007), 389-420.

## **TOPENG'S PROGENY: FROM THE KAMPUNG<sup>560</sup> TO THE ACADEMY**

It would be fair to say that the younger generation of *dalang topeng*, who are now in their twenties and early thirties, are still in the process of mastering their craft. Had *bebarang* not been banned they would probably have had sufficient opportunities to become full-fledged *dalang* sooner, but opportunities today are few and far between. Technically speaking, Sawitri's nieces, Noor Anani and Kartini<sup>561</sup> are *dalang topeng* in the traditional sense of talent and *keturunan*. That is, they have mastered the lexicon and preparations that go hand-in-hand with the honorific "*dalang topeng*." The same is true of Sujana's sons, Inu Kertapati and Astori.<sup>562</sup> Wiyono, a son of *dalang topeng* Keni Arja, is a fledgling *dalang topeng*. He has landed steady work with Cirebon's regional government (*Pemda*), a growing trend among other *dalang* who comprise the first few generations of college-educated village performers. With the exception of a few puppeteers who are still in demand and earn a high salary, civil servant posts or teaching at state arts institutions are prestigious positions, and among the few career paths where artists can get a retirement pension. *Dalang* who either opt out of or are not hired for such posts are rarely in a position to restrict their activities to *topeng* and amend their repertoire. During *Mulud*, for example, Noor Anani performed *Jaipongan*<sup>563</sup> and Inu Kertapati danced the male court dance *tayuban* [fig. 88] The path to becoming a *dalang*, then, is limited today. At least as far back as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *bebarang* was the proving ground for young artists; it was how they gained

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<sup>560</sup> "village"

<sup>561</sup> Kartini is around thirty-two years old. I have never seen Kartini perform, but have been told by many *topeng* aficionados that she is a stellar dancer.

<sup>562</sup> Since Sujana's death in 2006, Inu is considered a *dalang topeng*.

<sup>563</sup> A modern Sundanese music and dance form based on *ketuk tilu* that is popular in Cirebon.



experience and a following. Today, such opportunities are elusive, thus *dalang*-in-training must be diligent in creating opportunities.

The migration from the *kampung* to the academy requires transformations of space and knowledge. Today's young *dalang* commit to stretching, alignment, exams, and mastery of local and transnational movement vocabularies. Just a few generations ago, the *dalang*'s education was gauged by a very different standard: one that privileged the inner life. This is the focus of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4: ENGAGING THE BODY AND SENSES

### TENDING TO THE MIND AND BODY

Indonesia's cosmopolitan playwright and director W. S. Rendra was among Sawitri's most vocal advocates, yet he took issue with what he considered her failure to practice (*latihan*) her craft. He concluded that *topeng* training was not as rigorous as that of his actors at his theatre workshop, *Bengkel Teater Rendra*: "We practice more."<sup>564</sup> On the one hand, Rendra is correct: the training is vastly different; on the other hand, it is impossible to measure these two distinctive forms. Paul Stange asserts, when looking at culture, it is imperative to consider the *politik perhatian* (politics of meditation) - a code for the way we pay attention.<sup>565</sup> In this chapter, I argue that in the context of performance *how* one trains to be an artist is its own form of meditation. Thus, the *dalang* does not conceptualize her training in terms of practice, but in spiritual, contemplative, and ascetic terms. Rudolf Arnheim understood this inevitability when he wrote, "[t]rue contemplation is not mere waiting and gathering; it is essentially active."<sup>566</sup>

Unlike a play that lasts a few hours, *topeng* may go on all day, with the *dalang* on stage for hours. Throughout the day, her emotions must be pliable; her mind and body "empty."<sup>567</sup> Endo Suanda suggests that the concept of "emptiness" is related to

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<sup>564</sup> W. S. Rendra, interview, 8 July 2006. Rendra's theatre company is based outside of Jakarta in Depok, West Java.

<sup>565</sup> See Paul Stange, *Politik Perhatian: Rasa dalam Kebudayaan Jawa* [The Politics of Meditation: Rasa in Javanese Culture], (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1998).

<sup>566</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, *Toward a Psychology of Art: Collected Essays*, (Berkeley: University of California Press [1966], 1994), 298.

<sup>567</sup> The theme of emptiness is associated with Buddhism, of course, but it is also an important aspect of *kejawen* (Javanese mysticism) and common among *dalang*. It is particularly resonant with ascetic practices, e.g. fasting. Thus it is constellated around both literal emptiness, of the stomach as well as

forgetting, i.e. forgetting the dance pattern – a passive activity – while making the dancer receptive to improvisation (*jogedan*) and “divine inspiration.” Suanda further contends that most *dalang* are not eager to remember, but prefer to focus on their surroundings or to meditate. It is not surprising, then, that remembering and forgetting are tied into body consciousness, a topic we shall return to shortly.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) perceives his own body as “...always presented to me from the same angle. Its permanence is not a permanence in the world, but a permanence on my part.”<sup>568</sup> Body image is the snapshot of our own body that we have formed in our mind. In psychophysiological terms, the body has a variety of impressions, be they tactile, thermal, or pain. The way the body is perceived in terms of its energy sense, musculature, posture, and the unity of the body is more than a perception; it is what Paul Schilder refers to as “a schema of our body, or bodily schema,” or body image.<sup>569</sup>

In discussing body image in *topeng*, I am attuned to the collection of feelings, which are sometimes conscious, but more often unconscious, of where the body is at a given moment while moving through space. This includes the *dalang*'s awareness of breathing, balance, gravity, tension, and focus, while signaling the many emotionally charged feelings one has about the body itself. Among the physiological shifts *dalang* reported, the following were consistent: cognitive disruption, change in the quality of

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psycho-emotional emptiness. The complexities of this issue are nuanced for *dalang*. This is examined later in this chapter in the context of letting go in *dzikir*. Suanda, “Dancing in Cirebonese Topeng,” 11-12; Laurie Margot Ross, “Mask, Gender, and Performance in Indonesia: An Interview with Didik Nini Thowok,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 22, no. 2 (2005): 221.

<sup>568</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, (London: Routledge, 1962), 90.

<sup>569</sup> An example of body schema is provided by Schilder: when a limb is amputated, a phantom member appears; in this way, the individual still feels that the original limb exists. Paul Schilder, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body. Studies in the Constructive Energies of the Psyche*, (New York: International Universities Press, 1950), 11.

breathing, and displacement of body feeling in specific parts of the body. Consequently, a question emerges in relation to the mask: how can covering the face create such neurological and physical imbalance?

First and foremost, the face is strongly connected to ego function. Sensory perception, and those orifices that are keyed into the senses – the ears, nose, and mouth – function through the face and head as well. Tasting, smelling, seeing, thinking, breathing, happen through the face, and our most plastic avenue of emotions communicate in and on the face itself. Some senses are elevated when wearing a mask, while others are suppressed. Keeping the mask in place by biting into a foreign object (most often a piece of leather that is hammered inside the mask) generates certain physical tensions that originate in the jaw and migrate through the body. But this same tension offers a release, for it provides an intimate connection with the spirit of the mask and, hence, with God. The breath that passes is both a literal and existential translation. The mask maker, Kandeg reportedly blew his breath upon each mask at the moment of completion to bring it to life.<sup>570</sup> So, too, the dancer breathes life into the mask through its connective tissue. The teeth are clenched, but the mouth remains slightly open allowing the dancer's breath to establish its own rhythmic flow. It is this contact that brings the mask to life. How, then, are the senses suppressed? It is widely known that covering the face simultaneously disinhibits ego function while discharging emotional affect. Many *topeng* dancers describe entering a trance-like state. Yet, I have only once witnessed a *dalang topeng* enter this rarified state, complete with trembling and body

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<sup>570</sup> Deena Burton, "The Ancestors of Pak Kandeg of Suranenggala: the performance history of a master mask maker." Unpublished essay, (New York, n.d.), 12.

flailing as outlined by Gilbert Rouget.<sup>571</sup> But whereas trance is eagerly anticipated in many mask cultures, including Hindu Bali,<sup>572</sup> for Cirebonese Muslims – including *dalang topeng* – deep trance is both feared and to be avoided. Perhaps this is because public, embodied revelation is not in the majority of most Cirebonese people’s lexicon, regardless of how keenly it is practiced behind closed doors.

The late Bandung dancer, Nugraha Sudirdja, shared a telling story with Endo Suanda many years ago about intuition and the mind-body connection. The dancer asked *dalang topeng* Dasih to demonstrate the character Klana. As there was neither a gamelan nor the proper mask on hand, Nugraha handed her the mask of Tumenggung to demonstrate Klana’s movements. Her execution of the first (unmasked) part of the dance was uneventful, but when she placed the Klana mask over her face she automatically

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<sup>571</sup> Gilbert Rouget distinguishes two theories of trance. He argues that it is a state of consciousness with two underlying components: one being psychophysiological and the other cultural. He further distinguishes between two kinds of possession: “possession trance” and “shamanic trance.” In the former, some kind of external spirit(s) enter the individual’s body, temporarily displacing the ego for the duration of possession. With shamanic trance, it is the shaman who is said to have an out-of-body experience, which involves travel outside of the body. Trance very closely resembles an epileptic seizure. A seizure often occurs within one or two minutes of having an “aura,” which is also known as a “simple partial seizure.” The term “aura” is derived from Latin, and means “puff of air,” or “breeze.” Symptoms are similar to the experience of trance, even in its description of a breeze, and the notion of shamanic flight. This term resonates with the one used for shamanic trance in the Malay world, *angin* (wind). Carol Laderman describes *angin* in shamanic practice as “Inner Winds, personality, talents, drives.” *Angin* also relates to very specific personality types/spirits. Epileptologist Kenneth D. Laxer, M.D. describes a relationship between religious experiences and complex partial seizures. A classic example is the fifteenth century French heroine Jeanne d’Arc (Joan of Arc) whose visions were triggered by church bells. Laxer concludes that her “visions” were likely seizures. He describes other forms of epilepsy that can be triggered by specific stimuli, including where an individual’s self-stimulatory behavior triggers their seizure. For others, auditory or visual hallucinations can be their auras. For this reason, people with seizure disorder often acquire shaman status, but there exists a major distinction. According to Eliade, “The only difference between a shaman and an epileptic is that the latter cannot deliberately enter into trance.” Marcea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, [1964], 1970), 24; Kenneth D. Laxer, MD, pers. comm., 20 November 2007. Carol Laderman, *Taming the Wind of Desire: Psychology, Medicine, and Aesthetics in Malay Shamanistic Performance*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 342; Gilbert Rouget, *Music and Trance. A Theory of the Relations Between Music and Possession*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 13.

<sup>572</sup> Jane Belo provides richly diverse examples of the ubiquity of trance across Bali and how it takes hold. Interestingly, the only one of her subjects that included masks was the witch Rangda, who does not enter a trance state. Jane Belo, *Trance in Bali*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).

shifted into the character Tumenggung. Nugraha asked why she changed the dance. “Because of that mask,” Dasih replied.<sup>573</sup> Suanda offers two interpretations for this sequence: either the *dalang* had “possessed” the spirit of Tumenggung or she made a conscious decision to dance Tumenggung because it would have been “uncomfortable” to dance Klana with “that” mask even though Nugraha requested it. Suanda concludes that either reason supports the dancer’s embodiment of the mask.<sup>574</sup>

Another example of body awareness – and the intimate relationship between mind and body - is explicit in a *jampi* (incantation) provided by Sujana Arja. Prior to every performance Sujana would fast in order to attract an audience, but also to control his bodily functions for the duration of the performance, which often lasted many hours:

In the name of God, the Beneficent the Merciful, bind all of my feces and my urine, so as not to cause stomach problems – transfer the trouble to the stomach of *Mbah Kuwu* [Walangsungsang].<sup>575</sup> Make the heart of every person be attracted to me.

*Bismillahirrohmaanirrohim, Singseten taine isun, uyuhe isun, aja singset – singset weteng isun, singseten wetenge Mbah Kuwu. Rep sirep jantung atijne wong sejagat.*

What initially appears to be a shallow wish is anything but. Anderson has commented on the accumulation and absorption of power being enhanced by certain ascetic practices, including being in the “possession of certain objects or persons regarded as being ‘filled’ with Power.”<sup>576</sup> Keeler describes ascetic practices such as giving one’s body and voice

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<sup>573</sup> Endo Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master’s thesis, 199-200.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid: 200

<sup>575</sup> *Dalang* refer to Walangsungsang as Mbah Kuwu, which they consider more respectful. Walangsungsang was the first Muslim in Cirebon and is of great significance to *dalang* and non-*dalang* alike.

<sup>576</sup> Anderson, “Idea of Power in Javanese Culture,” 25-28.

over to spirits and “the potency of his *batin*” as mechanisms to achieve power.<sup>577</sup> The relationship between the inner self (*batin*) and controlling one’s environment is, thus, cosmically linked. Even outside a *tasawuf* frame, there is an Islamic connection in that urine and feces are considered minor impurities (*hadath asghar*).<sup>578</sup> For this reason, ones’ orifices must be tended to prior to *shalat*. This is achieved by first excreting bodily waste; then, the entire body is cleansed with emphasis on the mouth and nostrils; the ears and feet are also wiped. Thus, to the *dalang*, Islam and *topeng* are not merely compatible; they are a synthetic process. Sujana’s request to “transfer the trouble to the stomach of Mbah Kuwu” alludes to Walangsungsang’s (Cirebon’s first Muslim) supernatural, curative potential.

*Topeng* thus is a living form – embodied and animated – whose existence depends upon journeys of mind and body. The *dalang*’s *raison d’etre* is to infuse designated objects with meaning and set them vibrating. Unlike the text-based puppeteer, for whom the story reigns supreme, the *dalang topeng* is muted. This relational experience to silence, I argue, is simultaneously restrictive, spiritual, and subversive. It is restrictive in that holding the mask in place with one’s teeth renders speech impossible while imposing physiological and neurological shifts in perception. It is spiritual in the *dalang*’s vertical and horizontal relationship to God through silent *dzikir* – an interiorized journey, whose locus is the heart (*kalbu*).<sup>579</sup> Finally, it is subversive, for the suppression of uttered sound signals the body as the compass; it is

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<sup>577</sup> Ward Keeler, *Javanese Shadow Plays, Javanese Selves*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) 121.

<sup>578</sup> This compares with the bodily waste associated with menses and childbirth; these are more strenuously regulated and require ritual bathing prior to fasting and praying.

<sup>579</sup> *Kalbu* is perceived of as an organ of spiritual perception.

the point of departure and return; it is the source of ultimate power (*kekuatan*). It circulates. This is demonstrated in the *guru/murid* dyad by way of the incantation-driven initiatory bath, *mandikan kembang*.<sup>580</sup> A similar dyad flows between the *dalang* and spectator resulting from the *dalang*'s *tirakat-puasa*<sup>581</sup> practice in combination with *jampi*, which may or may not be augmented with *susuk*.<sup>582</sup> This intimate relationship conjures a variety of responses ranging from intuitive to prescribed and is elegantly articulated in *tawur* – spontaneous offerings often associated with the spectator's enjoyment of music and dance.

In thinking about text, literacy is often assumed. Malay culture, however, is often orally transmitted. *Topeng* is an oral "text." Amin Sweeney provides an exquisite example of how language performs in *Authors and Audiences in Traditional Malay Literature*,<sup>583</sup> with the Malay/Indonesian word *baca*. Today, *baca* translates as "to read," but its meaning was long ago decidedly oral: "to read aloud" or "to recite." These earlier constructs continue to be circumscribed in matters of religious and spiritual praxis, such as *membaca Quran* (recite the *Quran*), *membaca doa* (say a prayer), and *membaca mantera* (recite an incantation). Most important to our discussion is the corporality of sound expressed in *membaca dalam hati* (recitation of the heart).<sup>584</sup>

Sweeney's example is instructive in contemplating sound's interiority. Certain sounds – particularly sacred sounds – prioritize the ear to feeling. The ear, thus, is the

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<sup>580</sup> lit: flower bath.

<sup>581</sup> Intensive periods of meditation and fasting. *Tirakat-puasa* is the province of artists with *keturunan*. Endo Suanda says that those lacking the proper lineage are not considered strong enough to endure such rigorous asceticism.

<sup>582</sup> *Susuk* is the subcutaneous implantation of metals for purposes of personal power and attraction.

<sup>583</sup> Amin Sweeney *Authors and Audiences in Traditional Malay Literature*, (Berkeley: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, University of California, 1980), 15-6.

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-6.



receiver that allows sound to enter and be experienced in the body. It is precisely this quality that made music sacred in the medieval era.<sup>585</sup> *Dzikir* - particularly silent *dzikir* – is understood as embodied sonic theology for the viscerally attuned *dalang*. This is explicit in the teaching model employed by the three *dalang* I studied with. The *dalang* leads while the disciple follows behind (*ngintil*); the guru, whose movements are not fully visible from behind, meters out the rhythm, alternating between clicking her tongue against the roof of her mouth, humming the melody, and clapping her hands. In so doing, this one-person oral symphony reproduces the essential cadence of the *kendang* (drum), *saron*, and gong. As a consequence, the *dalang*'s body provides the aural markers that the young dancer must master before dancing with a live gamelan.<sup>586</sup> Over time, these rhythms are imprinted in the student's brain. This neurological mapping later affords more skilled dancers the creative space to improvise.<sup>587</sup> Like any artistic rule, once mastered, it may be broken. The senses, then, play an important role in *topeng* – not only sound but the tactile experience of initiation, provided by the ritual bath and devotional pilgrimages to ancestral graves (*ziarah*).

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<sup>585</sup> I am grateful to Paul Stange for his insights on aural embodiment.

<sup>586</sup> This typically occurs after the movements have been memorized. *Topeng* and musical instruction are similar in Cirebon in their emphases on watching, rather than teaching. Suanda has suggested that this method, in combination with harsh critiques of musicians' errors, attributes to practitioners' diminished knowledge. Endo Suanda, "Cirebonese Topeng and Wayang of the Present Day" in *Asian Music* 16/2 (1985), 118, fn.10.

<sup>587</sup> The complex role of improvisation in *topeng Cirebon* is discussed in Endo Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, 171-73. With the introduction of cassette players/recorders, *topeng* performances and practice sessions could be recorded. These recordings were perceived as superior to the simulated clicking and singing of the *dalang/guru*, and in subsequent generations have largely replaced them. These devices have had an intractable effect not only on the way dance is taught, but also on how it moved away from the highly individualistic medium of expressive interpretation to a more rigidly adhered to order. For a discussion of how the 'cassette culture' industry has affected the Sundanese rod-puppet theatre, *wayang golek*, see chapter 6 of Andrew Weintraub, *Power Plays: Wayang Golek Puppet Theater of West Java*, (Ohio: Institute of South East Asian Studies, 2004).

## MANDIKAN KEMBANG: THE CONCEPT OF THE BATH

In past generations the study of *topeng* often followed an initiatory bath, called *mandikan kembang* (lit: flower bath). This very old practice may predate Islam, yet is so indigenized in its conceptualization of *tawajjuh*<sup>588</sup> that it is considered the first stage of *tarekat* (the path of enlightenment). In the context of *topeng*, it inaugurates the non-verbal contract between *dalang* and disciple that allows the sensory transmission of power to occur.

The *mandikan kembang* has a *kejawen*<sup>589</sup> cast; nonetheless, its *tarekat* features are apparent. Engseng Ho describes the relationship between sensory experience and presence: “The mobilization of the senses is directed toward a prototypical goal: the “presencing” (*hadra*) of the prophet Muhammad. The ability to perceive the Prophet’s presence while awake is a high station of Sufistic achievement.”<sup>590</sup> One way “presence” is achieved is through coffee, whose olfactory and psychic benefits include inducing the appetite through smell and as a stimulant that energizes the participant’s focus during extended periods of *dzikir*.<sup>591</sup> Coffee is a staple of the initiatory bath.

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<sup>588</sup> Arabic: *tawajjuh*; lit: “To face Allah and meditate on Him.”

<sup>589</sup> Traditional Javanese mysticism.

<sup>590</sup> Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 87.

<sup>591</sup> *Ibid*, 85-86. The use of coffee during nighttime *dzikir* appears to have originated among the *Shādhiliyya* in Yemen, according to Ho. In nineteenth century Iran, the coffeehouse was a place that combined coffee and entertainments, including dancing.

Siddique argues that while many historians believe the Dutch introduced coffee to Cirebon, others hold one of the first Muslims in Cirebon responsible, Shaykh Kahfi from Baghdad; hence his name, Shaykh Kopi, or Shaykh Coffee. It naturally follows, according to Siddique, that this is why it is locally referred to as Arabic coffee (*Kopi Arabica*) on Java. I have not been able to substantiate this claim; however, it is plausible since Iraq was among the first to learn of coffee in the fifteenth century, which spread there from Yemen. They never switched their allegiance to tea like many other Middle Eastern countries. The popularization of coffee on a global scale is connected to the trade networks following Europe’s sixteenth century discovery of the Cape route to India. It was not until 1628 that the VOC first bought coffee from Yemen intended for the Iranian market. It would take a century before the Dutch began coffee production

Not all *dalang* incorporate the special bath, but it was a prerequisite before working with Dasih. Her former students Enoch Atmadibrata, his niece, Lilis Haryatika, Endo Suanda, and I all had them. Dasih was among the last *dalang* to continue this practice and, as such, a detailed description of my bath follows.

### **The Ritual**

I received the *mandikan kembang* exactly one week before my studies began with Dasih.<sup>592</sup> I was instructed to supply the following items: a batik sarong, traditional Javanese *kebaya* (blouse), and *minyak wangi* (perfume). I had a *kebaya* made and purchased the batik and perfume. Dasih supplied the remaining items: coffee, tea, flowers, leaves, red and white sugar, white and gray powdered incense (*kemenyan*), fourteen bananas, one cigar, a spoon, a small piece of paper with my first name and birth date written on it, and small change (4 @ 5 rupiah; 1 @ 50 rupiah; 1 @ 100 rupiah).

Dasih arrived wearing her *kebaya* and batik (as she did every day). Before I changed into my special outfit, she prepared the materials for the bath in my bedroom. She then folded my *kebaya* and batik and placed them on the floor in front of us, lit some incense in a can, and poured water from the well into a large basin. She selected the choicest flowers and leaves and placed them in the basin, followed by the coins, sugar, and some of the perfume. She next placed the smoldering incense in front of her.

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in Java (and Ceylon). Thus, whether coffee had already been introduced by Yemeni traders is unknown. See Rudi Mathee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500-1900*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 144, 150-57; 238; Sharon Siddique, *Relics of the Past? A Sociological Study of the Sultanates of Cirebon, West Java*. Ph.D. Diss. (Universität Bielefeld, Germany 1977), 72.

<sup>592</sup> My *mandikan kembang* happened on 6 October 1977.

*Jampi* were recited while holding the paper with my name and birthday on it.<sup>593</sup> Once completed, she held the paper a few inches above the incense and taking my hands in hers, moved them in a circular motion above the burning incense. I could feel the heat against my palms, which now had grey incense residue on them. I was instructed to rub my hands over my face three times. Dasih then prepared one glass of coffee, one glass of tea, and one glass of holy water with flowers, which she scooped up from the bowl. She ate one banana before sipping from the coffee and tea with a spoon and then smoked the cigar.<sup>594</sup> Next she helped me change into my *kebaya* and sarong in anticipation of the bath.

Subsequently, Dasih carried the large bowl with the holy water into the bathroom, where the bath was to take place. She scooped up some of the special water with a plastic pot and, in a reversal of *ngintil*, she stood behind me and poured the water over my head. I was fully clothed and sopping wet. Dasih removed all my clothing except for my underpants, and placed them on the floor in front of my feet. I then squatted over these items while she continued to pour the water over me. She then removed my underpants and placed them between my feet along with my *kebaya*, sarong, and special bra. Next, Dasih took one leaf from the bowl and rubbed specific parts of my body with it. She pushed my legs apart and flexed my knees as she rubbed my legs. I then sat on the floor. She poured most of the remaining water over my vagina.

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<sup>593</sup> This was striking since Dasih could neither read nor write. It suggests her connection to magic codified in symbolic writing.

<sup>594</sup> Dasih explained that the cigar is an offering to the ancestors who enjoy smoking them and drinking and eating special foods such as sticky rice, biscuits, and catfish.

One by one, she placed the coins on my forehead until each one fell to the floor. This marked the end of the bath proper.<sup>595</sup>

Afterwards, Dasih inspected the flowers, leaves, and coins and returned them to the bowl while I got dressed. Facing me, she removed some flower petals from my hair. A glass was then filled with some of the remaining holy water. She took the rest of the water outside and buried it with the flowers, leaves, and coins.

About a half hour later, Dasih returned. She folded my water-drenched *kebaya* and sarong and placed them in a bag together with the unused tea, coffee, and sugar. She would take them home and incorporate them into her prayers. I asked: When will you return my beautiful new outfit? They would not be returned, she replied. They were an offering to the ancestors (*nenek moyang*) that she would bury near her home in Palimanan, where Cirebon's first Muslim, Walangsungsang is said to have visited.

Finally, I received explicit instructions for the next seven days: to eat two bananas each day – one before breakfast and one before bedtime - until all were finished; I had to refrain from participating in any physical activity. In the morning I was to splash the holy water over my face three times and rest until noon, after which I could resume my normal activities.

I accompanied Dasih home that night.<sup>596</sup> We held each other tight for a long time. I did not fully grasp what had just taken place, but I knew it was big. So big, that before I went to sleep that night I took copious notes, retracing every step in

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<sup>595</sup> I later realized that the parts of my body that Dasih had rubbed with the leaf were not coincidental; they were identical with the muscles that ached when classes began the following week. In this way, she was literally molding me into a dancer.

<sup>596</sup> A few weeks later I moved to Enoch Atmadibrata's home, where she then lived.

chronological order. I followed Dasih's instructions in the morning. One week later I began studying Panji.

### **Variations of Initiatory Transmission**

As mentioned above, Enoch Atmadibrata, who studied two dances with Dasih in the 1960s, also received a bath prior to his studies.<sup>597</sup> Atmadibrata describes the *mandi* as complementary to *susuk* in its mission of *kekuatan*.<sup>598</sup> He recalls that flowers, water, coffee, a cigar, and coins were incorporated into his bath. The coins were placed on his forehead and when Dasih strategically moved his head, they fell to the floor. Dasih was pleased. She said it was a sign of his personal power. Next she held and moved his hand in "simple dance movements." It was Dasih who did all of the drinking and smoking during my *mandi*; however, Atmadibrata drank the fluids and smoked the cigar during his.<sup>599</sup> Atmadibrata also gave Dasih a batik sarong as an offering.<sup>600</sup> Soon after the *mandi* he began his studies.<sup>601</sup>

Lilis Haryatika of Bandung studied with Dasih and Sujana Arja, respectively, in 1971.<sup>602</sup> While the young dancer received a full *mandikan kembang* from Dasih, Sujana's initiation for Lilis involved *ziarah*, followed by a regular bath (*mandi khusus*). At the graveyard, Sujana picked up some dirt and placed it under four strategic points on

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<sup>597</sup> He studied *Tari Topeng Tumenggung* and *Tari Topeng Klana*.

<sup>598</sup> Enoch Atmadibrata, pers. comm., 26 December 2003.

<sup>599</sup> This may be because the cigar is associated with male energy, or because all of the items are offerings to the ancestors.

<sup>600</sup> Endo Suanda also gave Dasih a sarong following his *mandi*, which "had to be given away to her, perhaps as a symbol of the 'dirt' that was taken out of my body." *Topeng* scholar Jakob Sumardjo believes that first bathing and then burying the sarong refers to the Sufi concept of "die before dying." Pers. comm., 4 February 2006.

<sup>601</sup> Enoch Atmadibrata, pers. comm., 30 December 2003.

<sup>602</sup> Lilis studied *Tari Topeng Kencana Wunggu* and *Rumyang* with Dasih, followed by *Tari Topeng Panji*, *Rumyang*, *Tumenggung*, and *Klana* with Sujana.

the crown of the *topeng* headdress. Like Dasih's ritual, the bath that followed incorporated a cigar.<sup>603</sup> The cigar, thus, apparently was a common initiatic feature. On the other hand, Sujana Arja preferred a practice inherited from his father Arja, wherein in addition to visiting the sacred site he embarked on a synchronized fast with the initiate, which Sujana supplemented with recited incantations in isolation. When I studied *Tari Topeng Panji* with him in 2005, this was the extent of the initiation: we had a synchronized fast in which I ate three bananas or one handful of rice each day for four days (he was amazed I lasted that long!) while he fasted for a full week. This type of fast is called *puasa mutih* (white fast). On the last day of the fast, Sujana ate or drank nothing (*mati geni*) to fortify the fast. I suspect I probably received a modified version of the initiation because I had not committed to study exclusively with him.<sup>604</sup>

Dasih's sister, Sudji, employed a similar ceremony with Didik Nini Thowok, when he studied with her in c.1978. Curiously, rather than serving to launch his studies, the *mandi* was saved for its conclusion. Once Didik completed his studies, Sudji prepared a special bath for him with flowers, while she burned incense and prayed in isolation. She then brought the flowered water outside and gave it to Didik. He recalls: "I took a bath at the well, under the sky and the moon's ray. But prior to bathing, I had to pray." Sudji asked him to recite the declaration of faith, *kalimat shahadat*.<sup>605</sup> Didik,

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<sup>603</sup> Sujana said he did not incorporate the *mandi*; however, it is plausible it was once included. Lilis Haryatika, pers. comm., 28 December 2003.

<sup>604</sup> Pamela Rogers-Aquiniga describes transitioning from being one of Sujana's students to fully committing to being his disciple. It was a decisive moment in which she "ceased to study with other *dalang topeng* and their students...[s]uch involvement would have been impossible had I remained a passive observer." Rogers-Aguinga, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis, 8-9.

<sup>605</sup> The first of the five pillars of Islam states: "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger." *Shahadah* is always the first step in becoming a Muslim and has a long history in *topeng*

who is not Muslim (he is Christian), silently substituted his own prayers. He then held his breath as Sudji poured the water over this body. He was instructed not to breath until this was executed three times, after which he took a regular bath.<sup>606</sup> Before Didik returned home to Yogyakarta, Sudji said something he never forgot:

“In the future, the mask will move to Yogyakarta.” At that time, I did not understand, but now I know she meant that the Cirebon mask would move to Yogyakarta ...and I would spread out to other mask forms. My mask studies began with Cirebon masks. I rarely perform Cirebon *topeng* anymore, but I am still using masks, so the meaning...is symbolic.<sup>607</sup>

As Didik’s reflection attests to, knowledge was hardly transparent. It was the disciple’s unspoken responsibility to decode.<sup>608</sup> This was (and is) equally true for family members and non-*keturunan* students. *Dalang* anticipated that only the most dedicated disciples would meditate on an abstract idea for years and that for less inspired students these were messages to the wind.

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where it is assumed to have been the primary mode of conversion to Islam and was the cost of admission to *topeng* and *wayang* performances.

<sup>606</sup> Didik Nini Thowok, pers. comm., 21 December 2007.

<sup>607</sup> Ross, “Mask, Gender, and Performance in Indonesia,” 222.

<sup>608</sup> A different interpretation of the same event is put forth in Jan Mrázek’s article on Didik Nini Thowok. According to the author, Didik interpreted Sudji’s comment to mean that he would *tetep nopeng* (continue performing *topeng*) once he returned home to Yogyakarta and that “the masks are going to move to Yogya.” These varied interpretations in two articles published the same year (2005), suggest the very fluid synthesis of memory. Jan Mrázek, “Masks and Selves in Contemporary Java: The Dances of Didik Nini Thowok,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 36, no. 2 (2005): 254.





Fig. 35. Sudji and Didik Nini Thowok, c.1978. Courtesy of Didik Nini Thowok

Sudji carrying out the *mandi* at the end of training signals the variation of initiation practices for outsiders. It also illustrates the nuanced idiosyncrasies of the rituals even among siblings. After all, I was an outsider, yet I received the *mandikan kembang*. Sudji reasoned that the movements had to be learned before they could be understood. Since Dasih was Sudji's teacher, it is very likely Sudji received a bath prior to her studies.<sup>609</sup> Indeed, Sudji's daughter Tursini, who also trained with Dasih, agrees: the bath occurs first.<sup>610</sup> These practices, then, were fluid even within families.

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<sup>609</sup> One of Dasih's chief complaints about her sister was that she often ignored the protocols inherited from their father, Wentar.

<sup>610</sup> Tursini, pers. comm., 23 June 2005.

Rasinah employs no initiatory *mandi* nor fast; students are expected to jump in. I recall my first meeting with Rasinah soon after I arrived in Indonesia in 2005. The goal of the visit was to introduce myself and ask permission to study *Tari Topeng Panji* with her. We had a very nice meeting and she agreed to teach me the dance. Just as the conversation was winding down and I was gathering my things to leave, Rasinah said “Well, let’s go! Let’s begin now!”

Thus, the spectrum of initiation practices among *dalang* is richly varied. Furthermore, the mask proper requires adherence to specific rules that vary from *dalang* to *dalang*. Conscious breathing is required regardless of the character. Pamela Rogers-Aquiniga notes that anything less than sustained breath awareness may lead to hyperventilation and fainting.<sup>611</sup> In past generations, continuous breathing was a critical aspect of the *dalang*’s training, but in post-1965 Indonesia this focus became dissociated from its spiritual contours. Today, it is understood simply as a skill to be mastered. As a result, one could say that *dalang* today are in a constant state of remembrance - even if that which is committed to memory is sublimated to its polar opposite: forgetting. Forgetting would seem an impossibility considering the dancer’s training, in which memorizing the musical patterns is as important as the movements of the dance and which Endo Suanda states is not merely remembered in the mind, but imprinted in the body. He describes an elderly *dalang*, Diah (now deceased) who had lost most of her hearing, and could hardly hear the gamelan when she danced. She explained her ability to keep dancing thus: “It’s just because the melody is already here [pointing to her heart]

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<sup>611</sup> Rogers-Aguinga, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master’s thesis, 93.

that I am still able to dance.”<sup>612</sup> Sound, thus, was etched in her heart. In the context of *tarekat*, the heart signifies spiritual perception.

### **DZIKIR IN THE CONTEXT OF TOPENG**

*Dzikir* is a devotional form composed of the repetition: *Lā ilaha illa al-Lāh* (“There is no god but Allah”).<sup>613</sup> These words are composed of a negation: *Lā ilaha* (No God) and an affirmation: *illa al-Lāh* (but Allah.). During vocal *dzikir* the negation occurs on the inhale, while the affirmation is in conjunction with the exhale.<sup>614</sup> As *dzikir* progresses the breath becomes more and more abbreviated. If one removes the second and third *Alif*, “A” remains (“h” is pronounced “ha”) which is the very essence “*hu*.” *Huwa* is a third person personal pronoun so this is understood as *hu*, one of the Divine names, whose phonetic essence “h” is found at the end of *Allah* and coterminous with *dzikir*, which is ultimately reduced to *hu* and sharply aspirated breathing on the exhale. Thus, every breath one takes should be taken in remembrance. This is the cornerstone of *dzikir*.

As indicated, *dzikir* refers to the worship of God and is grounded in the *Quran* and the *sunah*.<sup>615</sup> While this topic is rarely discussed, it is an important practice in *topeng*. It is how *topeng hajatan* always begins: the *dalang topeng* is seated, hands touching the top of the *kotak topeng* in remembrance of God.<sup>616</sup> *Dzikir* is known by

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<sup>612</sup> Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master’s thesis, 12.

<sup>613</sup> This is the first part of the Muslim declaration of faith.

<sup>614</sup> I am indebted to Hamid Algar for introducing me to the wide variety of *dzikir* practices.

<sup>615</sup> Arabic: *sunnah*. The *sunah* is the way of the Prophet derived from the *hadit*.

<sup>616</sup> One *dalang* described his position at the *kotak* as “*Ikro miraj munajat tubadil*,” which means to absorb Divine knowledge until it reaches the heart (of the audience).

*dalang topeng* – old and young alike – in the context of *tasawuf*. In Cirebon, *tasawuf* was distilled through the prism of *kraton* activities and religious instruction in which village artists are known to have participated. Among them was renowned puppeteer and mask carver Kandeg, who often rode his bicycle from his rural village home in Suranenggala, (Cirebon) to *Kraton Kacirebonan*. He was considered the equivalent of a *kyai* (religious theologian).



Fig. 36. *Dalang topeng* Dasih performs *ronggeng* at *Kraton Kanoman*, c.1940s. Photographer unknown.

As mentioned elsewhere in this study, Dasih was *Kraton Kanoman*'s resident *ronggeng* and *dalang topeng* and participated in religious instruction and *dzikir* there.<sup>617</sup> The mystical instruction of the late puppeteer Kalim<sup>618</sup> from Kalijaga, Cirebon, was launched with *Quranic* memorization at *Kraton Kasepuhan* before moving sequentially through the stages of mystical instruction. He was not alone. Many other young people with *keturunan* studied there too. During their training, the boys were tested periodically to measure their memorization skills and their spiritual progress or failure. Kalim lamented that, over time, many of his friends returned home, unable to advance to the next level. Kalim eventually became *Kasepuhan*'s senior *dalang wayang*.

*Dzikir* is practiced by all Muslims. Nonetheless, its essential *tasawuf* role should not be underestimated. It is one of the primary ways the orders are differentiated. Over time, and particularly among Muslim practitioners of mysticism, *dzikir* became attuned to specific methods of remembrance that include collective recitation, movement, chants, or prayers. These inward, participatory journeys are not intended for public observation/consumption. *Topeng* would seem to be the opposite of mystical variants of *dzikir* and *dzikir saman*<sup>619</sup> because it is a public display intended for a viewing audience;

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<sup>617</sup> Pleyte argues that *ronggeng* is a very old, indigenous Javanese form which, prior to Islam's arrival, was performed for the Gods and, once Islam had taken root, was ascribed to Allah. In fact, courtesan dancers were placed in many Vishnivate kingdoms in India. The Cirebon (and Central Java) courts both trained *dalang topeng* in their *ronggeng* schools and taxed them. According to Matthew Isaac Cohen, the regulation of *ronggeng* dancers in Cirebon occurred as far back as the founding of the different *ronggeng* schools by the royal court of *Kasepuhan*, c.1810. Matthew Isaac Cohen, pers. comm., 12 December 2006.

<sup>618</sup> He was also a *bodor topeng* and *wayang wong* performer in Kebagusan and Jamblang region.

<sup>619</sup> *Dzikir saman* (formally called *Dzikir Tsaman*) is the form primarily practiced in Cirebon. From the Arabic: *al-samā'* which literally means "listening," or "spiritual audition." Its focus is the primacy of hearing, which is synthesized with conceptualizations of the Divine. *Dzikir* is associated with percussion instruments and with dance, "dance" is not an accurate description. Rather it can be something as simple as moving one's body, or swaying. Outside of the Mevlevi order (of Turkey and in the diaspora, including Jakarta), dance in the context of *dzikir* is rare. Music is different. The nineteenth century court poem, *Serat Centhini* provides an example of *saman* (canto 277, stanza 28-32) in gamelan music, wherein

however, they intersect in important ways that are not obvious to the uninitiated. In order to understand this nexus, a brief description of the different forms of *dzikir* follows. It is important to keep in mind that *nafas* (breath), in the context of controlled breathing is almost always connected to developed forms of *dzikir* throughout the Muslim world.<sup>620</sup>

### **Silent and Vocal Dzikir**

*Dzikir* may be reduced to two basic kinds: silent (Cirebon Javanese: *Dzikir Sirri*)<sup>621</sup> and vocal (*Dzikir Dhohir*).<sup>622</sup> The point of departure for the silent *dzikir* is the heart. The heart has its own tongue, i.e. the beating of the heart. Vocal *dzikir*, alternately, begins with the tongue and migrates to the heart and is associated with communal activities. The vocal *dzikir* begins with the head over the right shoulder for the negation (“There is no god”). This is followed by the affirmation “but Allah,” wherein the head comes down in a strong motion toward the heart. Sufi practitioners in the Muslim world disagree about which form to privilege, often to extremes.<sup>623</sup>

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several Sufi concepts are described: the use of the Arabic term *niat*, as a striving for the sublime; making the heart receptive, while not losing oneself; longing for Divine union; and a return to the source (Allah). Union with the Divine is also found in tantrism and, as such, is not unique to Sufism but, in its larger constellation, fits squarely within a Sufi paradigm. Judith Becker, *Gamelan Stories: Tantrism, Islam, and Aesthetics in Central Java*, (Tempe: Program for Southeast Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 1993), 100-102.

<sup>620</sup> In a martial art form from Kerala in South India, *kālarippayattu*, the Muslim practice of *ratheeb*<sup>620</sup> figures prominently. *Ratheeb* is a form of purification through breath control, wherein the breath is first taken into the body and then discharged through the body’s orifices. It is said that the breath’s impurities are expelled through this act. Sound, too, figures prominently in this exercise. Finally, *ratheeb* in combination with *dzikir* is said to increase mental and physical stamina and is essential to the practice of *kālarippayattu*. Phillip B. Zarrilli, *When the Body Becomes All Eyes: Paradigms, Discourses and Practices of Power in Kalarippayattu, a South Indian Martial Art*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 151-52.

<sup>621</sup> Arabic: *dhikr-I khafi*

<sup>622</sup> Arabic: *dhikr-i jahr*

<sup>623</sup> In the past their differences incited religious wars in Sinkiang Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1975), 175.

The silent proponents argue that theirs is a fully embodied form, and that vocal *dzikir* is too easy to achieve. While the debate rages on, there is *Quranic* precedent for the co-existence of the two forms, which has resulted in their continued practice by traditional Muslims and Sufis alike.<sup>624</sup> Even though exceptions exist, the *Naqshbandiyya* are the dominant proponents of the silent *dzikir*. The basic *tarekat* principle as practiced in Cirebon has three components: *nafas* (taking in breath); *anfas* (releasing breath); and *tanafas* (breathing in and releasing). This form is still practiced at Cirebon's *Kraton Kaprobonan*. The ascetic practices of Dewi, Sawitri, and Dasih confer this knowledge.

### **The *Naqshbandiyya* Principles**

Without exception, the silent *dzikir* is preferred by *dalang topeng*. Although they do not identify with a particular order, the symmetry with several *Naqshbandi* principles is indubitable. For instance, the order's first principle, *hush dar dam* (awareness of breath) contends that God is the source and maintains our breath from one instant to the next. In the context of *topeng*, the mask held in place with one's lips sealed is the physical embodiment of *hush dar dam*. Anything less would abruptly terminate the event, while signaling misfortune to all who bore witness to it.<sup>625</sup>

Further evidence of the bond between *topeng* and the *Naqshbandiyya* is the latter's principle of *nazar bar qadam* ("gazing at the foot"). Here, the aspirant must watch her or his footstep on the path. One's focus is simultaneously on the inner and outer worlds. Awareness of one's feet refers to *dzikir*. In *topeng*, *nazar bar qadam* is

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<sup>624</sup> See, for example, *Surat 17: 110*: "And [pray unto Him; yet] be not too loud in thy prayer nor speak it in too low a voice, but follow a way in-between."

<sup>625</sup> Catastrophizing is also omnipresent in the Hindu Sanskrit drama of Kerala, in Southern India, *Kuttiyatam*.

concretized in the mask's deliberate limitations. As will be further discussed in chapter 5, "The Cirebon Mask," most masks are designed with the wearer's visual acuity in mind. The wearer must, after all, avoid people and objects in her way.

The Cirebon mask carver, alternately, appears indifferent to the dancer's need to scan the visual field, because very narrow slits are carved into their mask and they are below eye level. I posit that this is a conscious enactment of *nazar bar qadam*. Gazing at the foot or ground affords the *dalang*'s only access to the outside world. In order to give a natural appearance to the body, the head must be (unnaturally) tilted in the direction of the ground. In doing so, the dancer projects an illusory visual line of the body's natural alignment. The mask thus is oriented out into the world, but the *dalang* is fervently locked within the self, in a constant state of remembrance; her reduced visual field hones her sensory connection to physical space.<sup>626</sup> Such hyper-vigilance restricts her interactions with the musicians, the clown, and the audience. I have been unable to verify the kind of breathing techniques *dalang* employed in the past; however, Kathy Foley, in her discussion of *topeng Cirebon*, makes a compelling case for the possibility of a silent meditative formation of sound by employing "masaman" as a "tuning word" for the *topeng* character Panji. This is explicated from Foley's training of the Sundanese rod-puppet theatre, *wayang golek cepak*.<sup>627</sup>

Panji's visual focus is directed to the ground about a body length in front of him, almost giving the impression of being recycled back into his body. What I will call the center of gravity, by which I mean the area of the body where the dancer places the energy focus, is low, in the umbilical area near the base of the spine. This extension of energy

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<sup>626</sup> Rogers-Aguinga, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis, 92.

<sup>627</sup> *Wayang golek cepak* originated in Cirebon. Its storylines are from the Amir Hamza stories. It has a long shared relationship to *topeng* including its character types.



toward the earth and the maintenance of a wide, deep plié allows all the parts of the body above this center to give a floating impression. A sphere of energy is created, but it slows down time, negates space, and is turned back onto itself rather than grabbing the audience. It pushes the dancer into the self and urges him/her to savor the slightest movements, especially those originating where the shoulders and head meet the spine. The vocal placement...is created by focusing the sound in the mouth cavity while letting the jaw drop and relax even as the upper jaw raises slightly creating extra space. 'Masaman' is a tuning word which is used for Panji. The speaker first draws out the syllables, placing the voice comfortably, then continues into the slow expansive sentences of Panji's speeches.<sup>628</sup>

I propose that the above description is symmetrical with the two Naqshbandiyya concepts previously described. First, it highlights Panji's relationship to the ground and, second, the internalization of sound. Much as the puppeteer's embodiment of Panji's voice is deliberate and slow, *dzikir* also begins slowly, with the speaker first drawing out the syllables. But during vocal *dzikir*, rather than the linguistic expansion described by Foley, language contracts to forge an elliptical expression of the Divine Name.

Another *Naqshbandi* principle integrated into *topeng* is *safar dar watan* ("inward journey"). Here, the wayfarer renounces transient thoughts and focuses on the inner life. Hamid Algar proposes *safar dar watan* may refer to various kinds of journeying: to one's place of birth, that is, in the tribal sense of the homeland, to the ultimate place of birth - the hereafter; to the inner world; or a restriction of travel to the inward plane. *Ziarah* is similar to *safar dar watan*, for it is the connective tissue bridging this world with the next. For the *dalang*, it is the site of internal and external engagement and conveys focused interiority. Although the *Naqshbandiyya* prefer the silent *dzikir*, Martin van Bruinessen argues that prior to the 1920s, the *Qadiriyya wa-Naqshbandiyya*

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<sup>628</sup> Kathy Foley, "My Bodies: The Performer in West Java," 67; 78 (fn.9).

preferred the loud, ecstatic form, which was believed, among other things, to instill invulnerability among its practitioners.<sup>629</sup>

Tensions between vocal and silent *dzikir* are poignantly illustrated in the early nineteenth century Surakarta court poem, *Serat Centhini*. Clara Brakel examines this epic at the intersection of music, masks, and Islam in the text, “Masked Dances, Spirit Worship and the Introduction of Islam in Java.” Brakel describes a celebration preceding a wedding ceremony in one scene. *Dzikir maulud* is mentioned in conjunction with Islamic texts accompanied by tambourines (*terbang*) of Middle Eastern origin and choral singing of Arabic songs. Following an intermission during which food and drink were imbibed, two *dalang topeng* perform the character, Klana. Their dance inspires ecstasy in the *santri* who begin to sing. At one point, the bride’s younger brother “Jayéngraga<sup>630</sup> feels almost like putting down the *terbang* and dance (the) Klana (dance), (but) looking at his elder brother he is afraid to do so, and therefore resigns himself to just playing the *terbang* nicely...”<sup>631</sup> The inherent reciprocity between *topeng* and *dzikir* is explicitly interwoven into this scene. Jayéngraga’s assertion of self-control in light of his brother’s perceived negative response alludes to the debate about *saman* as a contested issue – not only between different *tarekat* but within a single family. Furthermore, the Klana dance is not merely a mask dance. The crazy king, whose

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<sup>629</sup> Martin van Bruinessen concludes that vocal *dzikir* played an active role in their involvement in anti-colonial and anti-aristocratic rebellions and that *Naqshbandiyya*’s concern about vocal *dzikir* rose with the reformist movement in the 1920s. Martin van Bruinessen, “The Origins and Development of the Naqshbandi Order in Indonesia,” *Der Islam* 67 (1990), 706-10.

<sup>630</sup> The bride’s younger brother.

<sup>631</sup> Poerbatjaraka, “De Geheime leer van Sunan Bonang (soeloek Woedjil),” *Djawa* 18 (1938), trans. and cited in Clara Brakel, “Masked Dances, Spirit Worship and the Introduction of Islam in Java” *Assaph. Studies in the Theatre* 9 (1993), 24-25.

descent into madness is well known in Java, here invokes the Divine and in so doing those who are gathered are swept into *saman*:

Accompanied by frenzied playing on the tambourines [sic], the two dancers take torches and proceed to chase each other with these, scorching one another while the sparks fly around, in a wonderful manner 'imitating the fighting Klana.' This spectacular battle with burning torches which so much delights the *santri* is concluded by the chanting of *sala(wa)t*.<sup>632</sup> Then the dancers are rewarded with money and have a period of rest, during which cool food, fruits and drinks, are served.<sup>633</sup>

As Brakel notes, it is striking that the two *dalang topeng* blend with the other participants including the son of a religious leader. She concludes that the merging of Arabic prayers with "dancing and music of a distinctly non-Islamic character, demonstrates how Javanese syncretism works in theatrical performance practice."<sup>634</sup> It also illustrates how the lines between religious praxis and popular entertainment could become so blurred as to create a localized rationale for the advocacy of performance in conversions to Islam.

### **Other Forms of *Dzikir***

The *Naqshbandiyya* connection is clear, yet there are other prominent orders in the region. According to Sharon Siddique, one form of *dzikir* practiced in Cirebon was introduced there by four of Sultan Sulaiman's children who were disciples of the proto-Sufi, Junayd al-Baghdadi.<sup>635</sup> Legend has it that the Sultan expelled his children for their ecstatic practices. Siddique describes their *dzikir* as marked by body swaying and, as the

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<sup>632</sup> Blessings bestowed upon the Prophet. They may be recited rhythmically or soberly and sometimes precede *dzikir*.

<sup>633</sup> Clara Brakel, "Masked dances, Spirit Worship and the Introduction of Islam in Java," 25.

<sup>634</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>635</sup> Cited as 'Sheikh Junaid' in Siddique.

tempo increases, a gradual jerking motion back and forth while the *tahlil*, or proclamation, ‘*i’llā ’ll āh*’ [“There is no god but Allah”] “degenerates into a pectoral barking noise.”<sup>636</sup> This legend illustrates the conflict between practitioners of the vocal and silent *dzikir*. The children’s connection to Junayd, the architect of “sober” Sufism, is curious. Junayd delineated two schools of mystical praxis: the sober Sufi and the intoxicated Sufi. The former, with which he identified, observes *shari’a* and internalizes spiritual states; the latter gives expression to ecstatic states and utterances (*shathiyāt*).<sup>637</sup>

Junayd was neither a proponent of *saman*<sup>638</sup> nor a vocal opponent of it.<sup>639</sup> A more likely genealogy of the ecstatic *dzikir* takes into account Java’s propensity for blending different mystical doctrines, including ones seemingly at odds with each other. Certainly, al-Hallāj (b. Bayzā, 294 Islamic era / 857 CE; killed in 922 CE), who was the architect of the “intoxicated” *dzikir*, had considerable influence in the region. He was an important religious figure to *Seh Siti Jenar* of Cirebon, to whom he is often compared both ideologically and in fate.<sup>640</sup> Both men were accused of extremist Shiism and

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<sup>636</sup> Siddique, *Relics of the Past?*, 72-73.

<sup>637</sup> See Duncan B. MacDonald, “Emotional Religion in Islam as Affected by Music and Singing. Being a Translation of a Book of the *Ihyā’ Ulūm ad-Dīn of al-Ghazzālī* with analysis, annotation, and appendices,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, (1902), 4.

<sup>638</sup> Arabic: *al-samā’*

<sup>639</sup> Hamid Algar, Sufism class notes. UC, Berkeley, 12 February 2008.

<sup>640</sup> Ricklefs mentions this relationship in the introduction of Zoetmulder’s book *Pantheism and Monism in Javanese Suluk Literature: Islamic and Indian Mysticism in an Indonesian Setting*. Translated by M. C. Ricklefs, (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1995), xvii. Zoetmulder describes this relationship at length in his chapter about the *wali* in the same book (Zoetmulder 1995:300-08). Rinkes emphasizes al-Hallāj’s expression *Ana ’l Haqq* (“I am God”), which was particularly offensive to orthodox Muslims. A chapter is devoted to *Seh Siti Jenar* in D. A. Rinkes, *Nine Saints of Java*. Alijah Gordon, ed. Kuala Lumpur, (Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1996), 15-46.

executed for heresy. Some *dalang* claim that the founder of *topeng*, Pangeran Panggung was a disciple of *Seh Siti Jenar*, who met the same fate.<sup>641</sup>

Blended Sufi orders are common in Java. As such, a connection between the *Rifa'iyya* and *topeng* is plausible as well. The *Rifa'iyya* have been referred to as “howling dervishes” in response to their ecstatic utterances during *dzikir* meetings. Their utterances resemble the distinctive whooping sounds made by Cirebon-region *topeng* musicians, a topic that deserves further investigation.<sup>642</sup> Indeed, another procedure associated with the *Rifa'iyya* order, *debus* (*dabbus*) is still known in the region.<sup>643</sup> *Rifa'iyya* and *Qadiriyya* practices are often conflated<sup>644</sup> further indicating the possibility of a *Naqshbandiyya* / *Rifa'iyya* connection.<sup>645</sup> As we saw in the scene from the *Serat Centhini*, differences in *dzikir* practices were not only hotly debated among different orders, but within families. Because *topeng* musicians and *dalang* are often related, it is plausible that fusing the musicians' soundscape with the *dalangs'* silence was a compromise.

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<sup>641</sup> Endo Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, 76, fn.14. This relationship is confirmed in *Babad Djalasutra: Njarijosaken Lampahanipun Pangeran Panggung Ladjeng Karan Kijai Djalasutra*, (Yogyakarta: Sumodidjojo, Mahadewa, 1956) and in D. A. Rinkes, *Nine Saints of Java*. (Kuala Lumpur: MSRI, 1996), 21-22. Matthew Cohen writes that *dalang wayang* Abyor re-enacted the story of Siti Jenar's death as an exemplar of a *wani* (brave) character to enthusiastic Muslim audiences. Cohen, *An Inheritance from the Friends of God*, PhD Diss, 171.

<sup>642</sup> The Malay Sufi author, Nuruddin al-Raniri, was affiliated with the *Rifa'iyya* order. The eponym of the *Rifa'iyya* Order is Ahmad ar-Rifai [d.1183]. The order, which originated in Iraq, had a presence in Aceh until the nineteenth century. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1975), 176; Martin van Bruinessen, "Shaykh `Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani and the Qadiriyya in Indonesia," *Journal of the History of Sufism*, (2000), 1-2 .

<sup>643</sup> An invulnerability practice in which practitioners pierce their flesh with metal objects without drawing a drop of blood. Today *debus* is situated within the rubric of entertainment. The *debus* tradition, as practiced in Banten, is discussed in K. Hadiningrat, *Kesenian Tradisional Debus*, (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1982).

<sup>644</sup> Bruinessen points to the invocation of the eponym of the *Qadiriyya*, Abd al-Qadir's *manâqib* during performances of *debus* in Cirebon and Banten. Bruinessen, "Shaykh `Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani and the Qadiriyya in Indonesia," (2000).

<sup>645</sup> The *Qadiriyya* and *Naqshbandiyya* are often blended orders in Cirebon.

The energized chorus weaves through the entire *topeng* repertoire, but is most evident, and abstrusely so, with the first and most interiorized character in the pantheon, Panji. In performance, the gamelan crescendos until the moment the mask is donned, but still obscured by its protective cloth (*ules*). In conjunction with the striking of the gong, the *ules* is slowly lowered as Panji's face is revealed. Simultaneously, the musicians release a protracted, unified 'Waaaah!' The contemporary understanding of *topeng*'s vocal kinetics is to make the performance *rame* (lively). But Panji is different. Most *nayaga* and *dalang* today refer to this 'Wah!' in conjunction with Panji's unveiling, as the moment of birth.<sup>646</sup> One *topeng* scholar described Panji thus: "[Panji] represents the stillness of our heart. He demonstrates how to live among the noise of life....[through] internal stability." Other interpretations for these sounds were provided Kandeg and Dasih, who in the 1970s told me it represents the excitement of Panji's wedding day. Perhaps this was euphemistic, for the only other interpretation I have heard (from an elderly musician) is that "wah!" connotes the profundity of sexual union and its release. In all of these interpretations *wah!* defines a moment of transcendent significance.

Ethnomusicologist Michael Wright argues that Cirebon's distinctive gamelan music is continuous with the sixteenth century musical practices of Central and East Java. He notes the "spontaneous spoken utterances" in his discussion of the vocal contributions of the *gerong*<sup>647</sup> during *topeng* or other Cirebonese gamelan performances;

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<sup>646</sup> Alternate meanings for these sounds were provided by Dasih and Kandeg (who were distantly related) who said it defines the excitement of Panji's wedding day. One elderly *dalang topeng* said it represents the profundity of sexual union and its release. In all of these interpretations Panji represents transformation.

<sup>647</sup> *Gerong* is a borrowed term from Central Java; it is used to designate a male chorus typically composed of the *nayaga* and any audience members who choose to participate. See Michael Richard Wright, *The Music Culture of Cirebon*. Ph.D. diss., (University of California, Los Angeles, 1978), 12, 231.

however, he does not entertain a possible relationship between their vocal “ejaculations” and *dzikir*.<sup>648</sup> Benjamin Brinner argues that a distinction should be made between linguistic and musical competency, pointing to the coordination and combining of simultaneous “utterances” as one of the unique features of “musical competence.” He further suggests that the attainment of a particular state – physical or mental – is an interactive aesthetic goal.<sup>649</sup>

Wright cogently argues for the gamelan’s indispensability to the monarchs, for such cultural manifestations were central to how leaders maintained their authority. Hence, Wright’s contention that Sunan Gunung Jati likely brought his gamelan tradition with him (from Demak to Cirebon) and that the distinctive patterns of the two gamelan traditions today resulted from greater Dutch influence at the more affluent Surakarta and Yogyakarta courts is plausible.<sup>650</sup> This theory gains momentum when considering that many Dutch officials feared Islam’s deepening importance in the Archipelago in the nineteenth century. Particularly illuminating, is the Assistant Resident of Yogyakarta, van Baak’s description of a *dzikir* practice he observed with barely contained contempt:

Their *dzikir* is like that of *nakis bandiah* [sic] whereby, with moving head and body, the eyes are closed and the tongue doubled, all the while calling *laillah ilallah* an unreal number of times. Then they must bang their heads on the ground 90 times, an act that is so exhausting that the students slam to the floor, being [powerless] for eight days

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<sup>648</sup> Ibid, 16, 233.

<sup>649</sup> Brinner broadly defines “musical competence” as “an integrated complex of skills and knowledge upon which a musician relies within a particular cultural context.” He points to the goal of Arab instrumentalists to induce *saltanah* (“a deep immersion in the mode”), which signifies the importance of mental states and the interactions between musicians, dancers, and trancers. Benjamin Brinner, *Knowing Music, Making Music: Javanese Gamelan and the Theory of Musical Competence and Interaction*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1-3, 202.

<sup>650</sup> Wright, *The Music Culture of Cirebon*, 11-6.

thereafter. In Solo, two even died as a result of exhaustion, as did someone in Pasar Gede [a matter] now under investigation.<sup>651</sup>

That Van Baak describes the *dzikir* he observed as similar to that favored by the *Naqshbandiyya* suggests either his inability to distinguish between the practices of different Sufi orders or that those practices were so synthetic as to render some orders indistinguishable in late nineteenth century Java. One thing is certain: the Assistant Resident failed to grasp *dzikir*'s relational dimensions.

### INTERSECTING ATTRACTION AND MADNESS

Transformations – be they mystical, psychological, or creative – are bound to a singular vision discontent with facile solutions. Dasih described (in Sundanese) the transference of emotions in the *dalang*/spectator dyad as central to one's relationship to God and, hence, to *dzikir*: *Ari ngibing teh kudu siga anu geregeteun; geregeteun di dieu yeuh...ngarah anu lalajo oge milu geregeteun*. ["When you dance, you should feel like *geregeteun; geregeteun* here...while she circled her fingers around her heart...so the audience will also be *geregeteun*."] <sup>652</sup> Dasih's awareness of the reciprocity of emotions and their transmission is rooted in silent *dzikir*. Dasih articulates what Kenneth Burke understands as the artist's awareness of shifting attention: "[T]he artist's means are always tending to become ends in themselves. The artist begins with his emotion, he

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<sup>651</sup> Michael Laffan, "A Watchful Eye: The Meccan Plot of 1881 and Changing Dutch Perceptions of Islam in Indonesia," *Archipel* 63,1 (2002), 103.

<sup>652</sup> I could find no literal English translation for this word. Endo translates it as "being emotional and full of intensity in both madness and love." Endo Suanda, "Dancing in Cirebonese Topeng," 13, 15.



translates this emotion into a mechanism for arousing emotion in others, and thus his interest in his own emotion transcends into an interest in the treatment.”<sup>653</sup>

For Sufis, the “treatment” may include a journey into madness (*majnun*). Most of us understand madness as a mental disturbance best tended to by a caring, skilled therapist who can release the individual from its grasp by way of talk therapy, medication, or both. But as Dasih’s remark illustrates, emotions are infinitely nuanced. Artists depend upon the vicissitudes of their emotions, not only for inspiration but for charging their creative impulses. The question is of degree and technique.

On the surface, madness and obsessive attraction take on an unenviable, disconcerting gloss. I ask the reader to examine these concepts metaphorically as tools of engagement with equilibrium the goal, regardless of whether or not it is ultimately achieved. The artist’s journey is an interior process; its germ may be obsessive, unconscious, or intellectual. Whether exorcised with a pen, a chisel, a paintbrush, or the body, meaning occurs in the real world.

As noted, *tarekat* is rooted in the intimate bond between a spiritual guide and his or her disciple. Traditional Muslims and Sufis conceptualize madness differently. It is incumbent upon all Muslims to be compassionate toward the mentally ill and assure their care with family members or institutions.<sup>654</sup> In a Sufi context, however, “madness” often connotes a solitary seeker on the path, that is, without the benefit of a guide. They

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<sup>653</sup> Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 54-55.

<sup>654</sup> Somatic versus psychic treatment of the insane in Islam is treated extensively in Michael W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*. Diana E. Immisch, ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 112-310.

are perceived as reckless and inviting madness (*gila isim*). The “attracted one”<sup>655</sup> is referred to as *majdhūb*.<sup>656</sup> A similar kind of somatic and psychic responsibility falls upon the *dalang topeng*. It is incumbent upon the *dalang* and her *murid* (student) that a bi-directional attraction evolve over time, an attraction that the *murid* shall eventually transfer to her or his students and to the audience. Attraction happens on multiple levels and for multiple reasons. This pattern, then, is encountered in *topeng* as a manifestation of *tarekat*. Relationally speaking, this paradigm is also encountered in psychoanalysis.

Just as the *murid* seeks a psychically attuned *shaykh*, the analysand (a patient in psychoanalysis) seeks an intuitive analyst. In either relationship, the seeker of knowledge is the disciple. The “self,” in both psychoanalysis and *tarekat*, is conceptualized as an entity dependent upon pride and reputation. The only way to progress is if the pilgrim becomes indifferent to both. Both processes are thus contingent upon chipping away at the ego; both require regressive states that demand the death of the ego. Only in such a state can one begin reconstructing her or his life in a trusting, empathic relationship.<sup>657</sup> The Sufi concept “die before dying” is thus very much a part of psychoanalysis. This appears to be an unbalanced power relationship on the surface; however, the opposite is true. Sociologist Bonnie Oglensky argues that idealization is a formative relational process that occurs in every mentoring relationship,

because it allows each party to look towards the other in admiration and hope....Often mentors and protégées use the word “chemistry” to

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<sup>655</sup> The one who is attracted to *tarekat*.

<sup>656</sup> The one who is attracted to the Divine.

<sup>657</sup> Psychoanalyst Ralph Greenson describes transference reactions and the working alliance as “the two most important varieties of object relations that take place in the analytic situation.” Ralph R. Greenson. *The Technique and Practice of Psychoanalysis*, 1, (Madison, CT: International University Press, 1991), 216-17.

label the mix of attraction, excitement, identification, and goodness of fit that are at the base of idealization. This loving, marveling stance – reported to be the most intense in the earlier phase of the relationship – is an emotionally bonding experience and provides a powerful lubricant for the processes of learning, maturation, and influence...<sup>658</sup>

This chemistry takes me back to my first meeting with Dasih in 1977. I had come to her home to introduce myself and ask if she would take me on as her student. She had not taught in several years due to illness and advancing age. We stood face to face – though mine was a good foot higher than hers. With a stern expression, she penetrated my eyes. I met her eyes briefly before shyly looking away. Her gaze was disconcerting. She slowly scanned my body from head to toe and then back up again. I felt on display and very awkward. When her gaze reached my face for the second time, I met her eyes with mine; they locked for what seemed an eternity, though it was probably less than a minute. Suddenly, her smile stretched to mine, and we giggled uncontrollably, our gaze still intact. That was it. I was her student.

Within Sufi and therapeutic paradigms of madness and attraction, the mentoring relationship is nurtured in isolation. Hence, Jack Jurich argues that detractors of Sufism and psychoanalysis alike complain that these ties “foster dependencies that leave the adept open to abuse at the hands of the shaikh or analyst.”<sup>659</sup> But for the *murid* and the analysand, such dependencies are requirements of their spiritual and psychological

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<sup>658</sup> Bonnie D. Oglensky, *Bittersweet Attachments: The Bonds and Binds of Mentorship*. PhD diss., (City University of New York, 2002), 159-60. There is a parallel with the *Naqshbandiyya* principle of *jadhba* (to draw or attract) that frequently occurs in the early formation of the *shaykh/murid* bond in the context of Divine Attraction.

<sup>659</sup> Jurich’s dissertation delineates correspondences between Sufism and psychoanalysis through the lens of Farid Ud-Din Attar’s twelfth century allegorical Sufi poem, “The Conference of the Birds”; Jack Jurich, *A Cross Cultural Study of The Conference of the Birds: The Shaikh/Disciple and Therapist/Patient Relationship in Sufism and Psychotherapy*. PhD diss., (New York University, 1998), 41.

evolution and accepted as such. Prior to 1965, when the mask dancer's capacity to earn her keep was dependent upon *keturunan*, violence was embedded within the learning process. *Dalangs'* aggression toward their progeny was an important tool in molding young dancers. Hence, trauma's sequela reverberates in the memories of many *dalang* for the rest of their lives. Nonetheless, they are understood as pivotal moments in the *dalang's* training.<sup>660</sup>

Indeed, many *dalang* trained from the 1920s through 1950s portray the learning process as rough and tumble. Dasih and others described how poorly executed steps were rewarded with shouts and whippings, which made movement precision an early goal of fledgling *dalang*. Sticks molded from rattan were common disciplinary instruments for acquiring of skills.<sup>661</sup> Proponents of the Palimanan- and Bongas-style (whose members are related) had a particularly harsh teaching approach that in cyclical fashion, continued at least through the 1980s. Wentar, *bodor* Empek, and the troupe's drummer Sana, were apparently the biggest offenders. Wentar was described as '*cepat marah*' (quick to anger). So, too, were Waryo's father, Empek and the drummer Sana, with whom Waryo studied music. He described Sana as "*perdiam tetapi keras*" ("silent but rough").

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<sup>660</sup> *Dalang topeng* Dewi described how her father always hit her when she made a mistake, even pouring hot water on her once to make his point. She took her father's rough treatment with a grain of salt, concluding that inflicted pain was expected and was the most direct pathway to becoming a good dancer. *Kompas*. "Ibu Dewi + Ingin mengakhiri hidup di panggung tari." 27 February 1983.

<sup>661</sup> Raw rattan was imported from Kalimantan and Sulawesi, however, it was abundant in *desa* Tegalwangi, Kec. Weru, in *Kabupaten* Cirebon, where it was processed. See Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, *Budaya Masyarakat di Lingkungan Kawasan Industri Rotan Desa Tegalwangi, Kabupaten Cirebon, Propinsi Jawa Barat* (Direktorat Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional Bagian Proyek Pengkajian dan Pembinaan Kebudayaan Masa Kini. Jakarta, 1998/1999).

The pressure to excel was, no doubt, omnipresent; without such recognition, the economic security of an entire family was jeopardized. Sujana Arja was disinclined to follow in his *dalang* father, Arja's steps. This so infuriated Arja that he tied his son to a tree. Sujana was admonished that he must study – for he was the best dancer amongst his eleven children. Sujana eventually succumbed and proved to be one of the finest *topeng* dancers of the twentieth century.

### **THE *DALANG* AS MEDIUM**

Sujana Arja describes the *dalang*'s role as part performer, part teacher, and part *kyai*.<sup>662</sup> To this litany we might add *dukun* (shaman). Although they are less often referred to as such, their role includes protecting the weak and infirm and other services associated with healing. Sujana learned in childhood that he must help others if called upon to do so.<sup>663</sup> He described a performance when his neighbor brought her newborn baby to the stage and asked him to bless the infant; Sujana did so and then double-blessed him with a name.<sup>664</sup> On a different occasion, Sujana was asked to prepare special water from the gong for a person with an eye disease. He poured the water into the gong, which he combined with an invocation before wiping the man's face with the blessed water. Other *dalang* describe using *dalung*<sup>665</sup> as a topical cure for skin diseases.

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<sup>662</sup> The title for a religious scholar.

<sup>663</sup> Sujana Arja, pers. comm., 26 June 2005.

<sup>664</sup> It is considered auspicious for a baby to be named by a *dalang*. The child is then considered that *dalang*'s spiritual child. Endo Suanda, "The Social Context of the Cirebonese Performing Artist," 34.

<sup>665</sup> The *wayang* oil lamp used to create light and shadow on the *kelir* (*wayang* screen). It is made from coconut and peanut oil.

On other occasions Sujana bathed his only *pusaka* mask Aki-Aki (“Old Man”) with water, later returning the blessed water to the infirmed.<sup>666</sup> Sujana said he never danced with this mask, though he stored it in the *kotak topeng* with his other masks.

### **Aki-Aki as an Instrument of Healing**

The character Aki-Aki is an old man of Chinese ethnicity, suggesting a possible early link with Chinese shamanism. He is the teacher (*guru*) and almost always holy or connected to a scene that is important. He embodies the sacred teacher-student relationship and the secret system of how knowledge is transferred and how art survives. Sujana stressed that unlike the clown characters, Aki-Aki can only be worn by the *dalang*, though this is disputed by older accounts. In either case, Aki-Aki has not been performed in a very long time. In the few versions I have heard, the elderly, infirm, Aki-Aki leans on the edge of the *kotak topeng*. His son, Pentul, approaches him for advice. Aki-Aki instructs Pentul not to gamble in the *mushala*.<sup>667</sup> Soon after, Jinggaanom emerges and duels the regent (*patih*) Tumenggung.<sup>668</sup> Kandeg told a different version of the story to Endo Suanda,<sup>669</sup> wherein Aki-Aki represents the old priest Ki Ngabehi Subakrama (Magangdiraja’s father in Patapan Gebang Tinatar).<sup>670</sup> Similar to Sujana’s

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<sup>666</sup> This is an unusual practice. More commonly, the *dalang* cleans a *kris* (sword) in such matters, but Sujana only owned the *pusaka* mask and so it had to suffice.

<sup>667</sup> Aki-Aki’s admonishment not to gamble in the *mushala*, a place where Muslims worship, is a modern take on the scene *Pendawa dadu* in the Javanese version of the *Mahabharata*, wherein the Pendawa kingdom is lost to the Kurawas as the consequence of gambling.

<sup>668</sup> Sujana Arja, pers. comm., 26 June 2005.

<sup>669</sup> Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master’s thesis, 138-41.

<sup>670</sup> According to Kandeg, Aki-Aki is only included when the entire *lakonan* was performed. However, as we have seen, Aki-Aki is often requested by audience members, particularly in connection with healing purposes. Pigeaud mentions Aki-Aki’s chronology as following Klana and Rummyang (old spelling: Paroemijangan), and before ‘*Kedok Tjina*’ (Chinese mask). Pigeaud distinguishes between the two characters although they are the same mask. Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master’s thesis, 156-57, fn. 51; Th. Pigeaud, *Javaanse Volksvertoningen: Bijdrage tot de Beschrijving van Land en Volk*, (Batavia: Volkslectuur, 1938), 116.

version, Aki-Aki is not sturdy on his feet and frequently leans on the *kotak*. He complains to the musicians that his back aches and requests they massage him. One of the musicians comes forward and kneads the indicated area.

The *bodor* subsequently places Aki-Aki's costume over his own (mimicking Aki-Aki's action).<sup>671</sup> Although the meaning of this gesture is lost today, it likely symbolizes the transmission of knowledge by way of the initiatory cloak.<sup>672</sup> By the late eighteenth century, the *shaykh* placing the cloak on the *murid* indicated the student was both worthy of succession and had been formally initiated. However, according to Hamid Algar, the initiate is still "asleep," which refers to the concept of death before dying.

The above scene is followed by a comic routine in which the *bodor* morphs into a combination of two characters: Aki-Aki and Sentingpraya, who is Jinggananom's father and an expert in the martial art, *pencak silat*.<sup>673</sup> Sentingpraya tells Subakrama that his son, Magangdiraja, has mistreated Jinggananom. The story includes a dream sequence and a fight between the two old men, in which Sentingpraya (played by the *bodor*) wins. The cloak's meaning is realized at the end of the exchange between Sentingpraya and Magandiraja.<sup>674</sup> In Kandeg's version, once Aki-Aki is complete, the *dalang* removes the mask and performs the final dance, Klana.

There is no doubt that Aki-Aki is a transformative figure as indeed are all of the characters in the pantheon to one degree or another. What distinguishes Aki-Aki from the other mask characters is his dual role of healer and healed. For example, he asks a

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<sup>671</sup> Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis, 138-41.

<sup>672</sup> This practice is known to both Sunni and Shi'a mystics. Sunnis use the term *khirqah*; the term *kisa* is employed by Shias.

<sup>673</sup> This is apparently the context Pigeaud refers to in the *lakon* version.

<sup>674</sup> For the full translation see Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis, 138-41, 156-77, fn. 51.

musician to massage his ailing body, just as the *murid* asks a *shaykh* for psychic healing. Moreover, Aki-Aki wins the battle against the protagonist through his now able body (*pencak*). That the *murid* is here the old (experienced) party is a poetic inversion of the life cycle, wherein the body is in a constant state of renewal. It is also revelatory for it indicates the interdependence between the healer and the healed and between the *shaykh/dalang* and *murid* – bonds that fall squarely within a mentoring rubric, for they depend upon mutuality, reciprocity, and emotional sustenance.

### **The Expression of Emotion**

Many Cirebonese people are reticent to discuss their emotions. This, however, should not imply that they lack an emotional life. Cultural differences, nonetheless, proved a complicated matter in my efforts to engage *dalang* in conveying their experiences behind the mask. Paul Ekman, a pioneer in the study of the cross-cultural communication of emotions, developed some less obvious ways to excavate and interpret emotional content in preliterate societies.<sup>675</sup> In one study that involved fourteen cultural groups, including a group from southern Fore, Papua (New Guinea), a variety of stimuli were introduced that included photographs and stories, Ekman concluded that although cultural differences must be taken into account, there is “conclusive evidence” for the existence of a pan-cultural component in facial expression and emotion.<sup>676</sup> He has worked on two projects in Indonesia, one in Papua and one in West Sumatra.<sup>677</sup>

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<sup>675</sup> I am grateful to Paul Ekman for advising me on this project.

<sup>676</sup> Paul Ekman, Wallace V. Friesen, and Phoebe Ellsworth, *Emotions in the Human Face: Guidelines for Research and an Integration of Findings*, (New York: Pergamon Press, 1972), 153-67.

<sup>677</sup> Cultural anthropologist Karl Heider, who was working with the Dani of New Guinea, and Ekman first met in 1968. Heider contacted him after learning that he had gathered evidence about the universality of emotions during his second research period in south Fore, Papua New Guinea in 1968. According to Ekman, Heider “didn’t believe it as the Dani didn’t even have words for emotion. I wrote him back and



Ekman argues that the most meaningful way to understand emotional content is to work within a subject's experiential frame, not one's own. That is, to explicate meaning from their stories and metaphors.<sup>678</sup> Whereas Ekman employs photographic images to elicit emotional content, I use masks and, in the section that follows, oral text. Thus, I asked the respondents, "What do you most admire about this person?" and "What do you least like about this person?"

An example of this approach occurred when a male *dalang wayang / topeng*, Sukarta, shared one of his *jampi* with me. *Jampi*, by definition, are imprecise in meaning, and this one, *Donga Nyi Pangurangan*, is no different. It is named for a woman called Nyi Mas Pangurangan. Encoded in the *jampi* is Sukarta's yearning to be transformed in body, gender, and in essence. The question I posed was: "Why is she worthy of this incantation?" Sukarta, who is an adept storyteller with a rich inner life, required little prompting:

"To use a different terminology, she is a superpower. She can fly, disappear, [she] is invulnerable to a weapon's bullet. I want to be carried away by her aura. She is beautiful. Many people love her.

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said I would be glad to teach him to repeat my work and give him the materials if he would spend a week at my lab before his next trip to the Dani [1968]. He did and what every scientist dreams of – someone determined to prove you wrong repeats your work and gets the same result!!" Their findings were published in Robert W. Levenson, Paul Ekman, Karl Heider, and Wallace V. Friesen, "Emotion and Autonomic System Activity in the Minangkabau of West Sumatra," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 62.6 (1992), 972-88. For more on Heider's Sumatra project see Karl G. Heider, *Landscapes of Emotion: Mapping Three Cultures of Emotion in Indonesia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1991], 2006). See also Karl G. Heider, *The Dugum Dani: A Papuan Culture in the Highlands of West New Guinea*, (New York: Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, 1970). Paul Ekman, pers. comm., 31 May 2009.

<sup>678</sup> When I worked with Ekman on a pilot project for National Geographic in 2004, I asked subjects to select several photographs of one model and tell me the expression being conveyed in each image. I then asked "What happened to this person right before the picture was taken?" After I recorded their answer, I asked, "What will happen next?" as a way to gauge the respondent's interpretation of a given emotion.

Everyone who looks at her goes crazy [in love]...crazy about Nyi Panguragan....Her husband is originally from Syria.”<sup>679</sup>

For Sukarta, Nyi Mas Panguragan was a benevolent, powerful being. Gender never enters the equation. The point, then, is not that he wishes to be a woman, but that he desires to attract others to himself. He prays to be invulnerable. Sukarta’s mention that Nyi Mas Panguragan’s husband is from Syria, is a code way of saying that her husband is not only a Muslim, but one of the *walisanga*, thus positioning himself in closer proximity to the ineffable energy of Allah.

### **The Dalang’s Experience**

Approximating Ekman’s communication model, I asked several *dalang* how they feel before they put on the mask and how they feel when it covers their face. Sujana Arja described being self-conscious (*malu*) when his face was visible because he was cognizant the audience was watching him. These feelings subsided once the mask was put on: “After wearing the mask, I notice the people without feeling shy.”<sup>680</sup> I asked if he could see people during the masked sections of the dance. “It is not possible with Panji,” he responded. “I must lower my view to my feet.”<sup>681</sup> Sujana was familiar with neither the *Naqshbandiyya* nor their principle, *nazar bar qadam* (“gazing at the foot”); nonetheless, he had a sophisticated understanding of its employment.

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<sup>679</sup> “Kalau istilah lainnya perkasa, superpower. Dia bisa terbang, menghilang, tidak mempan golok maupun peluru. Orangnya canti. Banyak yang cinta. Semua orang kalau lihat Nyi Panguragan itu tidak ada yang tidak cinta sama dia, semua cinta. Semua tergila – gila oleh Nyi Panguragan itu. Malah suaminya juga berasal dari Syiria.” Sukarta, pers. comm., 1 October 2005.

<sup>680</sup> “Kalau belum memakai kedok saya masih malu tapi kalau sudah memakai kedok saya tidak merasa malu lagi. Kalau sudah memakai kedok kita bisa bebas memperhatikan penonton. Saya lebih suka menari menggunakan kedok karena bebas memperhatikan penonton.”

<sup>681</sup> “Tidak boleh. Harus menundukkan pandangan jadi yang dilihat hanya di bawah dekat kaki.” Sujana Arja, pers. comm., 25 June 2006.

What makes Sujana's conceptualization so compelling is that even though the figure Panji is often linked with pre-Islamic Java, the *topeng* character of the same name blends indigenous iconography with mystical Islam. Sujana's movement *gegera yang pulang hati*<sup>682</sup> articulates this well: the body is still; however, the fingertips are positioned toward the chest, fluttering up and down, and motioning toward the heart. Asked to elaborate on this movement, Sujana replied, "It means to discover what is in our thoughts." This is an important distinction, for its physical and linguistic reference corresponds to the heart (*hati*), but whose meaning is here grounded in the *tasawuf* concept of the emotive, sensory heart (*kalbu*) in conjunction with *ilmu* (knowledge). Dasih stressed that the eyes must focus on the floor regardless of which mask was worn. Yet, Sujana, who was two generations behind her, reserved his gaze for the floor only in deference to the legendary prince, Panji.

If other *dalang* share Sujana's sentiment about scanning the audience, they are disinclined to admit it. Sujana's son, Astori, a very fine dancer in his own right, said, "Before I wear the mask the audience can see my face. After wearing it, I automatically follow the mask's character. Before wearing the mask I am the one dancing the character, but after wearing it, it seems that I am not the one dancing anymore. Now the character itself is dancing."<sup>683</sup>

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<sup>682</sup> A very rough translation is "the trembling return to the heart" (The up/down motion, furthermore, suggests the vertical axis in Islam, that is, between humanity and Allah).

<sup>683</sup> "Sebelum memakai kedok karakternya belum terlihat sedangkan sesudah memakai kedok karakternya terlihat dari kedok yang kita pakai. Semua tarian itu sama. Sebelum memakai kedok kita yang menarik tetapi setelah memakai kedok bukan kita lagi yang menarik. Seolah – olah karakter kedoknya yang menari." Astori, pers. comm., 26 June 2005.

One *dalang*, who asked not to be identified, described her experience performing the second character, Samba: “I need to concentrate on the character” in order to “fit myself into the character of Samba who is rather coquettish and energetic... When I change to the next mask, Rummyang, I need to refocus my attention to being a married person.”

I then asked if she was aware of herself while dancing. Her response was firm: “Yes, I do...I never forget...there is only one *dalang* and one mind.” Indeed, with the exception of Astori, all of the *dalang* interviewed were aware that they were dancing. I attribute this to biting the leather strip inside the mask with one’s teeth – an act of remembrance. Your mind does not wander from time to time? I asked. “No, I am always aware that I am dancing in front of people,” adding that she needed to be aware of her surroundings. For instance, in advance of the movement *sepak soder* (kick the soder), she must be aware of the children gathered around the performance space so as to avoid hitting them. This would be impossible if her visual field was any place other than on the ground.

I asked several *dalang*: What do you think about when you are dancing?

Responses varied:

“I only think about wishing the audience is satisfied with my performance. I wonder whether they love it or no. Actually, it is before dancing that I think about this. While I dance, my mind is empty.”

I also asked: “Do you notice if the musicians err while you dance?” “Yes, I will know...[a]fter the dance is over, I let them know that they played the wrong notes.”

It is rare for a *dalang* to succumb to a fully embodied trance state as defined by Rouget, because of the central role focus and hovering attention play. The *dalang* must be aware of holding the mask in place, the approximate chronology, characterization, and sounds emanating from the gamelan. Which is most important, I asked – the gamelan or the audience? “The gamelan first, then the audience,” responded one *dalang*. Why, I ask? “Because the gamelan is intended for God. My focus never wavers from Allah.”

I asked Sujana why spectators enjoy watching him dance. He replied, “Perhaps because all of my prayers were granted by God. Before dressing, I always say this prayer”:

In the name of God, moving in harmony,<sup>684</sup> I intend to look for the yellow *Semar*.<sup>685</sup> If I find the yellow *Semar*, I hope my face will be changed into the yellow *Semar*. Big, small, old, young, male, and female who are inside the tent will offer their compassion, their love, as they stand quietly facing my body. I am a real man and my name is Sujana.

*Bismillahirrohmanirrohim Goyang – goyong condhong, niat isun golati Semar Kuning, sailane Semar Kuning ya isun rupane semar kuning, gede cilik tuwa enom lanang wadon sejerone tarub iki teka welas teka asih teka idep teka madep maning badane isun selirene isun, ya isun tegese lanang sejati Sujana.*

Sujana described Semar as *sanghyang* (a divine being or god). “Semar loves to give advice. Even though he has an unattractive voice, his message is good.” Thus, in

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<sup>684</sup> Sadly, Sujana passed away before I was able to translate his mantras. I am indebted to Matthew Cohen and Kathy Foley for assistance with this translation.

<sup>685</sup> Semar is invoked in many mantras. ‘*Semar kuning*’ translates as ‘the yellow Semar.’ According to Kathy Foley, Semar is the god of love, Batara asmarandana and, as such, often surfaces in love spells or to bind spectators to the performer. Yellow may have some Chinese influence because yellow is a royal and sacred color.

the above invocation, Sujana sought divine guidance. From this *jampi*, the next one springs, which was whispered while kneeling before the *kotak topeng*:

Oh Merciful God. Make all people on the earth and the world obey  
[Su]Jana who is powerful. Make them gather here in the feast. Allahu,  
Allahu, Allahu.<sup>686</sup>

*Allohuma tumpek bumi teng buana kesungen deng perintah wa Jana  
sakti suka rata – rata dikembulen mreng lagi nyingteng kalak sing  
ngundang Allahu, Allahu, Allahu.*

In the first *jampi*, Sujana makes an appeal – not to look like Semar, but to inhabit him and, in so doing, to draw himself into God’s immediate orbit. If Sujana can accomplish this, all those who gather in the tent will be drawn to him and “will offer their mercy” and, presumably, their love to the *dalang*, whose body they are facing. They will thus be the attracted one, *majdhūb*.

This second mantra addresses the issue of transmission. Here, the *dalang* bypasses Semar and appeals directly to God. The name is clearly stated, Allah, rather than the Malay word, *Tuhan* (Lord) - the Indonesian-Malay term for God applicable to any monotheistic religion. In Sujana’s two incantations the shift from pantheism to monotheism is evident. Not just any monotheism, however, but Islam.<sup>687</sup> The reader should not conclude, however, that a theological shift has taken place. Rather, that by invoking God’s will, the mantra is deemed within the *dalang*’s reach to fulfill. Indeed, as Beatty points out,

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<sup>686</sup> Sujana Arja, pers. comm., 25-26 June 2005.

<sup>687</sup> This shift is significant in that it reconciles the past with the present. Monotheism became an obligation of citizenship when the Republic of Indonesia was founded and was made explicit as the first of Indonesia’s five principal values stated in *Panca Sila* (the preamble to Indonesia’s constitution) as the belief in one, all-knowing God: *KeTuhanan Yang Maha Esa*.

The unquestioned position of Islam is evident in the use of Arabic prayers in ordinary Javanese ritual...[a]lmost no one – pious or otherwise – understands them; but their inclusion in slametans and other rituals such as those surrounding birth and childhood is obligatory. Nominal Muslims, even among themselves, would not think of omitting them. In contrast, one who disbelieved in the powers of the guardian spirit would be free to ignore him. Furthermore, whereas there is no *need* to justify or explain the saying of prayers or to elucidate their meaning, in the rival case there is no *possibility* of explication. To ask why ancestors and spirits are propitiated or to speculate about the powers of the guardian spirit would be to bring to light incongruities between antagonistic practices.<sup>688</sup>

By privileging Allah, the possibility that the *dalang*'s request will be granted increases ten-fold. The belief that language is embodied is addressed later in this study with the coupling of Arabic and Old Javanese mantras on the verso of some masks.

#### CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES OF MIND AND BODY

Secret knowledge at the village level has diminished over the past two generations along with the rigorous asceticism previously adhered to: for example, pilgrimages to the sacred sites that past generations of *dalang* relished; Sawitri's well-documented feats of endurance, including forty-day fasts, hanging from wells, seven day *tirakat-puasa* on the roof, and living in trees for extended periods;<sup>689</sup> and Dasih's fasts and nightly private *dzikir* practice. Fasting, while still taken seriously by some young

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<sup>688</sup> Andrew Beatty, *Varieties of Javanese Religion: An Anthropological Account*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 74.

<sup>689</sup> Juju Masunah, *Sawitri: Penari Topeng Losari*, (Yogyakarta: Tarawang, 2000), 52-55; Monica Wulff, "Dancing in the 'Contact Zone,'" *PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 3, no. 2 (2006a), 18. <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/ojs/index.php/portal/article/view/168> (accessed 22 January 2009). In the context of *dzikir*, Sufis correlate the firm roots of the tree with the heart of humans. The heart is not viewed as a body part, but as an organ of spiritual perception. I am indebted to Hamid Algar for explicating the tree's meaning in branching out to all parts, and whose fruit bears itself in all seasons – the fruit of knowledge, fruit of virtue, or fruit of closeness to Allah.

*topeng* practitioners, is less rigorously adhered to today. Perhaps it was always true that the guru's lessons were deliberately fragmentary with expanses of space left for the student to fill in during the course of a fully engaged life. But there are also sound reasons for keeping secrets related to power and earning access to it.

From these interviews and other stories collected over the course of my fieldwork, a leitmotif emerges wherein the *dalang* understands– and enjoys – her or his body as a mutable vehicle of Divine expression. In the past, the initiatic fast and ritual bath bound the *dalang* and student and, later, the *dalang* and audience. *Dzikir* was the glue that bound these practices. *Dalang* have long been aware that sonic reverberations linger in the body long after their initial contact. This awareness extends to unspoken words and sounds that vibrate with meaning and create atmosphere to the attentive ear.



## CHAPTER 5: THE CIREBON MASK

This chapter attempts an integrated theory of the mask proper. Its employment in *topeng Cirebon* grounded in its combined aesthetic, spiritual, and power-based contours, three of which are described herein: 1) *sirih* (betel nut); 2) stone incrustation on some old masks; and 3) *susuk*, wherein metals are implanted in the body, and fortified in conjunction with spoken or written *jampi*<sup>690</sup> or *mantera* (mantras).<sup>691</sup> The aesthetics of illusion is the stuff of intense relational encounters between artist and disciple, between artist and audience, and between the living and the dead. These are not merely surface treatments; they are at the core of our human interactions. It is incumbent upon the *dalang* to know her way around her mind and heart and to allow others access to both. Betel nut, for example, has both mystical, aesthetic, and relational values; stones, which are linked with power all over the world, serve multiple functions in *topeng*: they make the mask aesthetically appealing and convey the status of its owner, while protecting its custodian, the *dalang*; *susuk* is inserted subcutaneously to enhance the dancer's stamina and skill (inner) as well as to attract someone or something to her, most commonly, an audience or a mate (outer). *Jampi* impregnate these forms with power. The external, thus, brings the interior life into focus. This interdependence is more than a metaphysical construct; it is actualized in the reality of the mask, in its outer and inner face – the former intended for visual consumption, while concealing its true mission. If, as Marshall McLuhan argues, clothing is an extension of the skin; housing is

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<sup>690</sup> *Jampi* is a love charm or mantra. The Sundanese term *jawokan* is used interchangeably in the predominantly Sundanese Majalengka.

<sup>691</sup> These factors are more evident in older masks. They are relics of how the persona was once articulated. The terms *jampi* and *mantera* are interchangeable and employed thus in this chapter.

a collective skin; and cities are an even further extension of the body in which the needs of the larger community are tended to,<sup>692</sup> then the mask is a second skin, whose home - the *kotak topeng*<sup>693</sup> - serves the needs of the larger community.

### **THE MASK AS AN EXTENSION OF THE BODY**

Mask cultures generally fall within three stylistic categories: masquerades, dramas, and virtuosic mask performance.<sup>694</sup> Masquerades revolve around the voluntary activity of play - albeit serious play - with a high level of interaction between the mask wearer and spectator. In his landmark treatise on the cultural significance of play, Johan Huizinga contends that the borders of play and seriousness are neither conclusive nor fixed.<sup>695</sup> Indeed, the gradations between the two foster both play and active learning. Marshall McLuhan, on the other hand, views play as a medium with its own distinctive language and structure that, like all media, is culturally determined. Play and games are thus an extension of the body politic - an application clearly articulated when covering one's face with a mask.<sup>696</sup>

Mask dramas, in contrast, are scripted, even those performed in silence. Southeast Asian mask dramas often follow the Hindu epics, the *Ramayana*<sup>697</sup> and *Mahabharata*, and the indigenous Panji (*Jaka*) tales.

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<sup>692</sup> Marshall McLuhan establishes media as extensions of the senses. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 123-24.

<sup>693</sup> The wooden chest where the masks are stored.

<sup>694</sup> Virtuosic masking is often, though not exclusively, related to shamanistic practice.

<sup>695</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 5.

<sup>696</sup> McLuhan defined games as structured activities with enjoyment as their central aim, but they may also serve an heuristic purpose. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 234-45.

<sup>697</sup> In addition to Javanese, Cirebonese, and Balinese versions of *wayang wong*, the Cambodian *Lhakon Khol*, Thai, and Laotian *Khon* (the Laotian version likely introduced from Thailand) have masked dramas of the *Ramayana*.



Fig. 37. A *dalang*-in-training plays with the clown mask, “Mengo.” Losari, 1983. Photo courtesy of Sonny Sumarsono.

*Topeng Cirebon* belongs to the third stylistic group. It is a virtuosic, inherited form. Children study with a parent or other close relative and, years later, pass the tradition on to their progeny. It is different from play in that *topeng* is highly regimented, with knowledge gradually imparted over a period of years. As such, it is not a voluntary activity with the exception of clown characters, for whom the mask is akin

to what D.W. Winnicott deems “transitional objects”<sup>698</sup> – but only at prescribed times, notably during the bustle of a *topeng* performance [fig. 37]. Within *dalang* families, alternately, studying *topeng* is one’s filial duty.<sup>699</sup>

### **The Mask and Illusion**

Much has been written about illusion in the visual arts and its capacity to hold our attention (or distract us, as the case may be). Laurie Schneider Adams argues that the audience is more likely to stay with the action if the actor is someone recognizable rather than non-representational in her or his depiction. A negative response to non-objective art,<sup>700</sup> according to Adams, is rooted in the failure to connect with that which one cannot identify because it disrupts the viewer’s organic experience of three-dimensional space – essentially, it deprives the viewer of the familiar.<sup>701</sup> The naturalism of the *topeng* masks are thus not viewed as separating agents, as are the abstract or geometric masks of the Burkina Faso in West Africa,<sup>702</sup> for example. Rather, *topeng* masks invite the spectator to engage with familiar personalities.

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<sup>698</sup> Child psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott observed that the first use of illusion by children occurs during infancy in the absence of a significant other, most commonly a parent. During these absences, ‘transitional objects’ come into play as a defense mechanism against anxiety. And, in fact, they are very much ‘play’ objects that help to bridge liminal periods that Winnicott labels “transitional events.” Simon Ottenberg describes a similar transitional relationship occurring with masks among the Igbo later in childhood when boys first leave home to live with their fathers. D.W. Winnicott, D. W. *Playing and Reality*, (London: Routledge, 1999); Simon Ottenberg, "Psychological Aspects of Igbo Art," *African Arts*, 21, no. 2 (1988), 72.

<sup>699</sup> None of the *bodor* masks in Losari have mantras, which would preclude them from being ‘worn’ in the context of play.

<sup>700</sup> Non-objective or non-representational art contains no objects or figures.

<sup>701</sup> Laurie Schneider Adams, *Art and Psychoanalysis*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 44-45.

<sup>702</sup> Formerly called Upper Volta.

In *Art and Illusion*,<sup>703</sup> art historian Arthur Gombrich notes that all art, regardless of the culture that produced it, brings with it a series of expectations that allow the spectator to connect to it as a whole rather than its individual components. This process begins with observation and translates into illusion. As a result, observation and illusion are indistinguishable. He convincingly argues that the spectator and the artist come from different perspectives: the artist must make material choices, develop a vocabulary that gives the work meaning, and contend with restricted opportunities for expanding representational possibilities.<sup>704</sup> *Topeng*, likewise, must establish a vibrant relationship between the performer and the audience, a process that begins with the mask maker.

Endo Suanda<sup>705</sup> describes Cirebon mask makers as belonging to one of two categories: “professional” and “non-professional.” Professional mask makers undergo a long apprenticeship and may participate in other forms of woodcarving such as crafting rod puppets, frames for gamelan instruments, and furniture. The late mask maker, Kandeg, and his student Sujana Priya<sup>706</sup> were situated within this rubric.<sup>707</sup> Even so, certain mystical ascetic practices were upheld. Kandeg’s student was instructed to sing *macapat* and fast for nine days prior to studying mask making with him. Furthermore, Kandeg accompanied the young Sujana to the market to purchase a *sirih* (betel) vine,

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<sup>703</sup> E. H. Gombrich, E. H. *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*. (Washington National Gallery of Art/Pantheon, 1965).

<sup>704</sup> Ibid, 359-76.

<sup>705</sup> Endo Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master’s thesis, 205.

<sup>706</sup> Sujana (alias Sudjana) is a common name in Cirebon. Mask maker Sujana Priya is not related to the *dalang topeng*, Sujana Arja.

<sup>707</sup> For an overview of the three primary maskmakers active in Cirebon in the 1970s, see Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master’s thesis, 205-12. Interestingly, according to Suanda, Kandeg made a name for himself outside of Cirebon, and his student, Sujana, made many of the masks that were later sold as Kandeg originals outside of Cirebon. Kandeg’s masks fetched a much higher price than most mask makers, essentially deeming them too expensive for *dalang* to acquire. Thus, Suanda’s definition of “professional” is not adherent to Sufic practices, which is curious given Kandeg’s lineage and his role as a theologian.

whipping the betel leaves on Sujana's body at the completion of the fast. Sujana interpreted this as "inheriting Kandeg's talent" since he was not *keturunan*.<sup>708</sup> The second category, the non-professional carver, is enigmatic. Many *dalang* state that their masks were either inherited or crafted by their ancestors. But there is no evidence that *dalang* ever carved masks. However, as Suanda points out, the carvers' knowledge of both the characters and the dance strongly suggest that they are often related to the *dalang*.



Fig. 38. Kandeg poses with his *topeng* and *wayang wong* masks, c.1973. Photo courtesy of Ron Bogley.

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<sup>708</sup> Sujana Priya, pers. comm., 2 August 2005.



Fig. 39. Kandeg's heir: Mask maker Sujana Priya with a few of his masks in different states of production. On the far right is the top part of a *Berokan* mask (right). 31 July 2005.

Important theoretical approaches to the mask have been posited by Henry Pernet, A. David Napier, Kathy Foley, Frank Proschan, and Ron Popenhagen. Pernet argues that the mask does more than merely cover the face. It must be understood in its gestalt as attentive to the body vis-a-vis the costume and related paraphernalia.<sup>709</sup> As such, it cannot be reasonably viewed as independent of the body, for what adorns the body complicates its meaning. Proschan, on the other hand, coined the term “performing object” to describe “material images of humans, animals, or spirits that are created,

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<sup>709</sup> Henry Pernet, *Ritual Masks: Deceptions and Revelations* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press 1992), 11.

displayed, or manipulated in narrative or dramatic performance.”<sup>710</sup> Napier describes masks as a “heresy... because they suggest a sensibility for multiplicity and for salutatory change. They also challenge our perceptions of what is ethical. How can we attribute intentions and responsibility to personages whose images of themselves literally shift from plane to plane, in and out of focus?”<sup>711</sup> They also illuminate transitory shifts of consciousness that are interwoven in the irreducible object of the mask. Foley does not see the mask as an extension of the dancer’s body, but as a distancing agent; creating that distance is one of the first lessons the *dalang*-in-training must accomplish. Indeed, the mask may be far removed from the dancer’s chronological, physical, and emotional landscape.<sup>712</sup>

How does the *dalang* relate to his or her body? “Object relations” theorists believe that symbiotic relationships are formed over the first few years of life. Winnicott stresses that the psychological health of the child is strengthened when adequate mothering takes place. But the pendulum can swing either way: “If the mother's face is unresponsive, then a mirror is a thing to be looked at but not to be looked into.”<sup>713</sup> For Jacques Lacan, this flexibility is neither important, nor does it seem to exist: rather, there is a disconnect between the child’s corporeal and neurological development. He argues that early on the body is perceived as fragmented resulting from the mother’s tending to

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<sup>710</sup> Frank Proschan, “The Semiotic Study of Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects,” *Semiotica* 47, 1 / 4 (1983), 4.

<sup>711</sup> A. David Napier. *Masks, Transformation, and Paradox*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 16, 27.

<sup>712</sup> Foley, “My Bodies: The Performer in West Java,” 63.

<sup>713</sup> D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, (London: Routledge, 1999), 113.



specific body parts. Thus, the mirroring experience between mother and infant is an internal, ongoing struggle for recognition between the self and Other.<sup>714</sup>

The concept that we are born estranged from our body and choose to reverse it is one of the ineffable aspects of performance because it requires that the spectator simultaneously disengage and identify. It is the moment of invention and discovery; it is how we come to know that something is dependent upon spatial and psychological distance. Freudian analysis requires detachment from the body in order to talk about it. So, too, it is the mask's function to create conscious distance. From the perspective of the spectator watching *topeng*, there is the urge to slow it down, to distill and abstract it into conscious perception.

Finally, mask theatre scholar Popenhagen suggests that the mask is “an incomplete creation until it is put into the performance context...[m]asks are meant to be seen as Figure upon the Ground of the human body. Only when activated by a trained player can the mask ‘become’ what it truly ‘is’ – an ephemeral presence seen and experienced by viewer/participants.”<sup>715</sup> In each of these mask theories we confront an object that, on the surface, is static and that requires the artist's skill and talent to bring it to life.

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<sup>714</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits. A Selection*, (New York; W. W. Norton, 1977), 5.

<sup>715</sup> Ron J. Popenhagen, *Embodiments of the Mask*. PhD dissertation, (University of California, Santa Barbara, 1994), 6.

## THE SECRET LIFE OF THE CIREBON MASK:

### SYMBOLIC LAYERINGS OF INNER AND OUTER

Secrets, in short, are at odds with sequence, which is considered as an aspect of propriety; and a passion for sequence may result in the suppression of the secret. But it is there, and one way we can find the secret is to look out for evidence of suppression, which will sometimes tell us where the suppressed secret is located.<sup>716</sup>

Frank Kermode describes how secrets are employed by authors in the service of suspension; techniques that lead the reader to gloss over the mechanics of the narrative rather than focus on it to discover the plot. This philosophy holds equally true of *topeng* for, as Kermode argues, when a secret dies with the last custodian of the knowledge sequence, we look to the symbols themselves for clues to their meaning.<sup>717</sup>

In her joint role as secret-keeper and teacher, the late *dalang topeng* Sudji admonished Toto Sudarto, “If you wish to study *topeng*, you must understand what is behind it.” She picked up the mask, flipped it around, and continued, “For those who do not understand, they will only see wood behind it. There is something behind it that we must understand: its value, aesthetic, and symbols. In order to become a good dancer, we need to understand what is behind the mask.”<sup>718</sup> Sudji did not elaborate, but she was

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<sup>716</sup> Frank Kermode, “Secrets and Narrative Sequence,” *On Narrative*, W. J. T. Mitchell, ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 834.

<sup>717</sup> Ibid. Secrecy is pervasive in *topeng* and *wayang* generally, but its tendrils exist in orally-transmitted performance praxis throughout much of Southeast Asia. Examples include the *Mak Yong* of Kelantan, Malaysia, which enjoyed a protracted relationship with the Kelantan Sultanate until the 1920s, or Thailand’s *Nora Rong Khru Chao Ban* ritual, in which facets of secret learning associated with shamanism are transmitted only to those with a genealogy to become *nai rong*. In *Nora Rong Khru Chao Ban*, men almost always become *nai rong* and are reputed to have powerfully seductive powers over the spectator. Parichat Jungwittanaporn, “In Contact with the Dead; *Nora Rong Khru Chao Ban* Ritual of Thailand,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 23, no. 2 (2006), 384.

<sup>718</sup> “Kalau kamu ingin mengerti tari *topeng* dengan baik, kamu harus mempelajari dalamnya kedok...Bagi orang yang tidak mengerti dibalik *topeng* itu hanya ada kayu, sedangkan sebenarnya debalik itu terdapat

clearly signaling the inner life of the mask. Indeed, the physical part of the mask that rarely garners attention is rich in information about both the object and the culture that produced it: the verso. The mask's genealogy, how it was worn, its regional markers, and its knowledge, authority, and memories are imprinted here. Its inner face is a kind of Islamic calligraphy in translation: the two forms are symmetrical in their Islamic orientation. Where they differ – and differ greatly – is that calligraphy is designed to catch the eye, whereas scripted charms are restricted to the initiated. Thus, their audiences are different: calligraphy is designed with the spectator in mind, while the mask's inner face is a private matter. It is embodied.<sup>719</sup>

In itself, the mask is a piece of lifeless matter frozen in expression. At rest, its spirit is understood to be dormant but aware. The Cirebon mask's natural habitat is the *kotak topeng*, a simple wood box with a pyramidal lid. Physically, it is reminiscent of a coffin yet, rather than being static, it harnesses the mask's power. Removing the mask from the box so that it may be ritually fed on *Kliwon Jumat*<sup>720</sup> and prior to each performance keeps it sated, while energizing everything in its orbit.

Any history of the Javanese mask must include its raw material. Cirebon masks are made from a variety of woods, including the lighter weight *waru*, *kweni*, *kalujaran*, and *lame*, as well as the heavier *jaran*. Once extracted from the tree, wood is susceptible

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*sesuatu yang harus kita pelajari: nilai-nilai, estetika, simbol-simbol. Untuk menjadi penari topeng yang baik kita harus mengerti dalamnya.* Toto Sudarto, pers. comm., 27 September 2005.

<sup>719</sup> There is a fascinating correlation between the *jampi* inscribed in masks and the orthodox Jewish tradition of wearing *tefilin* during prayers. There are two kinds of *tefilin*, one for the forehead and the other for the arm. Each *tefilin* is a miniature box with straps attached. Inside each *tefilin* is a strip of parchment containing four miniature sets of verses from the *Torah* that have been painstakingly handwritten by a scribe. The head *tefilin* is wrapped in place between the eyes serving a similar purpose to the third eye of the *topeng* headdress, the *jampi* on the mask's verso, and to *dzikir*.

<sup>720</sup> Thursday night in the Javanese calendar.

to warping and decay from heat and burrowing termites. Hence, the life expectancy of a mask in the tropics rarely exceeds the century mark; most that surpass it have long ago found new homes in the distant, climate-friendlier shores of Europe and the United States, where they adorn home and museum walls.<sup>721</sup> The kind of paint (*sungging*) found on old masks has not been used in several generations. By 1910, traditional glue paint (*ancur*) and other natural pigments derived from bone, stone, and fruits were no longer in use. Today, store-bought “bicycle paint” is used. Its application takes less time, but the mask has a glossy, polished veneer.<sup>722</sup> This is quite different from the matte, crackly veneer seen on older masks. The quality of the painting on these older masks took much longer, and these masks’ aesthetic is generally superior to the contemporary crop.

The mask is not unilaterally embraced by traditional Muslims, even while – and perhaps because – it attempts to reconcile Sufism’s core tenet of reconciliation between the outer and the inner: *zahir* and *batin*, respectively. Its reconciliation is manifested in several ways, including magic learning and ascetic praxis blended with the physical properties of the mask itself.

### **Holding the Mask in Place**

Reconciling the mask’s *zahir* and *batin* polarity may be understood in how the mask is held in place: the dancer grips a piece of leather, rattan, or bamboo secured

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<sup>721</sup> Abdurachman also claims *mentaos* wood is used in Cirebon, but Suanda disputes this. Kandeg preferred *jaran* wood, which grows well in Cirebon’s swampy coastal area and is used exclusively for masks and firewood. It is soft to carve, but heavily knotted and grainy. This makes it less vulnerable to splitting, but also more difficult to manipulate. See Paramita Abdurachman. *Cerbon* (Jakarta Sinar Harapan, 1982), 125; Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master’s thesis, 210-11.

<sup>722</sup> Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master’s thesis, 210-11.

below the mouth of the inner face with her teeth. Rattan was most often employed in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It was typically molded into a U-shape with the ends inserted into two small holes on each side of the mouth. Bamboo was also used in masks of this period (and as recently as the mid-twentieth century). Bamboo, however, is less pliable. Thus two small sticks of approximately 1.5 inches each were inserted vertically into the mask. The front upper and lower teeth bite into the sticks to hold the mask in place.



Fig. 40. The inner face of Carpan's Klana mask incorporates the U-shaped rattan bitepiece. It has been restored with resin that is visible beneath the rattan. This mask has a particularly rich patina – a hallmark of masks with long-term use. It also incorporates a large red patch above the eyes designating its power base.



Fig. 41. Detail of bamboo prongs on a mask's inner face. The bamboo appears to have been made in a hurry because the right prong is  $1 \frac{3}{4}$ ," while the left one is only  $\frac{9}{12}$ " (they are usually the same length) and would be uncomfortable to wear. Collection of the Field Museum of Natural History. Acquisition # 36077.

Leather strips hammered into the mask with nails are also found on some masks of this vintage; however, this appears to be a late addition for there are often two holes where rattan or bamboo was likely used. While rattan was preferred, it was also more expensive and in limited supply. The bulk of it was imported from Kalimantan (Borneo), Sulawesi (Celebes), and even China. Bamboo, alternately, was readily available in the Cirebon region, particularly Kuningan (then Koeningan).<sup>723</sup> By the mid-1930s, rattan, bamboo and leather strips were being used interchangeably. By the 1950s, leather had

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<sup>723</sup> Dutch ledgers track the bamboo industry's growth between 1869–1870 in the regency (*Regentschap*) of Koeningan (Kuningan). According to one ledger, a total of 385,090 bamboo stalks had grown in the Koeningan area in early 1869: 83,841 in Koeningan proper; 123,743 in Kadoe-Gedih; 74,374 in Lebakwangie; 75,791 in Loeragoeng; and 38,352 in Tjiawi-Gebang. The following year, 6,146 new stalks were planted in the region. However, by year's end, 2,395 died, leaving a total of 388,841 bamboo stalks, an overall growth of 3,751 more stalks than the year before. *Inventaris Arsip Cirebon*. K.7: 70/8: *Cultuur verslag Koeningan, 1869-1870 "Bamboe Cultuur"* 3pp. Dated Koeningan, 2 Maart 1871. Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia.

become the dominant material.<sup>724</sup> Elderly *dalang*, who still own *pusaka* masks, prefer bamboo and rattan, with rattan their favorite, for it conforms to the dental configuration of the wearer over time and poses less stress on the jaw, teeth, and gums.<sup>725</sup> Leather, alternately, becomes brittle from being mixed with saliva; it hardens, tears, and eventually breaks.<sup>726</sup>

Why is the mask worn by biting into something secured when it is more comfortable secured behind the head? I postulate two reasons. The first reason is the important element of surprise. The mask is donned and removed suddenly and effortlessly, giving a magical impression.<sup>727</sup> Second, the act of biting generates an intimate connection between the trinity of wearer, spirit, and God. Breath, as we learned in the previous chapter, is central to *dzikir*. Containing spirit inside the mouth – the “home” of oral culture – signifies the interior life moving in unison with the material world. This is a dual epiphany in *topeng*, where the Divine and the ancestor coexist in one body. We will next examine the ideation of beauty in its internal and external manifestations.

### **The Human Face as a Medium: Teeth Filing and Betel Nut**

Anthony Reid theorizes that the human body is the most important medium of art, particularly in relationship to transitions into adulthood that incorporate “decoration

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<sup>724</sup> Bezemer, T. J. *Nederlandsch-Indie, Oud en Nieuw. Yearbook 1936, (Indonesian Arts and Crafts*. Amsterdam, 1936), 10

<sup>725</sup> Carpan, pers. comm., 18 February 2006.

<sup>726</sup> Carpan, pers. comm., 8 October 2005.

<sup>727</sup> This is similar to the Sichuan opera and itinerant form, *Po Lien* or *Bian Lian* (“changing faces”) that was well-known in Java before 1965. In *Po Lien*, the performer changes a series of masks in record speed, while covering the face with a large, draped sleeve.

and artifice, often of a painful kind.”<sup>728</sup> The blackening and filing of teeth is the most widespread Southeast Asian device of human body beautification, particularly in Indonesia, the Philippines, Burma, and Vietnam. Their purpose is anachronistic. Apparently, the rationale was to differentiate human beings from feral animals and demons of the spiritual world, who also had white teeth and, as such, would not be mistaken for an evil spirit upon death.<sup>729</sup>

Furthermore, the aesthetic use of cosmetics, including the blackening of teeth, has been linked with magical properties for centuries. The visual appearance of Cirebon masks is resonant with this practice where level, short teeth distinguish *topeng* masks from the demonic *raksasa* characters of the *wayang wong*, who sport elongated fangs.<sup>730</sup> Teeth filing was still practiced a few generations ago by young girls in Majalengka. This tradition is known as *dipangur* or *gusaran* coincided with the onset of menses. In this context, the filing was of modest proportion and chiefly symbolic.<sup>731</sup>

Beautification was also achieved with dyes. Throughout South and Southeast Asia, chewing *sirih* was the most common way to transfer dye to the lips and teeth. Its endurance in the region is marked by the elaborate craftsmanship associated with the nut

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<sup>728</sup> Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680*, v. 1, 75.

<sup>729</sup> Ibid, 75; citing Miguel Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, (New York: Knopf, 1937), 135; G. L. Forth, *Rindi: An Ethnographic Study of a Traditional Domain in Eastern Sumba*, (The Hague: Nijhoff for KITLV, 1981), 164; Nicolas Gervaise, *Histoire Naturelle et Politique du Royaume de Siam*. Paris: Claude Barbin, 1688, 113.

The one exception is the auxiliary character mask, *Jinggananom*, which sometimes (albeit rarely) sports modified fangs.

<sup>730</sup> Covarrubias has suggested that the practice of filing and blackening in Bali may correspond to early agriculture, combined with an attendant fear of hurting or offending the rice soul. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, 135.

<sup>731</sup> Toto Sudarto, pers. comm., 27 September 2005. The practice is not common today, although it may still be performed in a few isolated places.



cutters and lime boxes where *sirih* ingredients are stored.<sup>732</sup> *Sirih* is served in a small packet (quid) composed chiefly of areca nut shavings and lime paste, called *apu*. These items may be combined with select other ingredients including tobacco as a stimulant; camphor as an aphrodisiac; and *gambir* as a beautification device.<sup>733</sup> All these elements, that in their earlier context likely bridged local agricultural and spiritual beliefs, proved to have tremendous staying power long after Islam became the dominant discourse.

*Sirih* circulated throughout the Muslim world: India exported betel nut to the Middle East at least as far back as the thirteenth century where it enjoyed some notoriety in Mecca and Yemen, but proved too fragile for the long, arduous journey. Some conservative Muslims contend that *sirih*, in its comparisons to alcohol and stimulants, violates Islamic doctrine; as a result it was banned in much of the Arabian peninsula and among many Indian and Pakistani Muslims.<sup>734</sup> *Sirih* was long integrated into *topeng*'s ritual preparations, with the *dalang* chewing it in front of the *kotak topeng*, in plain view of the audience. This happened in conjunction with the opening musical section, *topeng talu*, while praying before dancing Panji.

In addition, *sirih*'s reputation as an aphrodisiac has contributed to its prominent role in courtship and marriage throughout the Malay world. This is visible in the lingua franca, Malay, where the word for areca, *pinang*,<sup>735</sup> is the root of the Malay words for

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<sup>732</sup> For examples of the finely crafted paraphernalia associated with its use, see Henry Brownrigg, *Betel Cutters from the Samuel Eilenberg Collection*, (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992).

<sup>733</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>734</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>735</sup> Cirebon Javanese: *nginang*.

engagement (*pinang*) and to propose marriage (*memingan*). Furthermore, *pinang muda* is the young nut, whose two halves, when combined, represent a perfect match.<sup>736</sup>

*Gambir*, the substance used as a dye, is formed from the young shoots and leaves of the *uncaria gambir* plant and prepared in a reddish-brown paste. The *gambir/apu* mixture, when combined with saliva, reddens the lips, a symbol of idealized beauty in *topeng*. Reddened lips also signal the complex androgyny of the first three characters in the lexicon: Panji, Samba, and Rummyang. This is particularly true of Samba, who is generally understood to be Kresna's son from the *Mahabharata*, but who applies lip color while looking in a mirror during *Tari Topeng Samba*.

Beautification was important due to fierce competition for work. Audiences required that the artist's face be pleasing to watch, regardless of the *dalang*'s gender. To this end, a yellow facial powder, *bedak kuning*, was applied to give the face a special glow.<sup>737</sup> The human face was thus objectified as much as the mask. During the first part of the dance, the spectator had ample time to fantasize about the *dalang*, both as an object of beauty and a potential mate. The most successful performers combined beauty and charisma with exceptional talent.

With the increasing ubiquity of Western cosmetics over the past two generations, reliance on *sirih* has diminished. Even though lipstick does not fulfill *sirih*'s magic function and is very expensive, it is accepted. In fact, it is preferred. Sujana Arja recalled how his father, Arja, always chewed betel in front of the *kotak topeng* before performing Panji. Arja instructed his son to do the same, but Sujana refused because of its foul taste

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<sup>736</sup> Brownrigg, *Betel Cutters from the Samuel Eilenberg Collection*, 30.

<sup>737</sup> Yellow is associated with *supiyah* (possessiveness, but also fertility, e.g. water), and the androgynous Samba.

and because by then lipstick was readily available. Sujana described the technique, *qodo*, as similar to a thin strip of paper called *yanci*. Water is added to it before rubbing it on the lips.<sup>738</sup> *Sirih*, then, served aesthetic, erotic, and ritual functions immortalized in the mask.

In past generations, *sirih* was widely believed to promote good oral hygiene and strong teeth and gums – both of which are essential for the *dalang* for securing the mask on the face.<sup>739</sup> Losing one's front teeth marked the end of a *dalang*'s career. This was the case with Rasinah, who had not performed in many years, when she was urged to resurrect her career in the early 1990s. Rasinah bawked because she had no front teeth, but her supporters persisted. They gave her funds to create a studio and rebuild her career. Rasinah had other plans for the money: she purchased a set of dentures – a decision that jump-started her career and catapulted her into one of the most financially successful *dalang topeng* of the twentieth century. Carpan's sister, *dalang topeng* Sayen's story is the norm. When she lost her front teeth she retired from dancing, but continues to play *gender panerus* in Carpan's gamelan.<sup>740</sup> Hence, the teeth, the lips, indeed all of the facial orifices, provide the most direct pathway to mask-knowledge.

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<sup>738</sup> Sujana Arja, pers. comm., 6 August 2005.

<sup>739</sup> Rather than providing good oral health, the opposite appears to be true. Recent studies show that chewing betel quid increases gum disease, including oral cancers, and is a significant predictor of tooth loss.

<sup>740</sup> Since *dalang topeng* often study *gamelan* before starting their dance studies, they are expected to be competent musicians. This also provides an organic transition from *dalang* to musician if the dancer can no longer perform. Elderly women who no longer dance, often play the xylophone instruments (*titi*) or *gender panerus*.



Fig. 42. A long-term *sirih* connoisseur in Cirebon. Most of her teeth are black, but her lips are red. Cirebon, 27 June 2006.



Fig. 43. Jinggaanom mask. The upper teeth are painted white, while the lower ones are black, representing *sirih*. Collection: Baerni, Gegesik, Cirebon.

## The Externalized Object: The Mask is the Medium

By the time Pigeaud's encyclopedic tome on Javanese folk theatre, *Javaansche Volksvertoningen* was published in 1938, the masks of Java were already established as *objets d'art* by at least two wealthy Indonesian collectors. As we learned, *Susuhunan*<sup>741</sup> Mangkunegoro VII, the Dutch-educated ruler of the minor court of the same name [r. 1916-1944] and the appointed Sino-Javanese head of Cirebon, Major Tan Tjin Kie [1853-1919] were early collectors of Cirebonese and Javanese masks.<sup>742</sup> The Mangkunegoro collection is better known because of its size, its relationship with the Surakarta court, and because the collection appears to be intact. Tan Tjin Kie's collection, in contrast, was apparently dispersed during the Japanese era.<sup>743</sup> The early twentieth century regent of Serang, Prince Ahmad Jayadiningrat should be added to this list of fledgling Native collectors though less is known about his collecting habits.<sup>744</sup>

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<sup>741</sup> *Susuhunan* is the title of the ruler of the minor court, *Puro Mangkunagaran*. The title "Sultan" is reserved for the ruler of the *Kraton Yogyakarta* and the rulers of three of Cirebon's courts: *Kasepuhan*, *Kanoman*, and *Kacirebonan*. The title of Cirebon's *Kraton Kaprabonan*'s ruler is "*Panembahan*."

<sup>742</sup> Pigeaud also notes the relationship between the Cirebon's approximately four-hundred-year old Chinese temple, *Klenteng Koan-Iem*, and *topeng* Cirebon. Th. Pigeaud *Javaanse Volksvertoningen*, 113-4. See also Ezerman, *Catatam mengenai Kelenteng Koan Iem "Tiao-Kak-Sie" di Cirebon*, (Majalengka.Perhimpunan Kesenian dan Ilmu Pengetahuan Batavia, n.d.); Tan Gin Ho (n.d.). *Mayor Tan Tjin Kie (1853-1919): Mayor titular warga Tionghoa Cirebon.Kenang-kenangan untuk para Keluarga Berkaitan dengan Saat-Saat Wafatnya, Ayah Mayor Tan Keng Bie (Mayor Tan Tjin Kie) Sampai Selesai Pemakamannya*. Trans. Iwan Satibi, (Majalengka, n.d. (c.2004)).

<sup>743</sup> Anderson, "A Language Learned in Java." I have compared the Mankunegoro VII collection on display at *Puro Mangkunegoro*, with Claire Holt's documentation of many of the same masks in the collection. Most of the Holt archive was gifted to the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York, by Cornell University. Deena Burton catalogued a large chunk of the archive prior to her death in 2005. For more on Holt's relationship to Mangkunegoro VII, see Burton's 2000 dissertation, "*Sitting at the Feet of Gurus*": *The Life and Ethnography of Claire Holt* (New York University, 2000), 63-65; and Deena Burton, *Sitting at the Feet of Gurus: The Life and Ethnography of Claire Holt*, (NP: Xlibris Corporation, 2009), 41.

<sup>744</sup> Toto Sudarto, interview, 27 September 2005.

Stone incrustation in masks is relatively rare but, when found, the practice appears to have symbolic reference.<sup>745</sup> Sudarto contends that stones were incorporated into specific characters, most commonly, Samba and Klana, to satisfy noble aesthetics. This is plausible since the children of local *bupati* (regent officers) and other elites were occasional students of *topeng* long before the form was officially opened to outsiders after 1965. The type of stone employed was likely determined by two factors: its cost and the temperament of the specific character. Thus the stone had to be resonant with the psychological features of a given character.

As noted elsewhere in this study, the majority of early twentieth century ethnographic museums were founded on native artifacts acquired from the colonies (although very few Cirebon masks in Western collections have stones). The combination of moral ambiguity and ready access to Java's visual splendors proved to be an irresistible cocktail. Their fine patinas inform us that many of the masks were used for generations; while the sole purpose of others, no matter how well crafted, was economic-based. But the sheer number of ethnographic museums that sprung up in recent years confirm that their acquired *objets d'art* were not a passing fancy. Several artifacts purchased by the Field Museum were either sold or traded soon after the World Columbian Exposition to other American museums.<sup>746</sup>

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<sup>745</sup> Among the few Cirebon masks that incorporate stones, the stones are placed either on the inner eye (forehead), cheeks, or chin. These points are identical with the facial mapping of *susuk*. The inner eye also corresponds to the *cakra* point of the same location, suggesting a possible Tantric/Sufic influence.

<sup>746</sup> Some objects were sold to the Brander Matthews Dramatic Museum at Columbia University, the U.S. National Museum, and Harvard's Peabody Museum.

When gemstones appear on Cirebon masks, their purpose is to project the locus of power: the center. Those placed on the forehead designate the inner eye, or *wahyu*.<sup>747</sup> It simultaneously conveys the object's internalization, a beautification device, and a chthonic projection, much like the *kala* face, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Thus, stones bridge the concealed and the revealed. Inlaid stones and crystals on the teeth of some old Central Javanese masks, in contrast, confer the commissioner's prestige and wealth [see fig. 44]. Mask carver M. B. Supana Wiguna of Yogyakarta contends that when stones are placed in Central Javanese masks to convey power, they are designated exclusively as the third eye.



Fig. 44. Old Javanese mask (Yogyakarta?) with dental stone inlays on teeth. Private Collection. Photograph reproduced courtesy of Supana Wiguna (Pono Wiguno), Yogyakarta.

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<sup>747</sup> A divine source of power that is imprinted in the human body.

Inlaid diamonds and small stones on the center of teeth signal the status of the mask's owner, as *sirih* once did. Indeed, viewed from a distance, dental stones acquire a *sirih* aesthetic. In some cases, gold paint frames the diamond to accentuate its status. Gold and silver dental crowns sometimes cap the *dalang*'s front teeth for the same purpose.<sup>748</sup>

I have only examined two old Cirebon masks with inlaid stones: a Klana mask in the collection of a *dalang topeng* in Gegesik, Cirebon, and a Bima<sup>749</sup> mask at the Mangkunegoro court. As one might expect, each mask has an unusual history.

The Klana mask in the possession of a *dalang* has crystal fragments imbedded in the centers of the three floral motifs in the mask's *mahkota* (crown). The mask's provenance is hazy. The *dalang*'s mother referred to it as a family heirloom, but otherwise could not shed light on its history. A very different version of the mask's provenance was mentioned by a *topeng* scholar. He had been contacted by the *dalang* (the mask's current owner) when she heard the mask was for sale. Concerned it would land in foreign hands, the *dalang* sought funds from the *topeng* community to purchase it.<sup>750</sup> This anecdote marks an important shift in rural artists' attitudes about the *pusaka* masks they were forced to sell during times of need. This may, in fact, have been the seller's situation. The difference is that a grassroots movement has emerged in recent years dedicated to keeping *pusaka* masks in the *topeng* community.

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<sup>748</sup> Sujana Arja had a few dental crowns to project the trinity of wealth, status, and power.

<sup>749</sup> Jayat Sena is synonymous with the young Bima, and is also referred to as Bratasena.

<sup>750</sup> I was unable to ascertain who contributed to its purchase, but it was a joint effort.





Fig. 45. Klana mask, recto. Only remnants of the original crystal remain in two of the three crown points.



Fig. 46. Klana mask, verso. *Jangan brani beroba khas Gegesik* (“Don’t [be so] bold as to alter. Authentic Gegesik [style].”)

It is widely known that the Cirebon courts have not enjoyed the same riches as those of Yogyakarta and Solo.<sup>751</sup> The Cirebon court's financial decline resulted in selling some of their power-laden *pusaka*, including their masks, many of which wound up with Mangkunegoro VII.<sup>752</sup>

Mangkunegoro VII was a champion and innovator of classical Javanese music and dance, particularly the operatic *langendriyan*. He enjoyed warm relations with the Dutch archeologist, Willem Stutterheim and Claire Holt who were then romantically involved.<sup>753</sup> Holt, who herself was a dancer, was a frequent guest at the Surakarta court where she discussed the arts with Mangkunegoro VII, attended dance rehearsals, and photographed much of his collection.

In addition to Holt, Ben Anderson was one of the few outsiders granted permission to photograph *Susuhunan* Mangkunegoro VII's collection.<sup>754</sup> One of these masks is Bima [Figs. 47, 48], the second Pandawa brother of the *Mahabharata*, portrayed in the village form of *wayang wong*.<sup>755</sup> Bima, who is noted for his strength, is

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<sup>751</sup> The Cultivation System (*Cultuurstelsel*) was launched by Johannes van den Bosch in 1830, leaving the Cirebon *kraton* impoverished due to the implementation of heavy taxes. For analysis of the cultivation system, I direct the reader to the following sources: Cornelis Fasseur, *The Politics of Colonial Exploitation: Java, the Dutch, and the Cultivation System*, R. E. Elson, ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1992); Robert Van Niel, *Java Under the Cultivation System: Collected Writings*, (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1992); Fernando, Radin. *Famine in Cirebon Residency in Java 1844-1850: A New Perspective on the Cultivation System*, (Melbourne: Monash University, 1980).

<sup>752</sup> Gusti Heru, pers. comm., 20 April 2006.

<sup>753</sup> Stutterheim was technically still married to a woman in the Netherlands at the time.

<sup>754</sup> Anderson photographed the masks in 1960s and *topeng* scholar Toto Sudarto archived them in the 1990s. Thus, on the average, one outsider was provided access every thirty years. Anderson, who was an avid collector of Javanese and Balinese masks describes those from Cirebon as his "personal favorite." Anderson, "A language learned in Java."

<sup>755</sup> Bima and his three brothers defeat the one hundred Korawas in the war known as the *Bharata Yuda*. There is an important *lakon* (*wayang* story) based on the union of Bratasena and Arimbi. *Wayang wong* has two versions, one of which is unmasked and associated with the Cirebon sultanate.

painted reddish-brown. His cheeks are adorned with teardrop-shape translucent, metallic green stones.



Fig. 47. Bima. Mangkunegoro Collection. Note the thin metallic green stone inlay in each cheek. Blackened upper molars and lower teeth represent *sirih* use. Collection: Puro Mangkunegoro. Photo courtesy of Toto Sudarto.

GPH Herwasto Kusumo (alias Gusti Heru), a prince at the Mangkunegoro court, is today in charge of their culture department, *Rekso Budoyo*. In addition to collecting Cirebonese masks, Gusti Heru's grandfather was an avid collector of masks from Central Java, East Java, Madura, and Bali. According to Gusti Heru, when Sultans from neighboring kingdoms visited Mangkunegoro it was the custom to bring entertainers and

objects from their territories, both of which fell under the rubric of *pusaka*.<sup>756</sup> Masks unquestionably qualified as *pusaka* and were not limited to inanimate objects. If a prince admired one of the female dancers, she too might be left behind.<sup>757</sup> Very few of the Cirebon masks, however, were given as gifts. Gusti Heru believes Mangkunegoro VII dipped into his personal savings to acquire them from *Kraton Kasepuhan*.<sup>758</sup> The impetus for such purchases was three-fold. First, as mentioned above, the Cirebon *kraton* was cash-poor; second, they satisfied the *Susuhunan*'s collecting habit; and third, moving the masks to another kingdom ensured the heirlooms did not end up in Dutch hands.<sup>759</sup> The Mangkunegoro court enjoyed friendlier ties with the Dutch than the Cirebon courts in the late nineteenth century.<sup>760</sup>

I made two trips to Solo to examine the Bima mask. While the collection remains on public view today, it is roped off. Furthermore, the masks are crammed together in such close proximity to one another, and at such odd angles, that one seeks in vain to establish a decent viewing position.

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<sup>756</sup> Onghokham contends that some of the Malang masks in the Mangkunegoro collection were collected by the *bupati* (district head) of Malang, Raden Adipati Soerio-adiningrat, who was a patron of Malang *topeng*. Onghokham speculates this transmission probably occurred because the *bupati*'s wife was a granddaughter of Mangkunegoro II. The majority of the *bupati*'s collection resides at the Museum Sono Budoyo in Yogyakarta. Onghokham, "The Wayang Topèng World of Malang," *Indonesia* 14 (1972), 111.

<sup>757</sup> GPH Herwasto Kusumo (alias: Gusti Heru), pers. comm., 20 April 2006.

<sup>758</sup> Transactions of this sort were duly noted by the late Sultan. GPH Herwasto Kiusumo [Gusti Heru], pers. comm., 20 April 2006. *Kraton Kasepuhan* had the largest collection of masks of the four Cirebon *kraton*. In 2006, Kasepuhan's collection was comprised of two Cirebon *wayang wong* masks (Gatatkaca c. 1899 and Sugriwa, c. 1920s) in their collection. A member of *Kasepuhan*'s court said that some duplicate masks were gifted as *pusaka* to Sultans from other courts during palace visits. The rest of the masks, he said, were given to heirs of the Sultan of *Kasepuhan*. I was unable to locate any of these masks. He also said that *Kasepuhan*'s Sultan Sepuh IV Jainuddin Amir Sena (r. 1750-1778) commissioned many masks. The masks in the Mangkunegoro collection are much newer than the reign of Sultan Sepuh IV.

<sup>759</sup> Gusti Herus, pers. comm., 20 April 2006.

<sup>760</sup> As described in the first chapter of this study, Mangkunegoro V cooperated with the Dutch to bring a troupe of *srimpi* court dancers to the *Exposition Universelle* of 1889, and Chicago's 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.



Fig. 48. Bima mask (top). This is the same mask as fig. 47. This photo was taken through the glass door of the case. Collection: Puro Mangkunegoro.

I was unable to examine the mask outside of its case on my first trip, due to the palace's strict policy about opening the cases. I returned to Solo several months later, accompanied by Didik Nini Thowok, who generously set up a meeting with Gusti Heru so that I could examine the mask. Following a pleasant meeting with the Prince,<sup>761</sup> an elegant palace lunch, and walking tour of the museum, it became clear that I would not be able to examine Bima outside of the cluttered case. "Too much bureaucracy," Gusti Heru said at the end of our meeting.<sup>762</sup> And so it was.

Two high-ranking officials – one from Mangkunegoro and the other from *Kasepuhan* – informed me of a sub-group of masks that were not intended to be worn,

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<sup>761</sup> The other known scholars to do so are Benedict Anderson and Claire Holt. I am indebted to Toto Sudarto for generously sharing his photographic documentation with me.

<sup>762</sup> Gusti Heru, pers. comm., 20 April 2006. A few insiders suggest that the cases will not be opened due to their fear that it would be catastrophic to release the long deprived, unhappy spirits into the world.

but gifted or sold as souvenirs to Dutch and local dignitaries. The carving and painting of those masks intended for sale are generally of higher quality than ones intended for use. This suggests the carvers' attentiveness to the aesthetic taste of the buyer. Some souvenir miniature masks have surfaced in museum collections.<sup>763</sup> Their non-use status is only realized on the mask's verso. Often there are no signs of wear; no patina associated with use; no pieces of wood chiseled out.<sup>764</sup> One telltale sign that the mask has been used is the surface where the dancer's lips make contact with the leather, rattan, or bamboo bite piece. All of these surfaces leave dental impressions, and/or pink or reddish coloring from betel nut (or more recently, lipstick). The wood on the verso typically has a nice patina resulting from contact with make-up (*bedak kuning*) and the natural oil produced from sweat.<sup>765</sup>

The idea that stone-incrusted masks in particular were solely intended as *objets d'art* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is tantalizing. Amin Sweeney<sup>766</sup>

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<sup>763</sup> Some finely carved and painted miniature masks from Cirebon landed in the *Rijks Ethnographisch Museum* in Leiden. There is only a brief description of the masks. See Joseph Gregor *Masks of the World: An Historical and Pictorial Survey of Many Types & Times*. New York: Benjamin Blom, [1937], 1968), 30, Plate 68 (fig. 191). It is not known whether the Cirebon miniature masks served a magic function, such as the Lega masks of the Kongo, which were worn as amulets or served as protectors of the full-size masks. The Cirebon masks may have at one time served a similar function. Contemporary Cirebonese miniature masks appear utterly profane. They are sometimes sold as key chains and often dangle from a car's rear-view mirror. Yet the position of the latter corresponds to the double *kala* face image whose role is to protect or "watch the back" of its owner.

<sup>764</sup> Chiseling off a piece of the mask's interior was prescribed for certain power-laden masks to minimize its perceived powers as protector of the *dalang*, particularly should it wind up in unsympathetic hands. John Emigh shared a story about a performance in the *Bhagavata Mela* tradition (a temple service to the Deity) among Telegu-speaking Brahmin families of Tamil Nad: in an effort to seek a middle ground between possession and mimetic performance, they chiseled away a bit of the inside of the wooden mask of Narasimha in order to lessen its power for fear that the trance would be too violent, which would prevent the performance from being completed. John Emigh, pers. comm., 21 July 2006.

<sup>765</sup> Dancing with wood masks and multi-layered costumes tends to generate considerable perspiration.

<sup>766</sup> I am indebted to Amin Sweeney for his insight into the stones' multivalence.

argues that such purposeful flexibility “shatters the schemata.”<sup>767</sup> By this he means that it explodes the stereotype of the stones’ intended use as pure decoration:

The artist begins not with a visual impression but with an idea or concept. He has a stock of mental stereotypes, schemata or formulas, which he adapts to suit his needs and, when he seeks to match the sights of the visible world, the process is one of schema and correction.<sup>768</sup>

In this context, the stones are iconic constructs of power and protection. Yet their meaning resonates on several levels. The stones may have been added as an embellishment, but their strategic placement and attentiveness to temperament through color and expression suggests something far more compelling: the stones may have been inlaid as a safety measure to protect the mask carver and larger community from the custodian of the mask, particularly in the event its owner was an outsider. The question of ownership, thus, is contested.

It is doubtful that stone-embellished masks were commissioned by peasant *dalang*. Precious and semi-precious stones and metals were coveted objects of international trade. They were also expensive. With the exception of the *dalang*-owned Klana mask of mysterious provenance, other *dalang* were unfamiliar with stone-incrusted masks. This lacuna in a culture where *topeng*’s history is orally transmitted is significant in that a correction of the mask’s schema would likely have registered in the oral histories of *topeng* families. Furthermore, the host was expected to provide *dalang topeng* and *bodor* not only with their staples for the day, food and cigarettes; they also loaned artists their batik, musical instruments, and, one would assume, if available and

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<sup>767</sup> Schemata are cognitive mental structures that represent certain aspects of the world. People quite unconsciously use schemata to provide a framework for understanding future events.

<sup>768</sup> P. L. Amin Sweeney, *Authors and Audiences in Traditional Malay Literature*, (Berkeley: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, University of California, 1980), 38-39.

needed, their masks. While *dalang* had not encountered such masks, their magical properties were nonetheless obvious to them. The rarity of these masks is evident, too, in the collecting habits of *peranakan* Chinese. Those old enough to recall *topeng* performances before 1965 do not remember any masks with stones.<sup>769</sup>

Stone incrustation is specific. It is not related to tattooing and other forms of scarification found elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Whether these foreign objects are externalized, that is, displayed, or concealed in the body, they are beholden to a complex network of beliefs that merge outer and inner realms.

### **The Internalized Object: Susuk**

Power is that intangible, mysterious, and divine energy which animates the universe. It is manifested in every aspect of the natural world, in stones trees, clouds, and fire, but is expressed quintessentially in the central mastery of life, the process of generation and regeneration. In Javanese traditional thinking there is no sharp division between organic and inorganic matter, for everything is sustained by the same invisible power.<sup>770</sup>

The relationship between power, pleasure, and form is omnipresent in *topeng*. Prior to donning the mask the face is naked to the world. It is a revelation. Yet neither is the *dalang*'s face naked; rather, it is enhanced to draw the spectator in like a magnet. When the mask is finally donned, pleasure is deferred in the service of something higher.

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<sup>769</sup> However, many artifacts collected by *peranakan* Chinese were either stolen or destroyed during the Japanese occupation, so this information cannot be verified.

<sup>770</sup> Anderson, "Idea of Power in Javanese Culture," 21-23.



Just as strategically placed stones serve to connect the *dalang* to a higher power, the needle charms known as *susuk* serve a similar function.<sup>771</sup> Even the implantation sites are identical. The difference is that while the stone inlays on masks are visually cued for contemplation and projecting power, *susuk* is inserted subcutaneously – its closely guarded meaning is not open to interpretation. The goal, however, is the same: to mine the boundaries of human interaction between the occupant and the onlooker. *Susuk* is a remarkably durable old Malay tradition. Even Soeharto is said to have been a proponent, catapulting him to both the heights and deepest valleys of his career by failing to remove it at the proper time.<sup>772</sup>

The correlation between precious metals and stones with power is not unique to Southeast Asia. It is found wherever cosmopolitanism flourished, sprouting along trade routes from Mexico to Afghanistan and points beyond.<sup>773</sup> Metal and stones, which were

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<sup>771</sup> Reid has gathered together many primary sources about the significance of gold, silver, and iron throughout Southeast Asia. The Indonesian *kris*' (sword) iron blade exemplifies both its protective and destructive potential. Skeat's encyclopedic colonial-era text describes how Malay rituals surrounding vegetation, marriage, and overt power displays often incorporated metal and stones. Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680*. v. 1, 96-103, 106-119; Walter William Skeat, *Malay Magic. Being an Introduction to the Folklore and Popular Religion of the Malay Peninsula* ([1900], 1967 Reprint ed.), 240-42, 250-77.

<sup>772</sup> Benedict Anderson, "Exit Suharto: Obituary for a Mediocre Tyrant," *New Left Review* 50 (2008), 28-29.

*Susuk*'s durability ensured wide acceptance of birth control implants when they were introduced in Indonesia in the mid-1980s. This was likely because inserting foreign objects subcutaneously was already an accepted practice. Even the word '*susuk*' has been appropriated by many Javanese to describe birth control implants in the arm. According to one report, birth control users in the lesser Sunda islands, including Timor, Sumbawa, and Flores, readily understood that the product was to be put in the arm and removed five years later, though the reason for its removal was less clear. Poor communication resulted in the failure to remove the product in a timely fashion. Though not understood by the article's authors, this was probably due to the deeper religious and spiritual function of authentic *susuk*. Terence H. Hull, "The Challenge of Contraceptive Implant Removals in East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia," *International Family Planning Perspectives*. Guttmacher Institute 1998) 24, no. 4.

<http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/2417698.html> (accessed 27 January 2009).

<sup>773</sup> Pre-Conquest Mexican tutelary masks fashioned from emeralds, gold, turquoise, and pearls required equal measures of wealth, craftsmanship, and religious motivation. The burial of precious gold and stones with their deceased owners occurred in the heart of the Silk Road's Tillya Tepe (lit: "Golden Mound") in

portable, light, and intrinsically valuable, were key objects of trade, status, and power both for the living and the dead far beyond Southeast Asia's periphery. Gold and silver's poorer cousin, iron, fueled many indigenized practices in Islamic pockets of Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly the magic-affiliated ironwork of Nigeria, the Ivory Coast, and Senegal.<sup>774</sup> Iron staffs and iron blades and the highly sought silver sheaths of Javanese *kris* are equally prized *pusaka*.<sup>775</sup> However, inserting *susuk* into the body proper to increase one's magnetism appears to be endemic to Southeast Asia, particularly the Malay world. Yet, *susuk*'s role within the *topeng* community is enigmatic, fortified by the *dalang*'s secrecy about inherited knowledge. In past generations, many *dalang*'s first encounter with *susuk* was during adolescence. Those who acknowledge having used it, argue for its necessity in a highly competitive field. They describe it as "white magic," whose goal is self-improvement.

*Susuk* is sought for a variety of reasons, of which three dominate: *tusuk penghasilan* ("love charm needle") is used to attract (*tertarik*) others to the individual; *susuk kekuatan* (Cirebon Javanese: "*tusuk ngilmu kedugalan*") is to request power – attracting and keeping it; and *susuk wibawa* (Cirebon Javanese: *tusuk komara*) is initiated to raise the aura or status of the wearer. The majority of *dalang* who are

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north Afghanistan. The majority of jewelry found there is composed of gold and turquoise. See Donald Cordry, *Mexican Masks* (Austin: University of Texas, 1980), 88-9; Frederik Hiebert, *Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2008); Penny Edwards brought to my attention that gold, turquoise, and other stones were buried with their rightful owners in thirteenth century Burma, which led to pillaging corpses for their material prizes.

<sup>774</sup> Iron plays a dominant role as embodied power in the tools and the iron staffs of Yoruba cults of Osanyin. See Denis Williams, *Icon and Image: A Study of Sacred and Secular Forms of African Classical Art*, (New York: New York University Press, 1974), 51-100; William Fagg, *African Tribal Images: The Katherine White Reswick Collection* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1968), 138.

<sup>775</sup> The *kris* is also widely known in Aceh and the Minangkabau of West Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Bali. T. J. Bezemer, *Les Arts et Métiers Indonésiens: Atlas d'Images*, (Le Haye: N.p., n.d. [c.1920]), 11-13 + plates 208-9; 210-14; 218-235. Václav Solc, *Swords and Daggers of Indonesia* (London: Spring Books, n.d.), Unpag.

proponents of *susuk* typically request the first and second type, or a combination of the two.<sup>776</sup>

The inner eye cakra point is a popular place to implant *susuk* among *dalang*. The needle or tiny beads are composed of gold, silver, iron, or diamonds impregnated with charms or incantations (*jampi*). The *jampi* must be recited by the individual fitting the *susuk*. While the charm is contained within the body, its purpose, encoded in the mantra, is projected out into the world.

*Susuk* fitters generally fall within three categories: *dukun* (shaman), “paranormals” and upper-echelon *elang*.<sup>777</sup> This connection to the court is significant in light of Islam’s perceived prohibition on body alteration. It points to the long-term collaboration between *dalang topeng* and *dalang wayang* at the *kraton*. The majority of rural *dalang* have their *susuk* fitted by itinerant *dukun*. An elderly puppeteer, who asked not to be identified, recalled *susuk* being provided to artists at two of the Cirebon courts until recently.

Linus Suyadi’s (1981) *Pengakuan Pariyem: Dunia Batin Seorang Wanita Jawa* [“Confessions of Pariyem: The Interior World of a Javanese Woman”] is one of the few literary accounts of *susuk* use in performance, where it was employed to draw men in

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<sup>776</sup> *Susuk wibawa* is often requested when embarking on business ventures.

<sup>777</sup> *Elang* is an honorific associated with high-ranking Cirebon court officials. Today, it often refers to a court regent, or *patih*. The etymology of the honorific is traceable to the Malay term *eling*, which corresponds to sustained consciousness through remembrance. In its mystical context it connotes *dzikir*. Not all *Elang* offer *susuk*. It varies among the courts. Both *ratu* (high female members) and *elang* are trained in its preparation and implementation. Today, it is considered a service and a fee is attached as a financial cushion.

and increase the *pesindhen*'s status.<sup>778</sup> Interestingly, *susuk* is not believed to enhance the individual's features. It does not make a person more physically attractive, a dancer more gifted, or a singer's voice more beautiful. Its function is illusory – to project charisma, which in turn draws attention to the *susuk* wearer like a magnet. Thus, it is not transformative, but magic. *Dalang* Sukarta put it thus: “A person hears something apparently pleasant, because she or he is susceptible to its aura, whereas it is an illusion that is interpreted as if they like, enjoy, or are attracted to the person.”<sup>779</sup>

### ***Attitudes About Body Alteration in the Islamic Canon***

The *kraton*'s deliverance of *susuk* in the past was at the very least irritating to orthodox Muslims for whom magic amulets are objectionable. Furthermore, the placement of the mantra – whether written or spoken – between the Divine Name and an encrypted *Quranic* passage is prohibited,<sup>780</sup> yet it is the act of whispering “Allah” that charges the amulet.

While the interplay between *susuk* and *jampi* is foreign to the *Quran*, *jampi* are locally understood as being borrowed from it. They were said to have been translated by the *walisanga* during Java's Islamization before the Javanese were acquainted with Arabic. But the introduction and close of the mantra may not be translated from the

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<sup>778</sup> A translated excerpt of Suyadi's text is available in R. Anderson Sutton, “Who is the *Pesindhen*? Notes on the Female Singing Tradition in Java,” *Indonesia* 37 (1984), 117-118. Linus Suyadi's (1981) *Pengakuan Pariyem Dunia Batin Seorang Wanita Jawa*, (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1981) 130.

<sup>779</sup> “Orang yang mendengarkannya sepertinya enak, karena terpengaruh oleh aura itu padahal orisinilnya orang itu tidak begitu, jadi dibikin supaya orang suka/senang/ tertarik.” Sukarta, pers. comm., 15 May 2006.

<sup>780</sup> Traditional Muslims prohibit combining Arabic with other languages, let alone with the aim of producing a magical outcome.

Arabic, with one enforcing the other.<sup>781</sup> *Dalang wayang/topeng* Sukarta contends that its efficacy is dependent upon the blending of *Quranic* snippets with the mantra whose power is fortified when whispered (*bisikan*) by the *dalang*. Sukarta, who long ago forfeited *susuk* in favor of *jampi* and fasting, generously shared an incantation he uses in combination with a “white fast.”<sup>782</sup>

In the name of Allah  
*Asmarawulan*<sup>783</sup> in my mouth, The prophet of David in my voice, the  
Prophet of Joseph in my face, my light is The Prophet Muhammad,  
whoever looks at me will love and have mercy on me, be amazed by  
me. It is because of Allah.

*Bismillah*  
*Asmarawulan ing tutug ku, Nabi Daud ing swaraku, Nabi Yusuf ing*  
*rupaku, Cahyaku Nabi Mohammad. Sapa kang pada nyawang aku*  
*teka welas teka asih, teka demen, teka kangen, wong sabuana*  
*pandelenge marang aku, teka kedip, teka sirep, rep sirep saking*  
*kersane Allah.*

This incantation illustrates the sandwiching effect of the Arabic/*jampi*/Arabic model. The actual *jampi*, “*Asmarawulan* in my mouth” is sandwiched between Allah’s name and the reference to David who, according to the *Quran* was gifted with a splendid voice. He next refers to the handsome and virile Joseph before turning his focus to Allah’s messenger, the Prophet Muhammad. The charm is sealed with the Divine Name. This structure is in keeping with the Islamic tenet that only Allah can provide. The *Quran* and magic charms are, thus, equivalents.

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<sup>781</sup> The openings, Allah and Allahuma may under no circumstances be translated. Other Arabic expressions that are prohibited from being translated include *Ya Arhamarroohimin* and *Yaa Robbana Atina Fiddunya Hasanah*, neither of which may be selected to seal the prayer.

<sup>782</sup> White fasting allows the *dalang* a handful of rice and a half glass of water daily for seven days and seven nights. On the seventh night, the *dalang* must perform *Ngebleng* – a full fast (no food or water) for the next 24 hours.

<sup>783</sup> I can only provide a literal translation for *Asmarawulan*. *Asmara* refers to romantic love or adoration, while *wulan* corresponds to ‘month.’

There is not a single mention of *susuk* in the *Quran*, yet many Muslims view it as black magic and, hence, *haram*.<sup>784</sup> Particularly troublesome is the Herculean powers of attraction ascribed to *susuk* and the wearer's invulnerability. *Ulama*<sup>785</sup> stress its symmetry with tattooing, or any other alteration of the human body, which are also considered *haram* because Muslims are prohibited from making requests from anyone but Allah. One *kyai* compared it to requesting something from Satan.<sup>786</sup> Others make a clear distinction between *susuk* and tattoo; the latter is perceived to be a desecration of the body and manipulation of God's Will. It is particularly offensive because the skin is prevented from absorbing water, a requirement of *wudlu*.<sup>787</sup>

*Susuk* may not appear in the *Quran*, however, there are numerous references to molten copper, bronze, and brass in the context of valuables.<sup>788</sup> Perhaps the most important Islamic refutation of *susuk* is in the context of hoarding, gleaned from *At-Tawbah* (Repentance)<sup>789</sup> *Surat* 9, 34 & 35:

*Surat* 9, 34:

Alas beholders, there are many clerics and monks<sup>790</sup> who wrongfully devour men's possessions while hindering others from following the path of God. But as for all who accumulate treasures of gold and silver and do not spend them on the path to God, shall suffer heartache in the next life.

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<sup>784</sup> A prohibition on something for religious reasons.

<sup>785</sup> Islamic scholars with jurisdiction over legal and regional social matters.

<sup>786</sup> In the context of Islam, Satan represents a spirit of demonic nature, or *jinn*, rebellious of God's will.

<sup>787</sup> The ablution performed in preparation of *shalat*.

<sup>788</sup> See *Al Imran* (The House of Imran) *Surat* 3: 14; *Sheba*, *Surat* 34:12. References to metals are also found in the *Quran*. *Surat* 57, *Al-Hadid* (lit: "Iron") is devoted to iron.

<sup>789</sup> Indonesian: *Al-Bara'ah*. English translations from the Indonesian are mine. H. M. Bachrun and Maulana Muhammad Ali, trans., *Qur'an Suci*, (Jakarta: Darul Kutubil Islamiyah, 1979).

I utilize the Indonesian translations from the Arabic here because they emphasize the unique Indonesian interpretation of the material.

<sup>790</sup> Several English translations from the Arabic that I consulted cite "rabbis and monks" are cited. "Rabbis" are omitted above.

*Surat 9, 35:*

When the day comes, (gold and silver)<sup>791</sup> shall be heated in hell's fire, and their foreheads and their sides and their backs singed therewith, [the sinners shall be informed]: These are the treasures which you have piled up for yourselves, taste, then the evil of your hoarded treasures.

*Surat 9, 34:*

*Wahai orang yang beriman, sesungguhnya kebanyakan ulama (Ahli Kitab) dan rahib, makan harta manusia dengan lancing, dan menghalang-halangi (manusia) dari jalan Allah. Adapun orang yang menimbun mas dan perak dan tak membelakangan itu di jalan Allah, beritahukanlah kepada mereka siksaan yang pedih.*

*Surat 9, 35:*

*Pada hari tatkala (mas dan perak) diapanaskan dalam Api neraka, lalu dahi mereka dan lambung mereka dan punggung mereka diselar dengan itu: Inilah yang kamu timbun bagi kamu sendiri, maka rasakanlah apa yang kamu timbun.*

One could also read into the above *Surat* the danger of keeping *susuk* in the body past its expiry. Likewise, the danger of taking one's riches to the grave is explicit in *Surat* 43:

36, *Az-Zukhruf* (Gold):

And whoever fails to remember God who is Great and generous, we will point to as evil, until such evilness (satan) is his companion.

*Dan barangsiapa berpaling dari ingat kepada Tuhan Yang Maha pemurah, Kami tunjuk baginya suatu setan, maka jadilah (setan) itu kawan baginya.*

As the above verses illustrate, hoarding precious metals within the body is linked to avarice. Making matters worse, *susuk*'s efficacy depends upon executing the magical, but prohibited, *jampi*. This prohibition, however, has not had an appreciable impact on *susuk*'s popularity. The

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<sup>791</sup> literally: "hoarded wealth"

*Naqshbandiyya* principle of *jadhba* (to draw or attract) is instructive. *Jadhba* often occurs in the early formation of the *shaykh/murid* bond during the “intoxication” attraction. The term *tariq-i jadhba*, or “path of attraction” affords a kind of shortcut, wherein the disciple may bypass the initiatory chain (*tarekat*) that under other circumstances separates her or him from Muhammad.<sup>792</sup> In this light, *susuk* not only connotes defacement of the body; it is perceived as disregarding the stations of *tarekat*.

### ***The Dalang’s Perspective***

Not surprisingly, those *dalang* far removed from the Muslim orthodoxy have a more ebullient view of *susuk*: they understand it as a stimulus for an intense relational encounter. I posit that poverty and infrequent invitations to perform have prompted fewer *dalang* today to be *susuk* patrons.<sup>793</sup>

Like stone incrustation in masks, the cheeks, chin, and forehead are the most popular places to insert *susuk* and give the face an unusual glow.<sup>794</sup> Many, though not all, *dalang* who can afford *susuk* prefer it over the rigors of fasting, for results are immediate.<sup>795</sup> Most *dalang* remove their *susuk* by age fifty. Fear of outliving the practitioner who inserted it is the most oft-cited reason for premature removal. The second most cited reason is completion of the desired

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<sup>792</sup> See Arthur F. Buehler. *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi Shaykh*, 1998), 93, fn. 33, 34.

<sup>793</sup> the majority are female singers, individuals in pursuit of love and/or marriage, prostitutes, business people, and athletes. Some athletes insert *susuk* into their legs and arms. My late *guru*, Dasih, had *susuk* inserted into her hands to accentuate the flutter of her fingers as she moved through space (many people commented on her exceptional hand dexterity). Many *pesinden* and *ronggeng* practitioners insert *susuk* in their buttocks to emphasize their sex appeal. *Pesindhen* often drink water from *Nyi Ronggeng Buyut* in addition to *susuk*.

<sup>794</sup> I was invited to Yeyen’s home when her daughter had her 7-month pregnancy bath ritual, *Mitoni*. Two young women walked into the room during the *selamatan* that followed. Their faces had a special glow. I took a closer look and noticed that they weren’t particularly beautiful, but they were striking. I later learned they were Yeyen’s clients who were starting a business.

<sup>795</sup> Dewi’s daughter Mutri reasoned that her mother and aunt, Dewi and Sawitri, respectively, were disinclined to use *susuk* because they were *dukun* who “converted illness into health and the insane into sanity’s fold.” Mutri, pers. comm., 9 September 2005.



goal, e.g. the individual has found a mate, established career, etc. When ready to have it removed, the wearer diligently seeks out the individual who inserted it. The reason is two-fold: first at stake is the issue of the fitter's potency; and second, her or his mantras and object placement is idiosyncratic. It is difficult for a second party to determine the precise location of the implanted needle. Nonetheless, it is often impossible to have the original party remove it because *susuk* is frequently inserted during the early stages of a young person's career by a fitter, who is considerably older. The fitter thus often predeceases the dancer by a generation or two. In such cases, an heir of the original fitter is sought for its removal, assuming she or he has been trained to replicate the method employed by her or his teacher (usually a parent). The protracted fear of the practitioner's demise leads many *dalang* to form a subtle, albeit neurotic attachment manifesting as a protracted interest in the fitter's whereabouts. The subtlest shift in the fitters' health – real or imagined – is enough for many users to have their *susuk* removed in advance of its expiry. While many *dalang* live with their implant for much of their adult lives, others choose to use it on a short-term basis, inserting it just prior to performing and removing it soon thereafter. These artists pay a kind of rental fee, since the metal or diamonds are returned and, with proper care, can be recycled. *Dalang topeng* Sujana preferred this method.<sup>796</sup> The short-term plan is more economical than a permanent or semi-permanent implant, but this is secondary to fears that the *susuk*'s original fitter would predecease the artist.

## CONCLUSION

Carl Jung called the human mask we show to the world, the persona, which is the name of a mask from the Greek theatre. Jung envisioned the persona as a protective mask, a self-created system that bridges the inner life with the realities of daily life. The

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<sup>796</sup> Sujana Arja, pers. comm., 6 August 2005.

flip side of this visible side of personality, Jung refers to as the shadow, meaning the repressed hidden parts we shield from public scrutiny. He concludes in his mature, last full-length book, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*:

For nothing in us ever remains quite uncontradicted, and consciousness can take up no position which will not call up, somewhere in the dark corners of the psyche, a negation or a compensatory effect, approval or resentment. This process of coming to terms with the Other in us is well worth while, because in this way we get to know aspects of our nature which we would not allow anybody else to show us and which we ourselves would never have admitted.<sup>797</sup>

This is the condition of the Cirebon mask. It is a revelation and a secret within a secret – the face projected out into the world, whose counterweight is the inner life and the individual’s most protected secrets: the desultory path to love circumscribed in forging an intimate connection to God. These are *topeng*’s terms. They are not negotiable. The methods, however, are. It is this curious flexibility that has allowed *topeng* to endure against all odds. The next chapter, “Geography of the Mask,” examines possible explanations for *topeng*’s durability in the Muslim world.

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<sup>797</sup> C. G. Jung. *Mysterium Coniunctionis: An Inquiry into the Separation and Synthesis of Psychic Opposites in Alchemy*. *Collected Works*, Bollingen, v. 14 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 496, section 706.

## CHAPTER 6: THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE MASK: CROSS-CULTURAL INTERCONNECTIONS IN PRE-ISLAMIC AND ISLAMIC WEST JAVA

Although I am very fond of these masks, I can't help but recognize that there is something rather melancholy about their future in a museum – no matter how nice. Paintings, statues, and perhaps also ceramics are meant to be contemplated, and museums make possible just this contemplation. But masks (at least those of Java) are, like musical instruments, meant to be “put into action” by gifted performers. Locked up in beautiful glass cases, they can give off the distressing aura of once-marvelous wild animals caged for life in zoos.<sup>798</sup>

This chapter takes a step back from *topeng* in order to view the mask in its larger context; as a global phenomenon, whose earliest renderings adorn cave walls. Past scholarship has viewed *topeng Cirebon* as geographically static. But as Ben Anderson reminds us, the mask moves in space and meaning. It allows us to gaze upon another and see our own reflection and, in so doing, brings us literally face-to-face with what Viktor Frankl deems our central human condition: the search for meaning in an often cold and indifferent world. For Frankl, one of the core articulations of meaning comes from experiencing something or encountering someone.<sup>799</sup> The mask allows us to do both.

I will then focus on the mask's relationship to the face. In this way, I seek to establish the mask as a cultural mirror in those few Muslim societies where it merges with the spiritual needs of the community it serves; specifically, I will discuss the transition from indigenous mask culture to Islamic adaptations - an integration most

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<sup>798</sup> Benedict Anderson's brief introduction in bequeathing his Javanese and Balinese mask collection to Cornell's Herbert F. Johnson's Museum of Art. The masks were collected in 1962-1964, 1967, and 1968. Anderson, "A Language Learned in Java."

<sup>799</sup> Viktor Frankl. *Man's Search for Meaning*, (Boston: Beacon, 1966).

fully articulated in sub-Saharan Africa and Indonesia. To date, few scholars have addressed these religious undercurrents. More commonly, masks are understood in their Muslim context as relics of spirit worship that Muslim travelers were unable to eradicate; hence, they were embraced for proselytizing purposes. This is equally true of the later Islamicized regions of sub-Saharan Africa as in Java.

This chapter, then, examines how masks circulate: physically, metaphysically, as objects of curiosity by outsiders, and of contemplation by insiders. I then focus our discussion on the theme of this study: how the Cirebon mask protects its owner, allowing the *dalang* to move freely between two opposing worlds existing tangent to each other, caught between unknown and knowing, between powerlessness and power. In an eloquent reversal of Michel Foucault, the empowered Cirebon mask squarely belongs to the subaltern, whose power/knowledge constantly renews itself.<sup>800</sup> As a result, the mask is much more than a theatrical device; it is an ambivalent object that fluctuates between containment and release. It circulates. This mobility provides its spiritual, illusory and, least understood, mystical contours. This dynamic process is realized in merging the Cirebon mask's outer and inner dimensions that oscillate – and not always comfortably – between interaction and contemplation.

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<sup>800</sup> The concept of power as knowledge-based and hierarchical was first articulated in Michel Foucault's pioneering examination of disciplinary shifts in modern Europe's penal system, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1977).



Fig. 49. Panji mask, Cirebon region. c. 1920s. San Francisco Tribal & Textile Arts Show 2006. Courtesy of Angelo Attilio Attili, Parma, Italy. November 2006.

The late African art historian, Roy Sieber noted that “the presentation of an isolated mask in a museum constitutes a gross misrepresentation, not only of the social values inherent to the complex comprised of mask, costume, dance, music and other related traits, but of the aesthetic component of the mask in its original context.”<sup>801</sup> This chapter contrasts the “presentation of an isolated mask” as an object of scrutiny by

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<sup>801</sup> Roy Sieber, “Masks as Agents of Social Control,” *African Studies Bulletin* 5, no. 11 (1962), 8-13, cited in Henry Pernet, *Ritual Masks: Deceptions and Revelations*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992) 11. The fragmentation of objects as a field of study has been addressed by scholars working chiefly in the fields of African art, anthropology and folklore. In addition to Sieber, they include James A. Boon, “Why Museums Make Me Sad,” Ivan Karp & Steven D. Lavine, eds. *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 255-77; Herbert M. Cole and Chike C. Aniakor. *Igbo Arts: Community and Cosmos*. Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History, University of California, 1984); Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 17-78; Simon Ottenberg “Psychological Aspects of Igbo Art” *African Arts*, 21, no. 2; (1988): 72-94; Robert Farris Thompson, *African Art in Motion: Icon and Act*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

arbiters of taste with how it is internalized *in situ*. This dichotomy is illuminated by examining two Cirebon mask collections. The first one is housed at Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History and positions *topeng* within the Dutch East Indies. The second collection is roughly the same vintage; however, its steward is not a museum but the same *dalang* family who commissioned the masks approximately one hundred years ago and who continues to perform with them. The first collection has been relegated to history; the second one is very much bound to the mask as a living (*hidup*) object.

### THE UNKNOWN AND THE KNOWN

Hints to the mask's lineage in Java reside in the *kala* faces of the island's Hindu-Buddhist period. Epigraphic evidence discussed earlier in this study confirms this relationship. The earliest extant demonic *kala* face in Java dates from the seventh and eighth century Central Java's Dieng Plateau<sup>802</sup> and Borobudur, respectively. Later, the *kala* face hovered over dark archways at the *Loro Jonggrang* complex at Prambanan (near Yogyakarta), where it takes on the form of an all-enveloping mouth functioning in a similarly protective way to the Balinese masked widow-witch, Rangda, whose tongue is the conveyor linguistic power.<sup>803</sup> Java's *kala* face is similar to ones in Northern and Southern India, where they are referred to as *kirttimukha* and attest to the same dialectic, for both are usually placed above archways.<sup>804</sup>

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<sup>802</sup> *Dieng* translates as wholly or sacred in Javanese.

<sup>803</sup> Rangda's counterweight in performance is the protector, Barong. John Emigh described a Bedahulu (Balinese) mask in which the Om sign appeared on Rangda's thrust-out tongue. For an analysis of Rangda's chthonic function in Balinese theatre, see John Emigh, *Masked Performance. The Play of Self and Other in Ritual and Theatre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 35-104.

<sup>804</sup> The face that protects temple gates in East Java is sometimes called *banaspati*.

Finbarr Flood describes the extant *kirttimukha* (related to the *kala*) head alongside desecrated anthropomorphic imagery in the porch of Demascus' Kaman mosque. He found similar couplings in

The Javanese interpretation of the menacing face may relate to local masking traditions, and certainly runs through it in imagery and metaphor. In the Cirebon region, the exorcistic *ruwatan*<sup>805</sup> is performed at the bequest of an individual or family, particularly those in need of healing or perceived as on the receiving end of misfortune, literally: “hit by nature’s arrow” (*kena panah ing kala*). Prior to some *ruwatan*, the magic charm *kala cakra*<sup>806</sup> is chanted to alert others of potential dangers. *Dalang wayang/topeng* Sukarta describes this particular incantation as “heavy” – both in its potency and meaning.<sup>807</sup> Another example, *punika ajal kala*, is recited in the ballad form, *kidung*, and performed to protect oneself from nature’s evils. Sukarta provides the following example of when this charm might be employed: an intelligent young person who wants to be a good student and whose parents echo this wish for their child, yet the young person continuously shirks his or her responsibilities. The implicit assumption is that nature has unduly interfered with the family’s “aura,” a situation that can be reversed by uttering *punika ajal kala*.

In the realm of *topeng*, the *kala* face often graces the gong frames of old West Javanese gamelans.<sup>808</sup> In the *topeng* pantheon, *kala* is most resonant with Klana who, on

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mosques in India. Finbarr B. Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval “Hindu-Muslim” Encounter*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 167.

<sup>805</sup> A ritual to purify a space or protect an individual from perceived imminent harm. It often involves puppets, but *ruwatan topeng* is still performed in Lelea, Indramayu.

<sup>806</sup> “The arrow or wheel of *kala*”

<sup>807</sup> Sukarta, pers. comm., 1 October 2005.

<sup>808</sup> A *kala-makara* motif is painted on the top of the West Javanese gong frame in the Field Museum of Natural History collection, which is believed to have builtc.1840. The head emerges from lotus flowers and roots endemic to the region. The gamelan’s origin is unknown. The consensus among Sundanese and Cirebonese music scholars, Enoch Atmadibrata, Richard North, and Ron Bogley is that the set most likely was crafted in Sukabumi, Sumedang, or Cirebon. Sue Carter-De Vale concludes its origin is either Sukabumi, Cirebon, or Semarang (Central Java). Semarang, however, is doubtful. See Sue Carter-De Vale, “The Gamelan” in *Field Museum of Natural History Bulletin*, (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, January 1978), 8.

the surface, is a lusty, greedy king, but dwelling beneath this façade is a lingering impulse towards deeper consciousness.



Fig. 50. Detail of the chthonic *kala* face that hovers above the entrance portal of one of the smaller *candi* at *Loro Jonggrang*, April 2006.





Fig. 51. The same *candi* from a distance. *Loro Jonggrang*, 2006. These pictures were taken a few days before the major 2006 earthquake that destroyed parts of the complex.

*Kala*'s features are simultaneously anachronistic and modern: its protruding teeth, *makara*<sup>809</sup> ornamentation, and local foliage-inspired mane cascading along both sides of the chamber's entrance suggest a very old connection to agriculture.<sup>810</sup> By the time the face appears at the *Loro Jonggrang* complex in the ninth century some *kala*

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<sup>809</sup> The creature that appears on the door jambs or balistades. It is also assumed to be of Indic origin: in Indian literature it connotes an aquatic animal. Vogel, Ph. J., "The Relation Between the Art of India and Java." In *The Influence of Indian Art*. F. H. Andrews, ed. (New Delhi: Delhi Printers, 1978), 70-73.

<sup>810</sup> Joanna Williams, lecture notes, Art of Southeast Asia, University of California, Berkeley. 9 September 2004.

exude a more menacing stance. No longer merely a face, her protruding claws now occupy the doorway's upper frame. *Kala* thus is more than a mask; she is an embodied creature. E. B. Vogler's exhaustive account of the *kala* motif in *De Monsterkop uit het omljstingsornament van templedoorgangen en –missen in de Hindoe-Javaanse bouwkunst*,<sup>811</sup> argues that the *kala* bears influences from India Champa (by way of Gandhara)<sup>812</sup> and the Greek world. While the Greek Gorgon resonates with other regional iconography, its relevance in Java is dubious. On the other hand, Vogler's genealogy of Indian iconography merging distinctive Javanese representations that include fish, crocodiles, elephants, and lions in *makara* ornaments is highly plausible.<sup>813</sup> How indigenous forms were perpetuated in the new faith becomes a more satisfying pursuit once we accept their currency over many centuries. Hence, we must skip several centuries and a few steadfast religions to understand *topeng* in its Muslim visage.

#### **ENTER THE NEW FAITH**

The early Muslim traders and merchants were undoubtedly confronted with local traditions seemingly at odds with their faith in the Malay world and parts of Africa. One insuperable obstacle they encountered was the mask.<sup>814</sup> Numerous scholars address the

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<sup>811</sup> "The monster head (grotesque mask) as border ornamentation in the temple gates and niches in Hindu-Javanese architecture."

<sup>812</sup> Today the region comprises northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan.

<sup>813</sup> E. B. Vogler, *De Monsterkop uit het omljstingsornament van templedoorgangen en –missen in de Hindoe-Javaanse bouwkunst*, 1949. For a discussion of correlations with the *kala* motif and demonic imagery in Indian and Balinese performance see Napier, *Masks, Transformation, and Paradox*, 188-223, 241-2; and John Emigh, *Masked Performance. The Play of Self and Other in Ritual and Theatre*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 35-104.

<sup>814</sup> The pre-Islamic Malay *Mak Yong* once incorporated mask use. Like *topeng*, *Mak Yong* is associated with Islamic praxis today. According to *Mak Yong* scholar, Patricia Hardwick, some contemporary practitioners link its origin to shamanic healing and others believe it originated with the Batak of northern Sumatra. Only a few *Mak Yong* practitioners still own the masks; however, they no longer perform them. Patricia Hardwick, pers. comm., 27 September 2008.

historical prohibition of human representation throughout the Muslim world. Schneider-Lyngyel's position that the mask is absent from Islamicized regions due to this representation is grounded neither in theory nor practice. The mask continues to thrive in a variety of Islamic regions and contexts.<sup>815</sup> A survey of Persian and Mughul miniatures confirms that the human body has long held a strong presence in regional Islamic art. Such illustrations, however, are not found in the *Quran* or in mosques where geometric forms and Arabic calligraphy dominate.<sup>816</sup> The mask is in a different category from other forms of human representation; it is intended not to grace texts or walls. Its purpose is to be worn and brought to life. Still, questions persist about why it flourished in certain parts of the Islamicate world and disappeared from others.<sup>817</sup>

#### **THE MASK IN THE MUSLIM CONTEXT – JAVA AND AFRICA**

[African contributions to Islamic art have] always been regarded as too provincial, too far removed from the heartland of Islam with its sophisticated metropolitan centers, imperial courts, and famed seats of learning. Located at the extreme edge of this civilization and conditioned by apparently different historical and cultural forces, Africa's monuments and creativity, typically marginalized or ignored, remain an eternal other – they exist but go unnoticed and unattended.<sup>818</sup>

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Batak masks typically represent the cult of the dead, in commemorating the death of an only son. Among the Batak, the mask is worn in conjunction with a pair of wood hands.

<sup>815</sup> Ilse Schneider-Lyngyel, *Die Welt der Maske*. (München: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1934).

I make a distinction here between Muslims who perform with masks, and those cultures where the mask itself is the vehicle for religious expression.

<sup>816</sup> The interpretation of medieval Islamic text was the province by Muslim scholars. A compromise was reached when Islam became the dominant discourse with Islamic calligraphy, which is both an aesthetic form and a language, whose symbols and visual patterns shape its meaning.

<sup>817</sup> Islamicate refers to those Islamic cultures whose borders are ambiguous. Masking traditions associated with Islam continue to a lesser degree in South and insular Southeast Asia, though primarily in Java.

<sup>818</sup> René A. Bravmann. "Islamic Art and Material Culture in Africa" in *The History of Islam in Africa*, Nehemia Levtzion & Randall L. Pouwels, eds. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 489.

Bravmann is describing the marginalization of contributions to Islamic art made by Muslims south of the Sahara; yet the same argument holds true for Cirebonese contributions to Islamic art. Both of these regions were marginalized for similar reasons. Sub-Saharan Africa may border on Africa's Arabized northern fringe but, theologically speaking, the two regions are worlds apart.<sup>819</sup> Few tribal art historians, art dealers, or collectors have examined Islamic influences on African and Indonesian cultural objects. More often, Islam is rationalized as a way to make indigenous beliefs palatable. It is rarely understood as an authentic influence. I argue that masks, when found in the Muslim world, are a synthesized expression of Islam in the region.

A fine example of this synthesis is the promenade of *al-Buroq*, the celestial steed that carried the Prophet during his mystical night journey (*Isra*) from Mecca to Jerusalem, followed by his ascent (*Mi'raj*) to the seven heavens.<sup>820</sup> In Cirebon, the night journey is commemorated during the seventh month of the Arabic calendar, *Rajab*, with visitations to holy graves and the purification of power-laden heirlooms, *pusaka*. The image of *Buroq* is not unique to Cirebon; it circulates in popular culture throughout the Muslim world, particularly Sufi culture. The light-complexioned mask with her exotic aquiline nose and almond-shaped eyes suggest *al-Buroq*'s foreign Middle Eastern

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<sup>819</sup> "Tribal" is a vexed term, but it is the one currently accepted by scholars and an improvement over its predecessor: "primitive." Rubin describes how the term '*art nègre*' (Negro art) was used interchangeably with the term "primitive art" in Paris, until Robert Goldwater deemed African and Oceanic art as the new designation for "primitive." Rubins argues that merging pre-Columbian art within the rubric of "primitive" was an inconsistency and that the theocratic and court arts of South America should be grouped with the Javanese, Egyptian, and Persian styles, whose style, character, and implications had constituted the definition in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The change in terminology was clearly a reflection of change in aesthetic taste more than of historical reach. William Rubin, ed., *"Primitivism" in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, 2v. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984), v1: 3; Robert Robert Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, (Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1986).

<sup>820</sup> So prominent is *al-Buroq* in the local culture that an Indonesia air carrier was named after the steed, "Bouraq Indonesia Airlines."

origins, while simultaneously transcending it as *al-Buroq* is part of Sufi popular culture from Cirebon to Sierra Leone.<sup>821</sup> In Cirebon, the steed's image often appears on reverse glass paintings (*lukisan kaca*). *Al-Buroq* is also realized in masked form in conjunction with a boy's circumcision, or *sunat*, in Cirebon. The history of circumcision may predate Islam, but today it takes on a decisively Islamic meaning in Cirebon. According to Muhaimin, Cirebon's literary traditions connect circumcision with Adam, for whom it was a sacrifice in gratitude of God's acceptance of his repentance. But it further signifies the transition from Javanese to Islamic cultural norms.<sup>822</sup>



Fig. 52. *Al-Buroq*. Two boys are perched atop two different *Buroq* and their attendants. Cirebon, 2005.

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<sup>821</sup> For representations of *al-Burāq* in African art, see René A. Bravmann, *African Islam*, (Washington, DC and London: Smithsonian Institution and Ethnographica, 1983), 70-85.

<sup>822</sup> Muhaimin. *The Islamic Traditions of Cirebon: Ibadat and Adat Among Javanese Muslims*, Jakarta: Centre for Research and Development of Socio-Religious Affairs Office of Religious Research, Development, and In-Service Training, Ministry of Religious Affairs Republic of Indonesia, 2006), 142-44.

The boy being honored is perched upon *Buroq*'s back, which is held in place by two performers underneath a batik or other decorative cloth and flanked by attendants on either side, who hold an umbrella above *Buroq*'s head as they circulate through the village. The actors provide *Buroq*'s legs and make the movements visible to the audience.<sup>823</sup>

The most obvious mention of *Buroq* in the *Quran* is *Surat 17*, verse 1, "The Night Journey":

Glory be to Him who made His servant go by night from the Sacred Temple<sup>824</sup> to the farther Temple<sup>825</sup> whose surroundings We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. He alone hears all and observes all.<sup>826</sup>

The translator of the above verse notes that some Muslims interpret the passage literally, while others understand it as "a vision."<sup>827</sup> Severing earthly attachments in the quest for God and ultimate transcendence has occupied Sufi thought for centuries. In addition to *sunatan*, today *al-Buroq* is often encountered at parades, accompanied by stilt walkers, toy tigers, and other carnival props. In these contexts it is referred to as *pertunjukan Burokan* (*Buroq* performance) or *Seni Buroq* (*Buroq* art), confirming the celestial steed's popular appeal.<sup>828</sup> We encounter a very different kind of white mask with an aquiline nose and refined features in *topeng*: Panji, whose Muslim referents, though less obvious, are equally potent.

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<sup>823</sup> Today, *al-Buroq* is performed in Cirebon, Indramayu, Kuningan, and Brebes (Central Java).

<sup>824</sup> Of Mecca

<sup>825</sup> Of Jerusalem (and thence to the Throne of God, accompanied by the Angel Gabriel.

<sup>826</sup> *The Koran*. N. J. Dawood, trans. (New York: Penguin, 1994), 281.

<sup>827</sup> Ibid: 281. This Sufic interpretation is more embedded in *hadit* than in *Quranic* verse.

<sup>828</sup> I saw a transvestite male street performer in 2006, wearing a *Buroq* mask he had repainted for performing *bebarang* to the background of *dangdut* music. The flexibility of the mask's meaning in its conversion from Night Messenger to itinerancy has gone virtually unnoticed at the local level.

*Topeng* masks are ubiquitous in Cirebon hotels, homes, and on key chains, indicating their popular appeal. However, masks of great antiquity are rare in Java. Furthermore, there is scant mention of masks in old Javanese literature or travelers' diaries prior to the nineteenth century. This poses a conundrum: has masking activity in Java been continuous or punctuated with stops and starts? In spite of this frustrating historical lacuna, we do know that *topeng Cirebon* cannot be traced in linear fashion to other early Islamic aesthetic traditions.

In reconciling the above contradiction, art historian Oleg Grabar contends that the injunction on figurative art was less about Allah's Will than a rejection of Christian aesthetics. He further argues that those Islamic images most consistently perceived as magical are popular folk-level visual symbols rooted in a culture's pre-Islamic past.<sup>829</sup> René Bravmann, in *Islam and Tribal Art in West Africa*, hypothesizes that certain African masks may have been abandoned following Muslim conversions, while others were created in accordance with Islamic beliefs and practices.<sup>830</sup> It is possible that these expressions of the demonic evolved out of earlier spirit masks, but their designated name, *jinn*, is from the *Quran*, and its meaning is articulated in their masking discourse.<sup>831</sup> Bravmann posits that masking's persistence in long established Muslim communities may have resulted from either the mask's ability to function at a variety of levels and contexts not treated by Islamic theology, or simply because they were more

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<sup>829</sup> Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 100-101.

<sup>830</sup> René A. Bravmann, *Islam and Tribal Art in West Africa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 31-4.

<sup>831</sup> René A. Bravmann, "Gyinna-Gyinna: Making the *djinn* manifest," *African Arts*, (1977), 10, no. 3:46. The mask culture crafted by the Zara of Burkina Faso (West Africa) has a cult of spirit masks that represent *jinn*. The masked *jinn*, or "spirits" provides explanations for the inexplicable. The *jinn* is a trope found in both Islamic literary and popular culture.

efficacious. This theory holds up in the context of Cirebon *topeng*, whose characters are linked with Java's Hindu past, but locally understood to bridge Muslim authority and indigenous matters. In this light, *topeng* may have had a problem-solving function that was well in place long before Islam's arrival and is resonant with other regions.<sup>832</sup>

Clifford Geertz paved the way for our current discussion in his important cross-cultural examination of Islam. He examined the distinctive ways in which Islam unfolded in Indonesia and Morocco in *Islam Observed*. The author argues that disparities between how Islam is practiced there rest with a dual process of Islamization that combined tractability with "a struggle to maintain, in the face of this adaptive flexibility, the identity of Islam not just as religion in general but as the particular directives communicated by God to mankind through the preemptory prophecies of Muhammad."<sup>833</sup> An example of how this duality unfolded may be extended to the mask cultures of Cirebon and parts of sub-Saharan Africa. While the appearance of masks is less understood in the former, and ubiquitous in the latter, the mask was entrenched in both areas prior to Islam's arrival and, over time, shifted to embody their Sufi orientation, even though their conceptual and stylistic differences remained vast. When the mask enters the matrix of Muslim performance, the degree to which foreign ideology

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<sup>832</sup> An example is the Yoruban *Gèlèdè* masquerade that is said to reconcile the indigenous cult worship of snakes and crocodiles and female worship in their oral telling of the story, which is said to have been originally uttered by a Muslim wearing a turban. See John Henry Drewal, "Gelede masquerade: Imagery and motif," *African Arts* 7, no. 4 (1974), 62-63. Similar patterns of acceptance are found in Cirebonese *topeng*, the majority of whose characters' names are pre-Islamic in origin, but sanctified as Muslim because of the assumed relationship to the *walisanga*.

<sup>833</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 14-15.



is reconciled with older, more entrenched beliefs is explicit.<sup>834</sup> In this way, the phenomenology of the mask among Cirebon Muslims is symmetrical with southern Nigeria to the degree that conversions there were more immediate and far-reaching, likely resulting in their rich, sustained masking traditions. Islam was met with a chillier reception among their north Nigerian neighbors, which Andreas Lommel argues may have contributed to the virtual disappearance of masking there.<sup>835</sup> Another interesting correlate between the distinctive traditions in parts of Africa and Cirebon is that the inner face of some masks bear Arabic inscriptions hidden from public view that conveyed the carver and the wearers' adherence to secret knowledge vis-à-vis the Holy *Quran*.<sup>836</sup> However, we need not travel to Africa nor even leave the Archipelago to find another example where masks are accepted as distinctively Islamic. I am referring to masks used by the Minangkabau of Andaleh Baruah Bukik in West Sumatra. Minang aesthetics and meaning share scant symmetry with *topeng*; yet both societies employ masks to mark the end of the fasting month, *Idul Fitri*, and in conjunction with

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<sup>834</sup> In Africa, masks are associated with masquerades and, hence, are interwoven with play as defined by Winnicott and Huizinga in the previous chapter. I distinguish between masks employed for other forms of story telling such as dance dramas, including *wayang wong*. Mask use in the Philippines, alternately, has been fully integrated into cultural festivals during Holy Week, e.g. the *Moriones* festival in Tayabas, a small island south of Luzon. At Mariones, the stories and characters revolve around the Catholic *pasyon* (passion plays) and masquerades. The masks employed there portray local attitudes toward the Other, such as masked Roman soldiers. Reinhard Wendt, "From the Foreign into the Own: Catholic Festivals in the Philippines between Colonialism and New Identities" (paper delivered at *Religious Festivals in Contemporary Southeast Asia* conference, University of California, Riverside, 16 February 2007).

<sup>835</sup> Andreas Lommel, *Masks: Their Meaning and Function* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), 10-11. Examples of this are the Gèlèdè and Igbo masquerades of the Yoruba. See Babatunde Lawal, *The Gèlèdè Spectacle: Art, Gender, and Social Harmony in an African Culture*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996); Cole/Aniakor, *Igbo Arts: Community and Cosmos*, (Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History, University of California, 1984).

<sup>836</sup> In "Islamic Art and Material Culture in Africa," René Bravmann discusses the inner surface of a secret society Poro mask (Sierra Leone) encoded with powerful magical squares, letters, numbers and a reference to the third chapter of the *Quran*, known as the *Cursing Sura*, 499-500.

circumcision ceremonies.<sup>837</sup> On these occasions, select Minangkabau elders secretly ascend the mountain and descend later as *cimuntu* (spirits). Their full-body masks are crafted from coconut hair and leaves. A few are made from wood or plastic. *En masse*, they do not represent a single given spirit, but a band of them. Although today the spirits are linked to entertainment, like other Islamic masking societies the Minangkabau tradition likely corresponds to much older forms of spirit-protector worship whose affective spirits are identified as ancestors.<sup>838</sup> In Andaleh Baruah Bukik, like in Cirebonese *al-Buroq*, *sunatan* are clustered in order to offset the high cost of the event. Furthermore, the boys' mental and physical well-being are believed to be compromised without the presence of *cimuntu*.

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<sup>837</sup> *Topeng* was often performed in conjunction with circumcision celebrations in the past, although it is rare today.

<sup>838</sup> William Ridgeway was the first performance theorist to examine the origins of non-Western theatre. His thesis is that theatre's origins were founded in worship of the dead. One example is the Shi'a Iranian passion play, *ta'zīyeh*, a mourning ritual that commemorates the martyrdom of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Hussein. *Ta'zīyeh* appears to have pre-Islamic precedent in Iran wherein the sacrifice of divine beings occur, further supporting Ridgeway's claim. See Ehsan Yarshater, "Ta'zīyeh and Pre-Islamic Mourning Rites in Iran," in Peter J. Chelkowski, ed., *Ta'zīyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran*, (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 92; William Ridgeway, *The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races*, (New York: Benjamin Blom, [1915], 1964). 5-19.



Fig. 53. A band of Minang *cimuntu* take a break during a circumcision celebration in Andaleh. Their full-body masks blend old and new technologies: they are constructed from coconut hair, wood or plastic masks, white gloves, and rubber boots. October 2007. Photograph courtesy of Paul Mason.



Fig. 54. This *cimuntu* sports sunglasses, which are barely visible under his full-body coconut leaf costume. October 2007. Photograph courtesy of Paul Mason.

The *raison d'être* of the *cimuntu* is three-fold: to frighten and control the behavior of young children; gather *sawer* (contributions) from the spectators; and lead them to the town mosque where the festivities are to take place.<sup>839</sup> The concurrent spectral connection to the ancestors and to *jinn* – and the readiness with which Minang conversions to the new faith occurred - reinforces the mask's recondite staying power.

Interestingly, although today both *cimuntu* and *topeng* are popular entertainments, thematic masquerades are virtually unknown in Java. Unlike *topeng*, the Minang mask is ephemeral. Preservation and display are not considerations. Its ephemerality promotes its natural destruction. Newer *cimuntu* masks constructed from wood or plastic were opportunistically acquired, stored, and performed with again and again, bringing what was likely a very old ritual encounter into contemporary life.

It is myopic to view masks as discordant with Islam, for mystical powers are sanctioned in the *Quran*.<sup>840</sup> *Kyai Haji Abdul Razak of Pondok Pesantren Darul Musyawirin* (Weru, Cirebon) supports this relationship: “Quranic verses can be used as a magic spell, as a cure. For instance, if you are ill, we recite magic verses from the Holy *Quran* and then blow [breath] upon the infirmed area, after which the person is given the [blessed] water to drink. It can cure disease.”<sup>841</sup> This confidence in magic's (*sihir*) transcendence is foregrounded in the *Quran* and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. There, *sihir*

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<sup>839</sup> Paul Mason, pers. comm., 5 October 2008. See also Paul Mason, “The end of fasting: Evolving performances at *Hari Raya* celebrations are a window into deeper cultural change,” *Inside Indonesia* 93: July-September 2008. Url: <http://insideindonesia.org/content/view/1126/47/>

<sup>840</sup> René A. Bravmann (1974). *Islam and Tribal Art in West Africa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 31-4.

<sup>841</sup> “*Ayat – ayat Al Quran itu bisa dipakai untuk mantera sebagai obat. Misalnya Anda sakit lalu kita berikan mantera dengan membacakan Al Quran, kemudian kita tiupkan lalu airnya diminum oleh Anda. Itu bisa untuk menyembuhkan sebuah penyakit.*” Abdul Razak, pers. comm., 13 September 2005.

is viewed as illusory, ambiguous power capable of healing as well as causing harm.<sup>842</sup>

Magic, however, is a sensitive subject for orthodox Muslims, for it infringes on their tightly held monotheistic views to the degree that spirits are drawn upon to invoke God's intervention. As such, the mask was both the curse and the appeal.

*Topeng*, which until the past generation was equally aligned with magic and mystical praxis, conjures the malleability inherent in Geertz's thesis. It is this curious blending that has long confused outsiders. With the exception of the three-dimensional Cirebonese rod puppet theatre *wayang golek cepak*<sup>843</sup> whose practitioners combine a rigorous knowledge of the past with the newer faith, Muslim stories are far from obvious to outside observers.<sup>844</sup> Indeed, many stories with a *tarekat* trajectory are accepted as Hindu in origin. The Panji tales, for example, are widely considered pre-Islamic, yet the tropes uniting them are Sufi themes of journeying, detachment, disguise, loss and, ultimately, fusion/transformation.<sup>845</sup>

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<sup>842</sup> Numerous examples of this dichotomy are explicated in the *Quran*, including 43:30 ("Gold"); 75: 24 ("The Cloaked One"); 51:31 ("The Winds") for example.

The conceptualization of magic healing in medieval Islam is beautifully articulated in Michael W. Dols, *Majnun: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*, Diana E. Immisch, ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 261-310.

<sup>843</sup> For an overview of this local Islamic form, see Kathy Foley, "At the Graves of the Ancestors: Chronicle Plays in the *Wayang Cepak* Puppet Theatre of Cirebon, Indonesia," *Themes in Drama 8: Historical Drama*. James Redmond, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 31-49.

<sup>844</sup> Islamic holdings are more grounded in the Indonesian stories called *hikayat*.

<sup>845</sup> Pilgrimage is not unique to Islam. It is also central to the journeyer's progress in Hinduism and Buddhism as well. However, the confluence of these leitmotifs suggest the possibility that the stories are being told from a Sufi perspective. Flood illustrates this point with one of the most popular story cycles to emerge from medieval Islam: *Kalila wa Dimna* centers around a group of animal fables, which the author traces to a Sanskrit text on statecraft, the *Panchatantra*. He introduces the tale to highlight translation's important role in "facilitating communication." Further evidence of Sufi tropes in the Panji cycle include Nizami's "Layla and Majnun," "The Seven Princesses," "Khosrow and Shirin," and Attar's *The Conference of the Birds*. Flood, *Objects of Translation*, 6-7. The Nizami texts are available in Peter J. Chelkowski, *Mirror of the Invisible World: Tales from the Khamesh of Nizami*, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975); Attar, Farid ud-Din. *The Conference of the Birds*, (London: Penguin, 1984). An analysis of the Panji tales is available in Poerbatjaraka, *Tjerita Pandji dalam Perbandingan*.

In order to illuminate how the explicit and implicit face comprise two sides of one mirror that range between harmonic and discordant elements, a few Cirebon masks from the Field Museum of Natural History and Losari collections will be examined. The employment of magic charms on both sets offer important clues about these masks in circulation, and their translation at the local, national, and transnational level. While neither collection has masks with stone inlays, they nonetheless share the symbolic language of *jampi* (magic charms) inscribed on the inner faces of many of the masks. Their hidden messages convey an ambivalence toward language and sound.

Similar to African Islamic charms, when integrated into the physical mask produced in Cirebon, the charm comprises two parts: a graphic element intended for visual recognition and contemplation (recto), and a written portion on the mask's inner face (verso) that is concealed from the spectator. It is only intended to be seen by the *dalang*.<sup>846</sup> The fusion of these two technologies – one oral, the other written – allows the mask to move effortlessly between the persona – the face projected out onto the world, and the inscrutable inner face of mask. Color patches are often smeared or painted inside the forehead<sup>847</sup> to imbue the mask with spirit, while increasing the dancer's psychic connection to it.<sup>848</sup>

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<sup>846</sup> René A. Bravmann. "Islamic Art and Material Culture in Africa," 498.

<sup>847</sup> Less commonly, color patches are located on the interior nose and chin.

<sup>848</sup> Paramita Abdurachman, ed. *Cerbon*, (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1982), 125.



Fig. 55. A large pink patch is painted on the inner forehead (above) of the mask character, Pamindo [see fig. 3 for the outer face]. Heavily worn leather strip is attached below the mouth, with reddish betel nut residue. Provenance: Enoch Atmadibrata, West Java; Dasih, Palimanan, Cirebon, West Java; Wentar, Palimanan, Cirebon, West Java.

### **EMBODIED DISCOURSE: SYNTHESIZING LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT**

The reader will recall from the previous chapter that *jampi* inform the inner/outer dimensions of *topeng* performance. It also boosts the efficacy of *susuk* (internal), stone incrustation (external), and betel nut (internal/external). Meaning, thus, is activated through the mixing of technologies. This twin obscuration and elevation of meaning is consonant with James Siegel's assessment of how the Achenese people conceptualize script and symbolic meaning. Siegel argues that meaning only has currency when

obscured, essentially privileging performative over text-based meaning.<sup>849</sup> Cirebonese attitudes are equally consonant with Amin Sweeney’s argument that oral societies view writing as mysterious and words as imbued with secret power.<sup>850</sup> We shall explore how the Losari *pusaka* masks substantiate Siegel and Sweeney’s claims later in this chapter.

The *jampi*’s power resides at the nexus of language and thought, a little-understood relationship in *topeng* discourse. Symbolic language – whether written on the inner face of the mask or whispered aloud – unites the ancestors with the Divine Name in one charm. In so doing, pantheism and monotheism are deemed compatible.

Codification is central to Javanese magic charms. Henri Chambert-Loir describes secret tongues as “slang languages” or “luddlings,” whose historical development is unknown but widespread throughout the Archipelago. According to Chambert-Loir, “A luddling is created by the transformation of the form of a linguistic message without altering its content for purposes of either concealment or comic effect.”<sup>851</sup> Similar interlocking systems, where consonants are dropped and letters are reversed or inverted, were employed in combination with *Jawa Kuno* (Old Javanese, or *Kawi*) on some of the Losari masks wherein the four directional points are combined with Arabic. They are:

|                          |         |
|--------------------------|---------|
| <i>Ha Na Ca Ra Ka</i>    | = east  |
| <i>Da Ta Sa Wa La</i>    | = south |
| <i>Pa Dha Dja Ja Nja</i> | = west  |
| <i>Ma Ga Ba Tha Nga</i>  | = north |

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<sup>849</sup> James Siegel, *Shadow and Sound: The Historical Thought of a Sumatran People*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

<sup>850</sup> Amin Sweeney, *A Full Hearing: Orality and Literacy in the Malay World*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>851</sup> Henri Chambert-Loir, “Slang and Secret Tongues,” *Language and Literature. Indonesian Heritage*, v.10. John H. McGlynn, ed. (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1998), 132.



Blending *Jawa Kuno* with nonsensical linguistic patterns thus is an active, living engagement between power and meaning.

Certainly much information can be gleaned from a given character mask, whose iconography is repeated not only from mask to mask, but from generation to generation, as regards its contours, coloring, and facial features.<sup>852</sup> Many practitioners believe that contemporary masks have not yet accumulated power and are often repainted. Old masks are viewed quite differently. Repainting an old mask or its mantra is considered a transgression. Nor would its scribe allow someone else to paint over it. To do so would be inviting ancestor-related trouble. Yet even the oldest masks were once brand new and reveal paint traces in an array of colors not commonly associated with the mask in question. This proves that color symbolism is hardly static in the lives of Cirebon masks, their makers, or their custodians.

In order to understand the schism between the mask's concealed and revealed contours we shall first examine several masks from the World Columbian Exposition. While we are most interested here in masks from the Cirebon region, a quick comparison with those from Central Java will illuminate how differently masks were viewed by the Surakarta court and rural Cirebonese artists in both their meaning and purpose – differences that were apparently anticipated and materially concretized before leaving the East Indies. Would the masks return home or stay in the United States? Although the two collections had different owners, both parties apparently assumed the latter. But their approach to this inevitability could not have been more different: one collection was aesthetically enhanced, whereas the other one was subtly desecrated.

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<sup>852</sup> The identical *jampi* may also repeat on different masks within a family.

## THE MASK IN STASIS:

### THE FIELD MUSEUM'S WORLD COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION COLLECTION



Fig. 56. World's Columbian Exposition. The mask display from Central Java (left cabinet) and West Java (right cabinet). The left (Surakarta) label states: "Masks of the Panji Cycle." The West Java label is titled, "Masks of the Hindu Cycle," ©1893, The Field Museum, GN83922.

As mentioned, the Central Javanese masks at the Field Museum were collected by Mangkunegoro of the Surakarta (Solo) court, while those from West Java were gathered by the two Dutch plantation owners who organized the "Java Village," G. C. F. W. Mundt of Parakan Salak, and E. J. Kerkhoven of Sinagar, near Buitzenborg (now Bogor). The masks were sold *en masse* in Chicago on 9 November 1893. The transaction was conducted under the business name, "Java-Chicago Syndicate."<sup>853</sup> The Surakarta collection is associated with court arts, while those from Cirebon are intimately linked with folk theatre. This distinction is eloquently articulated on many of

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<sup>853</sup> See the first chapter of this study for an analysis of the Chicago fair.

the versos in both mask collections. While the Central Javanese masks I examined did not employ written *jampi*, nearly all of the Cirebon masks once did; however, almost all of them were defaced.<sup>854</sup> The responsible party was likely the mask carver, the mantra's scribe, or the *dalang* who anticipated their masks' departure.

I will give one example of the Central Javanese mask Pentul, a clown figure that is found in both Central Java and West Java [Figs. 57. 58]. The Central Javanese version is typically painted black (the Cirebon version is usually red).



Fig. 57. Pentoel (Pentul). The mask is painted black with gold accents. Half-masks are always clown figures in Java. Provenance: Field Museum of Natural History. Acquisition #36081

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<sup>854</sup> In those cases where the *jampi* are intact, they are codified in *Jawa Kuno* and correspond to Chambert-Loir's luddlings.



Fig. 58. Pentoel (Pentul), verso with twine inserted into two holes and knotted on the mask's recto to hold the mask in place. This mask is mislabeled "Tembem." Below the left eye is a metal plate with the Field's acquisition number engraved on it. Field Museum of Natural History. Acquisition #36081.

A paper label is laid down on the verso of each Surakarta mask similar to the above example [fig. 58]. The name of the character is written in fine brown-ink calligraphy in both Javanese and Roman letters. This formal treatment suggests a very different spiritual and psychological connection to the masks. Furthermore, Pentul is mislabeled "Tembem" (the female clown-servant). This error, which is hardly unique, suggests that for all the attention paid to craftsmanship and labeling, when it came to representation, carelessness prevailed.



Fig. 59. Drupadi. The Royal consort of Yudistira. *Wayang wong* mask, mid- to late-nineteenth century. Field Museum of Natural History collection. Acquisition No. 36113.

The first Cirebon mask under discussion, Drupadi (alternate spelling: Duropadi) [figs. 59, 60], is a *wayang wong* character also known as Dewi Kresna and Dewi Pancali. She is the incarnation of Wisnu's consort, the rice goddess, Dewi Sri. Following a battle contest, Duropadi was married to Yudistira to whom she bore a son, Pancawala. Drupadi is one of the few Cirebon masks in the Field collection whose *jampi* has not been desecrated (although the lips were repainted).



Fig. 60. Drupadi, verso. Old Javanese *jampi*. With rattan bitepiece.  
Verso, Acquisition No. 36113.

A fine example of a *jampi* is found on the verso [Fig. 60] of this mid-to-late nineteenth century mask. As mentioned, extant *jampi* are rare in this collection. Fitted below the mouth is a piece of bent rattan in a semi-circle shape that has been inserted into two holes carved into the wood. The rattan is probably held in place with some kind of adhesive, possibly from the sap of a tree, which was common in the late nineteenth century.



Fig. 61. “Prabu Turolaya” (Ngastina?). Recto. *Wayang wong* mask. Cirebon? Field Museum, Acquisition # 36105.

According to puppeteer Sandrut and Sujana Arja, the next Cirebon mask, *Prabu Turolaya* [figs. 61, 62], is a *wayang wong* character that was mislabeled “Djajasena.”<sup>855</sup> This mask’s base color is dark greenish-brown, which appears black from a distance. It has gold accents, including a distinctive, elaborately executed inner eye, hair outline, and teeth. The tip of the nose is rubbed, revealing a lighter brown undercoat. On the verso [fig. 62], “*Djajasena*” is written over an undercoat of white paint that obscures most of the charm. It is likely that such over-painting and identification errors on some of the Cirebon masks was a strategy to weaken their energy field since presumably they

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<sup>855</sup> When Sujana Arja and his troupe performed at Chicago’s Field Museum of Natural History, he and Sandrut (a puppeteer and gamelan musician) were asked to examine the Field’s Cirebon and Javanese masks for identification purposes. According to Field Museum notes: “Both informants were unwilling to attempt identification of masks made in Central Java; hence the following relates only to the specimens ... made in or near Ceribon [sic] and used by the Sundanese dance group at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition.” [1977].

would be sold to third parties ill-equipped to handle their power. The concealment of visual imagery – whether pictorial or written - is a form of desecration.<sup>856</sup> It is the polar opposite of the anticipated energy enhancement provided by stone inlays.



Fig. 62. “Prabu Turolaya” (Ngastina?), verso. Incorrectly marked “Djaja Sena.” Leather bite piece. Field Museum Acquisition # 36105.

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<sup>856</sup> It is also plausible that like the Surakarta masks, misidentification resulted from carelessness on the part of collectors or misinformation; however, this seems less likely because these masks were overpainted.





Fig. 63. Togog, in profile, with moveable jaw. Field Museum of Natural History, Acquisition # 36100



Fig. 64. Togog. Verso, with moveable jaw closed. Field Museum Acquisition # 36100.

The next Cirebon mask under discussion is the clown character, Togog [fig. 63, 64]. Togog's eyes and mouth were repainted a most unusual color: pumpkin orange. Many of the Cirebon masks in the Field collection were repainted this identical color, most likely from the same batch of paint. The verso's forehead has also been repainted orange to likely obscure an earlier mantra. Every one of these odd-colored masks has a rushed, unfinished appearance discordant with the other painted surfaces. Since the West Javanese masks may have been collected from more than one region, repainting them was neither capricious nor ambivalent. I posit that it was prescient: it anticipated the masks' departure from their native soil and rightful owners.



Fig. 65. Sarag. Collection of the Field Museum of Natural History. Acquisition # 36092.



Fig. 66. Sarag, verso. Collection: Field Museum of Natural History. Acquisition # 36092.

The next Cirebon mask under discussion, Sarag, is the princess of Ngurawan [figs. 65, 66]. Sarag is Prabu Lembuh Mangaran's daughter and is a recurring figure in the Panji (*Jaka*) tales.<sup>857</sup> Heinz Lucas describes her as the (disguised) wife of Panji, Candra Kirana (old spelling: Tjandrakirana).<sup>858</sup> She is typically portrayed as palpably jealous, amoral, and in collusion with Klana and other dark characters. She is a relentless schemer. In *Jaka Semawung*, for example, she schemes to kill Panji's sister, Dewi Ragil Kuning, who is betrothed to Sarag's brother (Sindjang Laga), so that she can

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<sup>857</sup> Sarag's insertion provides an interesting confluence of tropes, since the majority of *wayang wong* characters are from the *Mahabharata* epic.

<sup>858</sup> Heinz Lucas, *Java – Masken. der Tanz, auf einem Bein*, (Kassel: Erich Röth-Verlag, 1973), 243-47.

marry him herself.<sup>859</sup> Her eyes and lips have been repainted the same pumpkin orange color. Turning to the mask's verso [fig. 66], we find yet another orange patch on the forehead as is applied to Sarag's pupils and lips. The orange patch is laid over an older, unintelligible script, again, likely concealing a *jampi*. It makes sense that the negatively perceived Sarag would have received such an amulet since charms are said to protect the wearer from the darker elements of the mask's spirit.

It is tempting to speculate about those areas consistently selected for retouching in the Field collection: the eyes, the lips, the nostrils, and the *jampi*. That one color was consistently applied to these regions indicates conscious thought, for each one forges a distinctive path to inner knowledge (*ilmu*): vision, speech, and concentration. Each orifice defines the requisites of a fully engaged life. Sealing them off, alternately, is synonymous with the end of life. For instance, when a villager dies, their eyes are shut and cotton placed over each eye, inserted in both nostrils and ears, to signify the body is no longer of this world, and to ensure its safe journey from this world to the next.

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<sup>859</sup> Westerkamp, Willem. *Javaanse Maskers en Maskervertoningen in Cerbon en de Vorstenlanden: een Bijdrage tot de Kennis van Masker en Maskerspel in de Negentiende Eeuw*, (Amsterdam: Koninklijk Instituut. PhD dissertation, 1987), pl. 23; Patrick Vanhoebrouck, "A Documented List of the Javanese Masks (*Topeng*) from the Field Museum Collections." Unpub. paper, (Field Museum of Chicago, 2002).

## LOSARI MASKS IN SITU



Fig. 67. On the go. This suitcase is the current home of the Losari masks. Each one is protected by its *ules*. Offerings to the ancestors are laid on top.

We shall now turn our focus to a group of masks from Losari, Cirebon. Many of these masks are still performed by *dalang topeng* Sawitri and Dewi's heirs. Although the complete stories have not been performed in many years,<sup>860</sup> Losari style *topeng* is associated with the *Jaka* (Panji) tales from the Mataram period.<sup>861</sup> Scholar Anis Sujana contends that these tales were widely circulated in *topeng* circles in past generations, but

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<sup>860</sup> An exception is that *Jaka Buntek* was reconstructed in the late 1990s.

<sup>861</sup> In past generations the stories most often told in Losari were *Jaka Bluwo* and *Jaka Buntek*. Poerbatjaraka describes the Panji tales as part historical, part legend, with entertainment value. The *Jaka* tales are arrayed around disguise in Panji's search for his betrothed, Candrakirana, who disappears on their wedding night. The story is said to be both indigenous and inherited from the Hindu epics, but there is evidence of a strong Sufi storyline running through it, particularly in relationship to concealment, revelation, and wandering. Poerbatjaraka, *Tjerita pandji dalam perbandingan*, xi, 405; Toto Sudarto, *Tari Topeng Panji Gaya Slangit Cirebon*, 10-14.

does not state which ones.<sup>862</sup> These stories were also performed in Slangit as recently as the 1940s. Although the *Jaka* stories are no longer performed in Losari, the variety of character and clown masks in their collection suggest that their repertoire was significantly larger than other *topeng* styles.<sup>863</sup>

In Losari, as in other *topeng* communities where *jampi* exist, the charms are committed to memory in childhood and passed down intergenerationally. Since most *dalang topeng* prior to this generation were pre-literate, a *dalang wayang* or theologian was responsible for writing the *jampi* directly onto the mask. That which can no longer be transmitted – its literal meaning – was lost with the death of its scribe. Never mind that these encoded chants are relics of a lost language. Their literal meaning matters little to the dancer, who concentrates on the hieroglyph until its impression is absorbed in the body; this genealogy of somatic experience can only be inherited through the bloodline. It's molecular.

Sonny Sumarsono recalls that prior to donning the mask, Sawitri who was able to read Javanese, concentrated on the mantra while summoning in her heart the spirit of her deceased ancestors. Her purpose was to “attract” the audience.<sup>864</sup> Her sister, Dewi, who did not read, focused on the symbolic code as she prayed until the mantra entered her heart; *then* she donned the mask. When Dewi's granddaughter Noor Anani was still a child, she had already received and memorized the *jampi*, but without knowledge of

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<sup>862</sup> Anis Sujana, *Pertumbuhan Topeng Cirebon dari Perspektif Sejarah*, (Bandung: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, STSI, 1999), 3-4.

<sup>863</sup> The extant number of masks in the Losari collection in 2006 was nineteen. Only a few years earlier, they numbered eighty. Many of the masks were sold piecemeal to collectors from Bandung and Jakarta who likely then sold them to foreigners. I estimate that of the remaining nineteen masks, less than half are still performed today.

<sup>864</sup> Sonny Sumarsono, pers. comm., 6 May 2006.

their meaning as was the custom.<sup>865</sup> Consequently, mantra “literacy” bears no relationship to what Westerners ascribe to the term. Rather, it depends upon the *dalang*’s capacity to have a physiologically induced response to symbols.



Fig. 68. *Topeng Patih Jayabadra*. *Dalang topeng* Sawitri. Losari, 1983. Photo courtesy of Sonny Sumarsono.

Figure 68 illustrates this principle. Immediately after Sawitri dons the mask, she presses her right hand holding the *ules* on her chin and her left hand presses on her forehead. I first saw this movement performed by Sawitri’s niece, Noor Anani. She held

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<sup>865</sup> Noor Anani, pers. comm., 14 May 2006

this position for approximately thirty seconds (an eternity in the context of performance). At the time I wondered if she was having trouble securing the mask on her face. It was only months later when reviewing hours and hours of videotape of Sawitri and Dewi dancing that I noted this movement occurred with every dance. I argue that pressing on the cakra point seals the mantra that is always written on the forehead of the inner face, by pressing firmly onto the third eye.

The Losari *jampi* are written in *Jawa Kuno* or *Arab Gundul*, or sometimes both. *Gundul* translates as bald and refers to the lack of dots, commas, or flourishes. It is described as “symbolic” or “non-expert” Arabic script that has been copied many times over several generations.<sup>866</sup> According to linguist Hamid Algar, the Arabic is indecipherable in nearly all of the Losari mantras: “No letters, no dots, no meaning...even if all the possible dots were supplied it would still make no sense.”<sup>867</sup> An example of this is the *Arab Gundul* script in fig. 72.

The next mask is *Panji Sutrawinangun (Genit / Centil)* [figs. 69, 70], a coquettish version of *Panji Sutrawinangun*. This mask bears the only legible Arabic script in the Losari collection. It simply states: Allah. One might believe this is not a mantra, for its meaning is crystal clear. However, for those artists who gaze upon it, who cannot read Arabic, it is a pictorial representation that generates feelings of

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<sup>866</sup> Kalim describes *Jawa Kuno* as “the language of the Sultanate.” Kalim studied *Jawa Kuno* at *Kraton Kasepuhan* when he was fifteen years old. It was presented as the first step in gaining inner knowledge (*ilmu*). As mentioned, repainting the mantras was the obligation of *dalang wayang*, usually a family member versed in Arabic and Kawi, but literacy levels varied greatly. The Losari family’s puppeteer, Kocak, was said to write Arabic, but several experts who have examined the notations state that they appear to have been copied from other sources. Dewi and Sawitri’s father, Sumitra, had rudimentary knowledge of both Arabic and *Jawa Kuno*. Sumitra’s son, Punjul, was also a puppeteer with rudimentary knowledge of Arabic and *Jawa Kuno*. Punjul predeceased Dewi and Sawitri. Presumably, the meaning of their *jampi* died with him, but possibly earlier.

<sup>867</sup> Hamid Algar, pers. comm., 31 January 2008.



connectedness. In this more quixotic version of *Panji Sutrawinangun*, [see fig. 71, 72 for the refined version of the same mask] the Divine Name is ensconced with inverted hearts, a *Naqshbandiyya* influence.<sup>868</sup> Knowledge, then, begins and ends with the *dalang topeng*, whose corporeality is grounded in *dzikir*, but with one important difference: *dzikir* begins with the heart. Vision is the stimulus for the charm.



Fig. 69. Panji Sutrawinangun (Genit / Centil), Losari Collection.

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<sup>868</sup> “Allah” sometimes appears inside a heart motif in this Order. The heart is synonymous with *ilmu*, or “knowledge.”



Fig. 70. *Panji Sutrawinangun (Genit / Centil)*, verso. Losari Collection. The word “Allah” is esconced with inverted hearts.

As mentioned, the Losari *jampi* were refreshed over time. Much like the Field Museum collection, their undercoat often reveals traces of its previous script. Yet, according to Dewi’s daughter, Mutri, the mantras must be identical to the original or their power is diminished.<sup>869</sup> While there is an injunction against mixing Arabic with other languages, a unique case may be made for the Cirebonese and their mantras. According to A. G. Muhaimin, Cirebonese elders define the term *Jawa* to mean either Java or Malay, both of which are considered inseparable from Islam.<sup>870</sup> Thus, invoking Allah makes the mantra acceptable.

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<sup>869</sup> Mutri, pers. comm., 29 June 2006. Kalim, alternately, said it was dangerous to change the mantra and would not be so bold as to do so.

<sup>870</sup> Muhaimin. *The Islamic Traditions of Cirebon*, 19-20.

This definition corresponds with the way Arabic was transmitted to Javanese wayfarers during the late nineteenth century. Snouk Hurgronje describes how Arabic was introduced to pilgrims on the hajj through their native tongue: Javanese, Sundanese, or Malay. The traditional Meccan method of technique gained currency in Semarang, Surabaya, and in the interior when periodically a celebrated Mecca-trained *shaykh* returned home and transmitted his teachings this way. Hurgronje was prescient in noting that the Meccan method was “gaining the upper-hand in West-Java, and should gradually drive out the older system of teaching.”<sup>871</sup>

It is plausible that the precedent for combining the native tongue with Arabic on Cirebonese masks began around the same time and served a similar heuristic purpose.<sup>872</sup> Since the mantras’ scribes were either *dalang wayang* or *ulama* – the latter likely performed the hajj – it is possible that the hybrid language on the Losari masks is traceable to recently minted *Haji* upon their return home. It is, of course, impossible to know when the *jampi* were written on these masks, as many have been repainted and, in a few cases, the writing is different. The few Field Museum masks where the mantras are intact include no Arabic script. It is clear, however, that by the dawn of the twentieth century, those *jampi* that did not foreground the Divine were null and void.

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<sup>871</sup> C. Snouk Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1931), 264-67.

<sup>872</sup> This precedent likely lost both momentum and meaning with the Wahhabi conquest, which was antithetical to Sufism, by essentially severing links with distant regions of the Muslim world. This in turn led to the indigenization of the Sufi orders. Hamid Algar, *Wahhabisme: Sebuah Tinjauan Kritis*, (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2008); Reynaldo Ileto, “Religion and Anti-colonial Movements,” Nicholas Tarling, ed. *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, v.3: *From c.1800 to the 1930s*. v.III, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 206.



Fig. 71. *Panji Sutrawinangun (Halus)*. Performed by Dewi, 1983. Losari Collection. Photo courtesy of Sonny Sumarsono.



Fig. 72. *Panji Sutrawinangun (halus)*. Verso. Losari Collection.

Long before Sukarno installed red, white, and black as the official colors of Indonesian sovereignty, red, white, and black symbolized mystical union: red symbolizes fertility; white is the color of semen; and black is associated with *mutmainah*.<sup>873</sup> In most of the *jampi* I have examined, the Arabic portion is written in black and the *Jawa Kuno* in red over a white background in keeping with a *tasawuf* interpretation. The above version of *Panji Sutrawinangun* (Figs. 71, 72) is a refined character whose attributes are closer to Samba than its namesake (Panji). The numbers “1118411” are painted in Arabic script in black on the inner face, followed by “*Sa Da Da Wa La Ma Ha*” – a condensed coded version of “*Sa Dhal Wawu Lamalif Mim Ha alif*.” – that according to the late puppeteer, Kalim, translates as “east”: *Ha Na Ca Ra Ka*. This example of a luddling both conceals and is revelatory to those with secret knowledge.

That they are, at most, one generation older than those of Losari suggests that the late nineteenth century was a turning point in how Islam was imagined through the eyes of rural *dalang topeng* and their communities.<sup>874</sup>

## CONCLUSION

At its most rudimentary level, the mask is a piece of lifeless matter frozen in its expression. Its meaning, however, is founded on the oddest of bedfellows: spirituality and trade. Whether on a museum wall or the face of its symbiotic partner, the *dalang topeng*, the mask is an object of contemplation. But *in situ*, as a performing object inscribed by its maker, we are confronted with its transcendent mission: to circulate, to

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<sup>873</sup> Calmness or refinement. Most of the knights in the *wayang kulit* lexicon are black.

<sup>874</sup> The Field Museum masks were likely made in the 1880s and 1890s, while the Losari masks are from the early twentieth century.

transform, and to animate everything in its orbit. This does not happen in a vacuum. It is dependent upon a constellation of polarities that oscillate between mobility and stasis, unknown and knowing, popular entertainment and an unshakeable connection to God.

## CHAPTER 7: VOICES FROM THE GRAVE: REINVENTING *ZIARAH*<sup>875</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

All religious sites are depositories of cultural significance. This chapter aims to examine how Java's earliest Islamic material culture is synthesized in *topeng* praxis. It looks at the *mesjid* (mosque) and the *buyut*<sup>876</sup> (ancestral grave) complex which are often attached.<sup>877</sup> *Buyut* are central to the *dalang*, whose veneration of ancestral shrines and graveyards is how they understand the self. That these two sites are attached is a distinguishing feature of old Javanese mosques, and draws our attention to how Islam was both imagined and realized on the ground. It also highlights the Javanese propensity for absorbing the new, while maintaining a rigorous knowledge of the past. An observer of this dynamic interplay, Paul Stange, describes the Javanese mosque as "often little more than gateways to the graveyard – they are integral to but not the heart of local culture."<sup>878</sup> Visiting *buyut* should not be viewed as morbid for the activity is very much grounded in life.

The majority of *dalang topeng* favor interiorized, focused meditation over public ritualized prayer. Intention, thus, is privileged over action. It is somewhat surprising, then, that the function of the mosque bears any resonance to *topeng* philosophy. The *dalang*'s spiritual energy is drawn from the *buyut*. The pilgrimage to a sacred space is

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<sup>875</sup> Pilgrimages that are associated with ancestral graves or other sacred spaces.

<sup>876</sup> '*Buyut*' literally means great-great grandfather, whereas the term '*Ki Buyut*' signifies the ancestor or founder of the village where the cemetery, or *kramat*, is located.

<sup>877</sup> Only three of Cirebon's sixteen medieval *mesjid* are not attached to a graveyard.

<sup>878</sup> Paul Stange, *The Sumarah Movement in Javanese Mysticism*. PhD diss., (University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1980), 33.

called *ziarah*.<sup>879</sup> *Ziarah* is a devotional act often performed in accordance with *dzikir*. It is distinguished from performing the hajj, which is incumbent upon all Muslims of good health and sufficient finances. The majority of *dalang topeng* consider *ziarah* the most meaningful pilgrimage they will undertake during their lifetime, not because it is the only one they can afford, but because their bond with the ancestors is more immediate and elliptical than other kinds of journeys. The construction, maintenance, and durability of these sites crystallize Javanese notions of continuity and stasis. How, then, did the mosque and graveyard become synthesized in Java?

Transnational trade played a pivotal role in conversions to Islam, although pinpointing their earliest occurrence in Java is problematic. Most scholars trace the earliest Muslim contact to the *pasisir* region.<sup>880</sup> By the sixteenth century, Islamic states

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<sup>879</sup> It is also known locally as '*jiarah*.' Literally: 'visitation,' from the Arabic, *ziyara*. These ancestors may be the Sufi apostles or other significant spiritual figures, including the founder of the village in which the *buyut* is located. Muhaimin describes the sacred sites as *kramat*, usually a shrine, or relic of the revered ones' existence. The term has been corrupted from the Arabic '*karamah*' (pl. *karamat*), which relates to God's regard or honor. A. G. Muhaimin, *The Islamic Traditions of Cirebon: Ibadat and Adat Among Javanese Muslims*, (Jakarta: Centre for Research and Development of Socio-Religious Affairs Office of Religious Research, 2004), 241-43.

<sup>880</sup> Everett Jenkins describes Arab travelers in the Archipelago as early as 1100 CE. His timeline is based on the discovery of the pivoting needle on a magnetic compass in the year 1000 CE, which would become an important navigational tool. Jenkins posits that this invention was gleaned by Arab travelers during contact in the Archipelago. Jenkins refers to such mobility as the 'Muslim diaspora.' I find this label problematic because the diaspora refers to groups forced to leave their homeland and settle in foreign lands. This is one of several theories about the pivot needle's origin, but supports early Arab contact in the region. Ricklefs, alternately, draws our attention to burial sites of elite Muslims in the graveyard at Trawulan, near the Hindu-Buddhist court of Majapahit, where the earliest tombstone is dated 1368-69 CE. It is commonly held that nearly a century would pass before the Muslim missionary, Raden Rahmat, introduced Islam to the Majapahit court, before settling in Ampel (Surabaya), where he was posthumously venerated as *Sunan Ampel*, one of the *walisanga*. His tomb complex in Surabaya remains the destination of many Javanese Muslim pilgrims today. Two centuries would pass before the Portuguese explorer Tomé Pires noted Javanese Muslims in the *pasisir*. Everett Jenkins, Jr., *The Muslim Diaspora: A Comprehensive Reference to the Spread of Islam in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas*, v. 1, 570-1500, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1999), 127-8; M. C. Ricklefs, *Polarizing Javanese Society: Islamic and Other Visions*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 1-3; Pigeaud suggests that it was probably in the seventeenth century that the number of *wali* in Java was fixed to eight or nine. Theodore G. Th. Pigeaud, *Literature of Java. Catalogue Raisoné of Javanese Manuscripts in the Library of the University of*



ruled chiefly by Muslims of foreign origin animated the landscape and, by the end of that century, elite Javanese had converted to Islam. M. C. Ricklefs pieces together this period of intense ethnic and cultural hybridity as not limited to concretizing the Javanese / Muslim bond where, during the same period, East Indians, Chinese, and other non-Javanese Muslims were also Javanized.<sup>881</sup>

Ricklefs identifies several examples of Muslim accommodation during the spread of Islam in Java. The favoring of crucial concepts in Javanese over Arabic in old Javanese mystical treatises, known as *primbon*, is one example. Another sign of Ricklefs' "mystic synthesis" was the fulfillment of the five pillars of Islam.<sup>882</sup> Most compelling to this study was the acceptance of a variety of indigenous spirits by foreign Muslims,<sup>883</sup> most notably the maiden of the South Seas, *Nyai Loro Kidul*, whose mythic powers are known throughout the Archipelago,<sup>884</sup> and the Hindu-inflected rice spirit, *Dewi Sri*.<sup>885</sup> Similar cross-pollination is found in other forms of material culture. We

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*Leiden and Other Public Collections in the Netherlands. I: Synopsis of Javanese Literature 900-1900 A. D.* (The Hague: Martinus Nyhoff, 1967), 150; Tomé Pires, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*.

<sup>881</sup> M. C. Ricklefs, *Polarizing Javanese Society: Islamic and Other Visions*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 1-3.

<sup>882</sup> The five pillars are the confession of faith (*shahadat*), praying five times each day (*shalat*), almsgiving, fasting and, for those of financial and physical means, performing the *hajj*.

<sup>883</sup> The Archipelago was by no means unusual. Rather it points to the tractability of Sufi travelers to incorporate local means in their missionizing efforts. A very similar trajectory occurred with conversions to Catholicism in the Philippines and among the Yaqui Indians of New Mexico, the latter forced to migrate to Arizona. In both cultures the passion plays were transformed to fit local needs. Iletto contends that in the case of the former, the orally-transmitted Tagalog *Pasyon Pilapil* informed how peasant brotherhoods and uprisings were shaped during the Spanish and early American colonial periods. Jesuits, alternately, established contact with the Yaquis in the seventeenth century. Conversions were widespread over time, but the Yaquis kept something of their culture through such indigenous-inflected performances as the *Wahema* Easter drama, *Deer-Pascola*, and *Madichean* dances. See Reynaldo Clemeña Iletto (1979). *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910*, (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979); Edward H. Spicer, *The Yaquis: A Cultural History*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985).

<sup>884</sup> Loro Kidul is woven into the nineteenth century, mystical story of Centhini, *Serat Centhini*.

<sup>885</sup> While neither of these figures holds the same currency in the daily affairs of most Cirebonese today, however, their significance continues to be deeply felt. This is exemplified, for instance, in the village

will first look at the mosque and ancestral grave and then turn our attention to their symbolic manifestations in *topeng*: namely, the chest where the masks are stored, called the *kotak topeng*, and the *sobrah* headdress worn by the *dalang*. These two objects, when combined, replicate the sacred topography of the mosque / *buyut* complex. I propose that at one time they functioned as portable altars. The *sobrah*, alternately, is a protective force in which the vertical – horizontal axis implicit in the five pillars of Islam is made manifest. The vertical relationship connotes the *dalang*'s continuous remembrance of God, while the horizontal plane connects the *dalang* with all humanity, including the dead. The horizontal and vertical axes are thus interdependent and flexible.

Periods of accommodation in Java were not unique to Islam's arrival. A similar synthesis occurred during another pivotal transition centuries earlier with the construction of the Buddhist and Hindu complexes in Central Java, such as *Borobudur* and *Loro Jonggrang* respectively. Art historians and archaeologists believe the shift from Buddhism to Hinduism was hardly a static process in Java. In "The Date of Barabudur in Relation to Other Central Javanese Monuments," for example, Joanna Williams argues that the *Loro Jonggrang* complex underwent various stages of construction beginning in the middle of the late eighth or early ninth century, when Buddhism was still the dominant religious discourse. She concludes that similar carving techniques were employed at both shrines, as evidenced in their moldings, dentils,

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ceremony *Mapag Sri* in which Dewi Sri is welcomed. Furthermore, the *wayang wong* character Drupadi (alias Dewi Kresna) is believed to be the incarnation of Wisnu's consort, Dewi Sri.

beveled edges, and execution of the *kala* faces.<sup>886</sup> Jacques Dumarcaay describes the Buddhist-Hindu transition as peaceful: “By building near the main [Buddhist] Sailendra sanctuary and without destroying it, the [Hindu] conquerors confirmed their authority and their tolerance.... The same political overtones are relevant with the location on the west bank of the Progo River, not far from Borobudur, of the triple sanctuary of *candi* Banon.”<sup>887</sup>

Since no Islamic shrines were built on the scale of *Loro Jonggrang* or *Borobudur*, we cannot point with confidence to a singular, decisive event of Muslim conversion on Java. However, other forms of material and spiritual culture of a more intimate nature tell us much about how Islam was imagined during the second, more pronounced, phase of Java’s Islamization in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

### **THE OLD JAVANESE *MESJID***

Java’s early mosques are not known for their embellished carvings. It is their simplicity and proximity to graveyards that reveal much about how faith was imagined as how it spread. The Cirebon Sultanate is the oldest extant Islamic kingdom on Java.<sup>888</sup>

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<sup>886</sup> Joanna Williams, “The Date of Barabudur in Relation to Other Central Javanese Monuments” in *Barabudur: History and Significance of a Buddhist Monument*. Luis Gomez and Hiram W Woodward, Jr., eds., (Berkeley: Berkeley Buddhist Studies Center, University of California, 1981), 25.

<sup>887</sup> Jacques Dumarcaay, *The Temples of Java*, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986), 42. The same is true for the continuation of the mountain-shrine tradition at Imogiri (near Yogyakarta) and Klaten. De Casparis opines that the once-Buddhist king, Pikatan, wished to be Siwa following the dedication of the *Loro Jonggrang* complex. Pikatan’s rise to power may also have resulted in his marriage to a Sailendra princess, according to art historian, J. G. de Casparis, “Short Inscriptions from Tjandi Plaosan Lor,” *Berita Dinas Purbakala*, 4, (Jakarta: Dinas Purbakala, 1958), 20, quoted in Mary-Lousie Totton, *Weaving Flesh and Blood into Sacred Architecture: Ornamental Stories of Candi Loro Jonggrang*, PhD diss. (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2002), 6-7.

<sup>888</sup> The Cirebon sultanate was divided into three distinct palaces (Kasepuhan, Kanoman, and most recently, Kacirebonan) during the Dutch era. The dates are sketchy, but it is believed that the first Sultanate was in Demak in 1478, with the Cirebon Sultanate of Kasepuhan following suit in 1479.

The sprouting of Cirebon's *mesjid* coincides with the birth of the Sultanates along the *pasisir* in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Many of these mosques were constructed by Sultans in close proximity to their palaces, signifying their authoritative right and greatness in the same way that Robert von Heine-Geldern, Stanley Tambiah, Clifford Geertz, and Soemarsaid Moertono describe ancient Southeast Asian kingdoms' center-based power radiating outward.<sup>889</sup> Three of Cirebon's twelve early *mesjid* are located on the property of Sultanates: two at *Kraton Kasepuhan*, including *Agung Kasepuhan* situated to the west of the *alun-alun*.<sup>890</sup> Legend has it that the mosque was constructed by the *walisanga* in one night.<sup>891</sup>

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<sup>889</sup> Bambang Setia Budi "A Study on the History and Development of the Javanese Mosque. Part 2: The Historical Setting and Role of the Javanese Mosque under the Sultanates" in *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering* 4, no. 1 (2005), 5. Stanley Tambiah describes a Southeast Asian kingdom as a "galactic polity" in which, as power radiates outward, its sphere of significance is diminished. Stanley Tambiah, followed his predecessor Heine-Geldern's (1956) distillation of the 'god-king' dyad. Geertz, alternately, describes the 'exemplary center' of the Balinese kingdom, while for Moertono and Anderson, the locus of power is the king himself. Anderson, "Idea of Power in Javanese Culture," 17-77; Stanley Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 112; Robert von Heine-Geldern, *Conceptualizations of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia*, (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1956); Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 13; Soemarsaid Moertono, *State and Statecraft in Old Java: A Study of the Later Mataram Period, 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century*, (Ithaca: Modern Indonesian Project, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University Press, 1968), 14-52.

<sup>890</sup> The mosque is also known as *Mesjid Cipta Rasa Kraton Kasepuhan*. The *alun-alun* is a public square.

<sup>891</sup> Budi "A Study on the History and Development of the Javanese Mosque. Part 2, 2.



Fig. 73. *Mesjid Agung*, Cirebon.

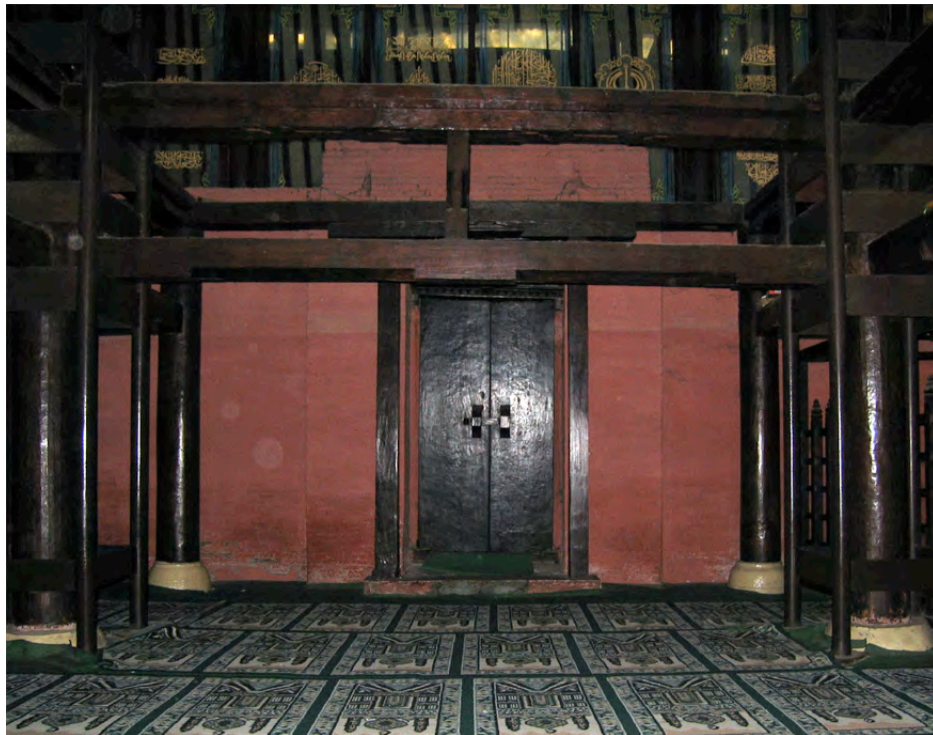


Fig. 74. *Mesjid Agung*, Interior view. Cirebon.

The last mosque affiliated with a Cirebon palace is at *Kanoman*. There is one other important mosque affiliated with the Astana Gunung Jati complex. The remaining

eight *mesjid* in Cirebon are well-integrated into the villages, suggesting their intimate connection to the communities they served.

The asceticism of the early mosques stands in sharp contrast to the massive shrines of Java's prior strongholds and other mosques of the period from the Near and Middle East, known for their high-domed ceilings and lavishly decorated metalwork, glass, and mosaics. Java's old mosques did, however, share the most critical features of those in the Near and Middle East, including an interior wall facing Mecca, the recessed area where prayers are spoken (*mihrab*), and the *minaret*, where the call to prayer is announced.

These early *mesjid* shed light on the asceticism of their architects and, as we shall soon see, on everything mystical Islam touched. Pijper points to Javanese *mesjid* design as an example of local ingenuity in blending the requirements of Muslim worship with native aesthetics.<sup>892</sup> The early mosques are elegant in their simplicity. They are square or rectangular in shape. Most are constructed from timber. The *mesjid* are raised on a massive foundation unlike the smaller, public Indonesian prayer houses (*mushalla*) that are raised off the ground on poles. Among the most unique features of old mosques are the elevated, pointed roofs and the inclusion of a veranda and external wall that

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<sup>892</sup> Cited in Bambang Setia Budi. "A Study on the History and Development of the Javanese Mosque. Part 1: A Review of Theories on the Origin of the Javanese Mosque," *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering* 3, no. 1 (2004), 190, 192. The adaptivity to integrate foreign ideas was not new. Similar archetypal translations are found in the carved depictions of the *Ramayana* at *Candi Loro Jonggrang*. Mary-Louise Totton argues that bas-reliefs depicting textiles at Loro Jonggrang comprise 'the earliest extant evidence of the ceremonial importance of cloth in the region.' Furthermore, depictions of flora and fauna in the *Ramayana* carvings are more than decorative embellishments. They provide a rich commentary on contemporary kingship, politics, and justice in ninth century Java. Mary Louise Totton, *Weaving Flesh and Blood into Sacred Architecture: Ornamental Stories of Candi Loro Jonggrang*, PhD dissertation. (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2002), 13-4; Mary Louise Totton, "Narrating Animals on the Screen of the World," *The Art Bulletin*, 85, no. 1 (2003), 6.

encloses the space.<sup>893</sup> But their most stunning visual, aesthetic achievement is the *mesjid*'s attention to the vertical / horizontal axis that we continuously return to in both the pillars of Islam and in mystical practices.<sup>894</sup> The structure literally "stands" with massive timber columns (*saka guru*) that usually number four. On occasion, the entire roof structure is supported by a single column (*saka tunggal*), which provides a counterpoint to the direction of *qibla*.<sup>895</sup>

In addition to the mosques' mapping, one other noteworthy symbol of pre-Islamic influence is the Hinduized split gate and pavilion, referred to as *siti inggil*. The design is typical of pre-Islamic palaces during the thirteenth and fourteenth century Majapahit court. Like the *kala* face, it employs negative space.<sup>896</sup>

These structures, which invoke Mount Meru as the center of the universe, are found at Cirebon's oldest palaces, *Kraton Kasepuhan* and *Kraton Kanoman*, and at Cirebon's fifteenth century Yemen mosque, *Mesjid Merah Pajunan* (Red Mosque of Panjunan), in the district of Lemahwungkuk. *Mesjid Merah Pajunan* is one of Cirebon's oldest mosques (c.1480), which continues to serve Cirebon's Hadramawt community.<sup>897</sup>

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<sup>893</sup> Bambang Setia Budi, "A Study on the History and Development of the Javanese Mosque. Part 1: A Review of Theories on the Origin of the Javanese Mosque," 189-90, citing G. F. Pijper, "The Minaret in Java" in *India Antiqua. A Volume of Oriental Studies Presented by his Friends and Pupils to Jean Philippe Vogel (Ö)*. F. D. K. Bosch, et al, eds., (Leiden: Brill, Kern Institute, 1947), 274-5.

<sup>894</sup> The vertical axis of Islam's five pillars is demonstrated in worship (*shalat*) and the hajj. Its horizontal axis corresponds to almsgiving, or *zakat*; fasting during *Ramadan* has both a vertical and horizontal connection.

<sup>895</sup> The *qibla* defines the direction of prayer, which is Mecca.

<sup>896</sup> The space beneath the *kala* head at *Loro Jonggrang* has also been compared to a womb chamber. Thus the early mosques and cemeteries of Java were not devoid of ornament; rather, they took on a distinctive Javanese cast, both as an homage to the past and a portent of expanding spiritual consciousness. The *kala* face's archetypal meaning is examined in chapter 6, "Balinese Faces and Indian Prototypes" in Napier. *Masks, Transformation, and Paradox*.

<sup>897</sup> Large numbers of Arab traders migrated to the region beginning in the mid-eighteenth century and those numbers increased in the nineteenth century. The majority of these immigrants were from the Hadramawt province of Yemen. Natalie Mobini-Kesheh, Natalie. "The Arab Periodicals of the



Fig. 75. *Siti Inggal* split gate in front of the fifteenth century *Mesjid Merah Panjunan* [c.1480].



Fig. 76. View of *Mesjid Merah Panjunan* from the street corner. The small-scale freestanding minaret is common to this vintage mosque (left rear). The contours of the roof are echoed in the lid design of the *kotak topeng*.



*Astana Gunung Jati* and the Cirebon palaces display decorative Chinese, Arabic, Delft, and British ceramics. Many of the plates were traded or given as gifts by merchants during Cirebon's heyday as a major port by way of the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. European ceramics, furniture, and chandeliers were gifted to *Kraton Kasepuhan* by Dutch and British colonial rulers, but many of the tiles at *Astana Gunung Jati* and mosques in the region indicate French, German, and Portuguese donors also cultivated relations there. The ceramics, then, are multivalent. They indicate lively trade relations, but their esteemed position in places of worship might also be read as a symbolic display of foreign hegemony.

The display of secular objects, such as the porcelain dishes at *Astana Gunung Jati* [fig. 77] and *Mesjid Merah Panjunan* [fig. 78] is like the gravestone: each form has a powerful subtext as a site of contemplation, where the faithful gather and focus on their mental journey to the center.



Fig. 77. Istana Gunung Jati. Shalat Jumat. August 2005.



Fig. 78. *Mesjid Merah Panjunan*, interior view. The mosque’s *juru kunci*, right; local becak driver (left). The *juru kunci*, of Hadrami descent, is wearing a traditional Javanese male sarong of checkered cloth.<sup>898</sup> Porcelain plates flank the doorway to the inner sanctum, and walls on either side. Posted above the archway is the profession of faith (*shahadat*): “*La ilaha illa ‘llah, Muhammadun Rasulallah*” [“There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger.”]

### JAVA’S ANCESTRAL GRAVE AS A MARKER OF INTERIORITY AND MOBILITY

While tombstones are mostly signs of absence, and mostly silent, at times of pilgrimage they are noisy with the sounds of many presences. Movement makes all the difference. We cannot understand the grave, the destination, without paying attention to the journey beyond it.<sup>899</sup>

The veneration of ancestral graves and *ziarah* continue today in modified form.

That it endures at all is striking against the backdrop of the iconoclastic Wahhabi

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<sup>898</sup> The *juru kunci* adheres to the gender-specific Javanese *sarong* design, a widespread tradition among the Hadrami at home, whose consumption of Indonesian imported cloth is widespread. See Engsens Ho *The Graves of Tarim*, 89.

<sup>899</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

movement,<sup>900</sup> an important counterweight to Sufism in Java and Sumatra, for whom ancestor worship is considered a deviant activity (*bid'a*). Yet, Wahhabi disapproval has had no appreciable impact on performing *ziarah*.

*Ziarah* is one in a series of rituals the *guru* and *dalang*-in-training undertake before the title '*dalang topeng*' is bestowed upon the fledgling dancer. Pamela Aguiniga-Rogers describes its occurrence in Slangit:

The student meditates and fasts usually alongside his parent in order to purify his body. They visit the graves of their ancestors and the parent will chant prayers and present *sesajen* (offerings) to each ancestor. The parent will also chant prayers to *Pangeran Panggung* (the creator of all the arts in Cirebon and the ancestor of all *dalang topeng*) and asks for his blessing and permission for his offspring to become a *dalang topeng*. He beseeches the spirit of *Pangeran Panggung* to protect the new *dalang topeng* when he dances and to "enter him" during performances. He implores *Pangeran Panggung* and the spirits to recognize the new *dalang topeng* as their own child, and to assist him in all his artistic endeavors. He names each ancestor and each mask spirit, inviting them to draw near to the new *dalang topeng*. A special *sesajen* of food is offered to them... The new *dalang topeng* is now required to make a special *sesajen* to these spirits once a month to honor them. The *sesajen* are considered to be of the utmost importance, for without food the spirits will not come and assist the *dalang topeng* and can turn against him and plague the entire village.<sup>901</sup>

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<sup>900</sup> Arabic: *Al-Wahhābīyya*. Hamid Algar contends that the movement is insignificant throughout much of the Muslim world, whose views are deemed extremist by the majority of both Sunnis and Shiites. The only nineteenth century movement that can be unequivocally traced to the Wahhabis is the Padri uprising in West Sumatra. Hamid Algar, *Wahhabisme: Sebuah tinjauan kritis*, (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2008) 31-32; 90-91.

<sup>901</sup> Rogers-Aguiniga, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis, 94-96.

Sujana's son Inu was very young and Astori not yet born when Rogers-Aguiniga conducted her fieldwork in the early-1980s. Sujana's eldest son from a previous marriage is a musician. Thus, presumably the process Sujana described was in accordance with his experience and that of his siblings from the 1940s through the 1960s.

Once these rituals are completed, a *selamatan*<sup>902</sup> is held on behalf of the transitioning student.<sup>903</sup> The student is said to become a *dalang topeng* at the moment the guru informs him or her; however, it is only *a fait accompli* once the words are uttered in the public sphere at the *selamatan* that follows.<sup>904</sup> Prior to the formal announcement, the fledgling dancer is in what Victor Turner describes as a ‘liminal’ state, for the transitioning party resides at the threshold of transformation. She or he is betwixt and between, no longer a student but not yet a master.

A modern twist on the tradition of passing the torch to one’s offspring occurred in June 2008, when, according to Indonesia’s English-language newspaper *The Jakarta Post*, the ailing *dalang topeng* Rasinah formally passed the torch to her twenty-two year old granddaughter, Aerli, at the Sunan Gunung Jati complex. There, Aerli, a dance student at STSI Bandung, performed on an elevated stage, prayed, and received Rasinah’s blessing to continue the family’s *topeng* tradition before an audience that included the national media.<sup>905</sup> That this occurred near Cirebon’s first king’s grave is significant on two fronts. First, as previously mentioned, only recently have *dalang*-in-training begun studying at the state-run art academy, *STSI, Bandung*.<sup>906</sup> The academic transition from student to master poses a conundrum when the graduate returns home:

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<sup>902</sup> A ritual feast associated with life-cycle events, in which the community plays in active role.

<sup>903</sup> Ibu Dewi described a similar situation when she was a child. She and her younger sibling, Punjul, accompanied by their father, walked to the grave of Sunan Panggung near Gunung Rajadanu. The trip was arduous, but they accomplished what they sought out to do: they prayed she would be a great *dalang topeng*. Afterwards, she felt a divine sign of power (*kekuatan*). *Kompas*. “Ibu Dewi + Ingin mengakhiri hidup di panggung tari.” 27 February 1983.

<sup>904</sup> Rogers-Aguiniga, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master’s thesis, 96.

<sup>905</sup> *The Jakarta Post*. “Aerli Rasinah: The new face of the Cirebon mask dance,” 29 June 2008.

<sup>906</sup> Sujana Arja’s son, Astori, also attended STSI Bandung in the early 2000s, but even before his father’s death in 2006 had not been declared a *dalang topeng*. Dewi’s granddaughter, Noor Anani of Losari, also graduated from *STSI Bandung* a few years ago, but feels that while she is technically called a *dalang topeng*, it will be many more years before she feels deserving of the title.

regardless of whether the young dancer has received her college degree or not, she is technically still in training in the eyes of the *guru*. The transition to full-fledged *dalang topeng* is solely dependent upon the mentor's oral utterance of completion and, as such, trumps a written degree. But for the young, college attendee or graduate the pull to return home to the orally-driven frame of *dalang* life and complete their training is compelling. The second significant feature, which is imbedded in the first, is that the embodiment of power so intrinsic to the *dalang's* very being is a clandestine affair laid down over a period of decades. There were, thus, two interlocking processes at work – one external, the other internal. This is resonant with the mystical dichotomy of *zahir* and *batin*, respectively, wherein the external world contains a world within it, enveloping the interior path to the center, *batin*.

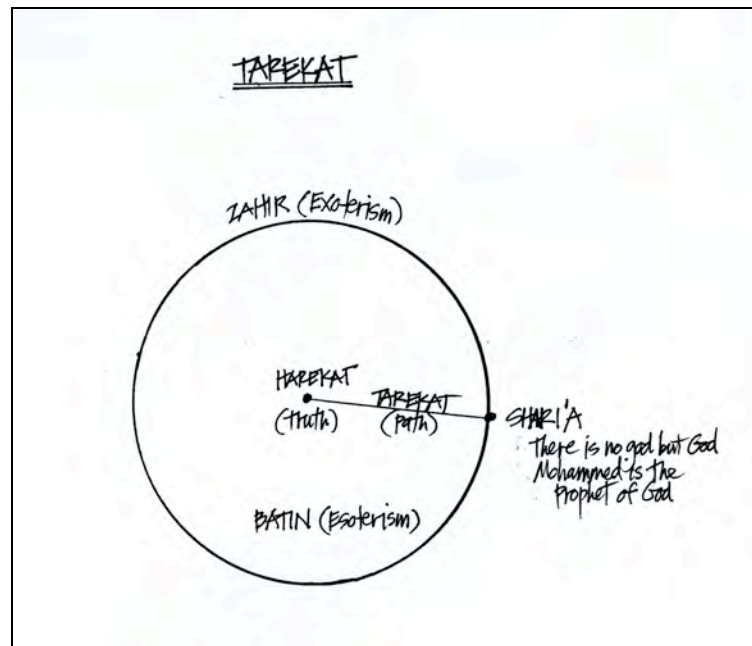


Fig. 79. *Tarekat* (The Sufi Path). Drawing by Ron Bogley.

*Ziarah*'s role in the lives of past *dalang topeng* should now be clear, although its power has diminished in the lives of their progeny. According to Cirebon's department of education and culture, there were twenty-six *buyut* in the Cirebon district in 1976.<sup>907</sup> At that time, the seven most important destinations for *dalang* were: *Makam Ki Buyut Turi* (Bagusan); the graves of Ki Bluwer and his son Ki Gumer<sup>908</sup> in Weru, Cirebon; *Nyi Mas Gendasari* (Panguragan); *Makam Gusti Syarif Hidayat* (posthumously known as Sunan Gunung Jati, Gunung Sembung); *Nyi Ronggeng Buyut* (Pandawa, in Kalianyar) *Tarub Agung* (Banyupanas, Palimanan); *Buyut Ciliwung* (Ciliwung, Palimanan).<sup>909</sup>



Fig. 80. *Nyi Ronggeng Buyut*. Kalianyar, Cirebon.

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<sup>907</sup> This is according to Kandeg Patmadjwinata and Sudji. Cited in Maman Suryaatmadja, *Topeng Cirebon Dalam Perkembangan Penyebaran Dalam Masyarakat Jawa Barat Khususnya di Daerah Cirebon*, (Bandung: Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia, 1980), 22-3 and Sudarto. *Topeng Babakan Cirebon 1900 -1990*, Master's thesis, 34-35.

<sup>908</sup> *Dalang topeng* Sujana Arja's ancestors.

<sup>909</sup> Maman Suryaatmadja, *Topeng Cirebon Dalam Perkembangan Penyebaran Dalam Masyarakat Jawa Barat Khususnya di Daerah Cirebon* (1980), 23. Wentar and several family members, including Sudji, are buried at *Buyut Ciliwung*.

The last generation of *dalang* to perform *ziarah* have now died, and the demands of daily life necessitate that few of their progeny have sufficient time or the means to follow the ascetic practices established by their elders, including *ziarah*.

When I studied *topeng* with Dasih in the late 1970s, the two most significant pilgrimages for a *dalang topeng* were to *Nyi Ronggeng Buyut* in Kalianyar<sup>910</sup> and *Mbah Buyut Trusmi*,<sup>911</sup> both in the district of Cirebon. The former is said to be the home of the first *ronggeng* in West Java. The *dalang topeng*'s identification with this improvised, unmasked form is longstanding and complex. *Mbah Buyut Trusmi*, alternately, is associated with Walangsungsang,<sup>912</sup> the founder of the complex. His perceived connection to the arts has profoundly influenced Trusmi's artist guilds and performing arts in the region. We will first look at the significance of *Nyi Ronggeng*, followed by *Mbah Buyut Trusmi*.

The sacred site, aptly named '*ronggeng*,' signifies both the dancer and the form.<sup>913</sup> *Ronggeng* has had a turbulent history in Java, particularly among orthodox Muslims, for whom female dancing was viewed in a negative light. Nonetheless, *ronggeng* had a long lifespan until its ban in 1965. From that point forth, any art form with even the hint of an erotic subtext was not allowed.<sup>914</sup>

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<sup>910</sup> Sub-district of Arjawinangun.

<sup>911</sup> The village of Trusmi.

<sup>912</sup> He is also known as Pangeran Cakrabuana or Mbah Kuwu.

<sup>913</sup> The Malay form of '*ronggeng*' is '*tandak*.'

<sup>914</sup> Endo Suanda describes a dance performance in the village of Leuwikidang, Majalengka, where the performance was terminated because the female dancer's upper arms and calves were visible which, according to the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (*hadit*), are considered *aurat*. Endo Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis.

Stutterheim posits a genealogy of the *ronggeng* extending to India's *devadasi* dancers. The two forms have several important common features: both were attached to religious centers, e.g. the mosque and temple; both had ties to prostitution and gradually lost their esteemed positions as the result of social reforms; and both activities were eventually frowned upon as immoral. The variety of Tamil loanwords found in Indonesia from South India, where the *devadasi* flourished, supports this possibility. Even so, *ronggeng* was not viewed in a Hindu context among the Javanese, but rather as conforming to the highest stage of *tarekat* (the path), *marifat* (knowledge). W. F. Stutterheim, "A Thousand Years Old Profession in the Princely Courts on Java" in *Studies in Indonesian Archeology*, W. F. Stutterheim, ed., (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956), 100; K. S. Ramaswami Sastri, *Indian Aesthetics: Music and Dance*, (np: Sri Venkateswara University, 1966), 49.

The British colonial scholar and administrator, Thomas Stamford Raffles who was perhaps the first European to take Java and its inhabitants seriously (albeit with considerable prejudice) describes *ronggeng* as professional singer-dancers comparable to the “usual dancing girls of Western India” who are “generally of easy virtue” and often kept in the service of the regents for years. Raffles had a marked preference for the courtly Central Javanese *bedaya* dancers for their “superior graces,” a style that was then unknown in West Java.<sup>915</sup> He likened *ronggeng* to prostitutes lacking in aesthetic qualities:

Their conduct is generally so incorrect, as to render the title of *róng'geng* and prostitute synonymous [sic]; but it not infrequently happens, that after amassing considerable wealth in the profession, they obtain, on account of their fortune, the hand of some petty chief. In this case, they generally, after a few years retirement and domestic quiet, avail themselves of the facility of a divorce and repudiating their husbands return to their former habits... Their action is usually distorted, their greatest excellence seeming to consist in bending the arms and hands back in an unnatural manner, and giving one or two of the fingers a tremulous motion...[i]t is not unusual for the performances of the *róng'gengs* to be varied by the action of a fool or buffoon. Mimicry is a favourite amusement, and beside imitating, in a ludicrous manner, the actions of the *róng'gengs*, there are not wanting performers of this description, who occasionally direct their wit against all classes of society, and evince a considerable degree of low humour.”<sup>916</sup>

Raffles only mentions *topeng* in the context of Central and East Javanese (Malang) *wayang wong*, but a parallel may be drawn with the lives of female *dalang* who, for a variety of reasons described in chapter 3 of this study, were serial monogamists. Raffles

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<sup>915</sup> Although *bedaya* is considered to be court dance at Cirebon’s *kraton*, it was introduced there later. *Bedaya* has not had the same staying power as Central Java’s versions and was abandoned for many years at the *kraton* until being revived in 2006 to commemorate the end of the fasting month.

<sup>916</sup> Thomas Stamford Raffles, *The History of Java*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, [1817], 1965), 1: 342-44.



describes the *ronggeng* form as “the only public exhibitions of the female sex.”<sup>917</sup> Nonetheless, he highlights one of the least discussed aesthetic elements that bind *ronggeng* and the gender-bending *topeng* with other indigenous dance forms: double-jointed arms as an aesthetic standard. This alignment of the arm is characteristic of Javanese dance and, according to Joanna Williams, does not conform to Indian classifications. Double-jointedness continues to be a sought-after skill in Java, where even young children master it at a very young age.



Fig. 81. The double-jointed elbow. Rama (center) listens to news about Sita in this relief at *Loro Jonggrang*.

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<sup>917</sup> Ibid, 344.



Fig. 82. *Dalang topeng* Sujana Arja, with double-jointed arm, early 1970s. *Tari Topeng Tumenggung*, Photographer Unknown.

Raffles further describes the *ronggeng*'s use of a handkerchief thrown over the shoulder and a fan in her hand, "occasionally employed by the dancer to conceal part of the face, not so much out of any affectation or bashfulness, as, in the manner of a huntsman, to assist the louder tones of the voice..."<sup>918</sup> The *ules* (handkerchief) and, at one time, the fan were also incorporated into *topeng*, for like purposes of concealment and revelation.<sup>919</sup>

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<sup>918</sup> Ibid, 343.

<sup>919</sup> The *ules* still has an important function in *topeng* by concealing the mask before it is donned, but the fan is also an important part of the Chinese mask form *Bian Lian* ('Changing Faces'), known in Java in the nineteenth century.



Fig. 83. *Topeng babakan* performance. Female *dalang* and male *bodor* (clown). Note the direction of the *dalang*'s arms, the closed fan in her hand, and the miniature *kotak topeng* (right foreground). Illustration from Ritter and Hardouin (1872).

Spiller touches on one of the most important features of *ronggeng*'s linkage with prostitution, a critique also applied to *topeng*:

In West Java, respectable women simply do not perform music and dance in public; by performing any role, even the role of a goddess, a woman risks revealing herself to be outside acceptable limits of behavior—a whore. *Ronggeng* stand in for all women as well as represent an impossible woman when they perform for dance events.<sup>920</sup>

The connection between female performers in the public domain and prostitution haunts the discourse of *ronggeng* today. Even the word, *ronggeng*, is anachronistic. The idea of

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<sup>920</sup> Spiller, *Erotic Triangles: Sundanese Men's Improvisational Dance in West Java, Indonesia*, 31.  
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women dancing for money anywhere – but especially in the public sphere – is anathema to many orthodox Muslims. Such forms as *tayuban*, *dangdut*, *jaipongan*, and *pesindhen*, have taken its place to designate art forms in which the eroticized exchange between female dancers and their male clientele occur. Improvised dance between women and men is too entrenched in Java's history to abandon.

### ***Ronggeng and Topeng in the Tasawuf Matrix***

Zoetmulder<sup>921</sup> refers to a passage in Rinkes' translation of the *Babad Cerbon*, in which the four levels of the mystic's path are delineated. It is often stated that the chronicle was written in the seventeenth century by the *pengulu* (chief mosque official) at the *Agung Mosque*, Abdul Kahar. The *babad* depicts a synthetic Muslim cosmology that delineates the four stages of *tarekat* (the Sufi path). In their proper order, they are: *shari'a* (Islamic law),<sup>922</sup> *tarekat* (the way),<sup>923</sup> *hakekat* (truth), and, the highest stage, *marifat* (knowledge). Each level has its counterpart in one of the four Cirebonese arts: *wayang*, *berokan*, *topeng*, and *ronggeng*.<sup>924</sup>

The first stage of the path, *shari'a* has its parallel in *wayang*, in which the bond between humans and their creator, Allah, is forged, represented by the *dalang*, but for whom a screen separates the two. The *wayang* puppets are dependent upon the puppeteer, just as humans are to the Divine according to the *Quran*. Thus, one must live in accordance with the Divine animator.

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<sup>921</sup> P. J. Zoetmulder, *Pantheism and Monism in Javanese Suluk Literature: Islamic and Indian Mysticism in an Indonesian Setting*. M. C. Ricklefs, trans. (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1995), 248-9.

<sup>922</sup> In addition to Islamic law, *shari'a* also refers to the external elements of Islam, or 'zahir,' without which *tarekat*, or the interior journey, *batin*, is not possible.

<sup>923</sup> *Tarekat* may also refer to a Sufi order, e.g. *tarekat Naqshbandiyya*.

<sup>924</sup> Siddique, *Relics of the Past?*, 79-80.

The second stage, *tarekat*, is symbolized by the full-bodied mask *berokan* or *barongan* [see Appendix 3] that is often associated with a tiger or lion. *Berokan* unifies *wayang* in its human form with Allah (the *dalang*). The body is concealed in a burlap sack and an animal mask. This signifies the disciple embarking on the mystical path with one's *shaykh* (guide). *Tarekat* represents both union and concealment, because that which keeps them apart is the confinement of the full-body mask.



Fig. 84. *Dalang wayang* Taham demonstrates *Berokan* in his studio. Tambi, Indramayu. 5 October 2005.

*Topeng* is symbolized in the third stage, *hakekat*. The *dalang* and *wayang* are united. The body is now a human form, but there remains one barrier: the mask itself. *Tasawuf* scholar, Opan, described *hakekat* thus, “The Prince [God] is human, the human

is the Prince. God is me. I am God. The only limitation [to complete union] is being concealed by the mask.”<sup>925</sup>

The fourth, and highest stage, *marifat*, is symbolized by the *ronggeng*. In local *tarekat* circles, the *ronggeng* is *Roh Kang Nganggeng* (the living spirit), the supernatural presence of *tayuban*.<sup>926</sup> Here, the relationship between the human being and God is explicit: “Yes, the human is God and yes, God is human.”<sup>927</sup> There are no more obstacles to knowing God, no hesitation about God’s existence. Once again the *dalang* and *wayang* are combined but finally, unveiled, suggesting human fusion with the Divine, a place of eternal life. Taken together, then, the four stages of *tarekat* reveal a genealogy of performance that begins with concealment and concludes with revelation.

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<sup>925</sup> *Ya Pangeran ya ingsun, Ya ingsun ya Pangeran. Ya Tuhan ya Manusia. Ya manusia ya Tuhan.*

*Batasnya itu hanya ditutupi oleh kedok.* Rafan S. Hasyim (Opan), pers. comm., 5 October 2005.

“I am God” (Arabic: *Ana 'l Haqq*) originated with the Sufi scholar, al-Hallāj [b. Bayzā, 294 Islamic era / 857 CE), who was crucified in 922 CE.], who, according to Hamid Algar, upon his return from the hajj built a replica of the *kabah* (the center of the mosque at Mecca) and began to circumambulate (*tawaaif*) while claiming *Ana 'l Haqq*. For practitioners today, this means “I have fortified myself in God.” In the context of Sufism in Cirebon, its referent is likely Seh Siti Jenar, who is often linked with al-Hallāj.

Ricklefs, Drewes, Rinkes and others have pointed to Seh Siti Jenar’s approach and his fate with that of the al-Hallāj. Ricklefs mentions this relationship in the introduction of Zoetmulder. He describes this relationship at length in his chapter about the *wali* in the same book. Rinkes emphasizes al-Hallāj’s expression *Ana 'l Haqq*. An entire chapter is devoted to the heretic in Rinkes. Seh Siti Jenar’s shrine is on the outskirts of Cirebon. In the context of Ibn Arabi, “I am God” relates to the unity of being. D. A. Rinkes, *Nine Saints of Java*, Alijah Gordon, ed. (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1996), 15-46; Zoetmulder, *Pantheism and Monism in Javanese Suluk Literature*, xvii; 300-03.

<sup>926</sup> *Tayuban* is a later form. In this context it refers to the paired dance with a man and woman.

<sup>927</sup> *Ya manusia ya Tuhan. Ya Tuhan ya manusia.* Rafan S. Hasyim, pers. comm., 5 October 2005.



Fig. 85. *Topeng* and *Ronggeng* intersect with *Organ Tunggal*. Rasinah (far right), her sister-in-laws, Waerih (standing, rear left), Rokani, (front center), a former *dalang topeng* and clown, and her daughter, Wacih (whose back faces the camera). The women are dancing to *dangdut* at a Muslim wedding in Indramayu. The women are all improvising. Interestingly, their heads face the ground as they take the position of *adzan* (the call to prayer). May 2005.

Siddique describes it as an Islamic rather than mystical inheritance; however, the merging of human life with the Creator is founded in mystical ideation, wherein fusion with the Divine is the goal, a concept abhorrent to the majority of orthodox Muslims and some Sufis. It becomes clear at the end of each *topeng* dance that the *dalang* and *ronggeng* have fused when the mask is removed in full view of the audience and the dancer gives thanks to Allah.<sup>928</sup>

Not surprisingly, the performer is an important trope for mystical union across religious borders. In Java, many stories center on the *ronggeng*. In a version provided by C. M. Pleyte (1916), the “first *ronggeng*” (“De eerste *ronggeng*”) is couched in

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<sup>928</sup> The meaning of the movement *sembah*, in which the *dalang* bows at the end of the dance, is often misunderstood today as the *dalang* thanking the audience for their presence. According to every *dalang* I knew in the late 1970s, *sembah* acknowledges the Divine presence that is being acknowledged.

mysticism. The story revolves around a triad of artisans; a goldsmith, a wood carver, and a tailor. The wood carver crafts a statue of a beautiful woman upon receiving instruction from Allah.<sup>929</sup> The tailor takes pity on the naked statue and wraps it in a *sarong*, chest cloth, and blouse. The goldsmith then adorns the sculpture with rings, earrings, and a necklace. All three craftsmen, now enamored with the sculpture, pray and fast in hopes of bringing it to life. After forty days, the sculpture comes to life by the will of a *wali*. Each craftsman claims the beautiful woman for himself, but the *wali* orders the men to accompany her as she wanders through the country singing and dancing. The woodcarver plays the *rebab*,<sup>930</sup> the tailor beats the drum, and the goldsmith plays three metal percussion instruments: the *gong*, *ketjrek*, and *ketuk*. They travel to Majapahit.<sup>931</sup>

The significance of precious and semi-precious metals is not unique to Sufism,<sup>932</sup> however, the above story is undeniably of Sufi origin: three wandering artisans – the woodcarver, the goldsmith, and the tailor – travel to Majapahit, the place where the first conversions to Islam are believed to have occurred.

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<sup>929</sup> This may be interpreted as an acknowledgement of only Allah's divine right to reproduce the human form.

<sup>930</sup> The *rebab* is a one-string violin that has its origins in the Middle East, connoting its Islamic identity.

<sup>931</sup> C. M. Pleyte, "De Eerste Ronggeng," *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*. Deel LVII, (Batavia and 'S Hage: Albrecht & Co. and M. Nijhoff, 1916), 270-272.

Claire Holt concludes that this telling has the woman belonging not to one of them, but to all. Brakel-Papenhuyzen traces this oral story to the *Serat Pustaka Raja* and to an earlier Hinduized version in the *Tantu Panggelaran* in which three gods are transformed into a group of wandering artists. Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia*, 113; Brakel-Papenhuyzen, "Javanese *Talédhek* and Chinese *Tayuban*," 545-46; T. Pigeaud, *De Tantu Panggelaran*, ('s-Gravenhage: Smits, 1924).

<sup>932</sup> David Wyatt, for example, describes a Pagan chronicle in which the founder of the Lan Na kingdom (now Thailand), Mangrai, arrived in Pagan-Ava in the late thirteenth century, not to plunder, but to obtain some of Ava's famous metalworkers to take to his kingdom. He was given five hundred families of goldsmiths, silversmiths, and coppersmiths. David Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 35-36.





Fig. 86. Three *topeng* dancers. Contemporary sculpture near *Kraton Kasepuhan*, Cirebon. Commissioned by the City of Cirebon's Department of Culture and Tourism, c.1990s. Sculptor unknown.

The woodcarver takes a piece of lifeless matter, frozen in its expression, and through his tools and imagination brings it to life – a task identical to the mask maker's role.<sup>933</sup> In Java, the *kris* (sword) is forged from iron and is imbued with magic powers as we saw in chapter 5 in the context of *susuk*. Finally, with the propagation of Islam in Java, crafting a garment from cloth became an important skill.<sup>934</sup>

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<sup>933</sup> In the eyes of many pious Muslims this life-giving force conflicts with God's will, wherein "to fashion" or "to create" is doctrinally restricted in the *Quran* to Allah. Examples are *Surat* 7,10 and *Surat* 49, 66.

<sup>934</sup> Jean Gelman Taylor contends that beginning in the thirteenth century, the unisex Javanese costume of unstitched, rectangular cotton (*kain*) covered the lower body for both sexes. Women wore a variety of breast and waist wraps and shoulder cloths, while their shoulders and arms were exposed; men's upper bodies, alternately, were bare. During the VOC years a shift occurred in how materials enveloped the body and the colors and patterns deemed appropriate for men and women. For men, the evolution was towards somber colors and the concealment of the body, but without constricting their movement. Women's costume was more restrictive, highlighting the contours of the female form, and with bright colors. With Java's Islamization, the breast wrapper and *kain* ceased to be the costume of the majority of Javanese women, with the exception of aristocracy and for formal occasions. Taylor (citing Nieuwenhuys) describes *kain* and breast wrap combinations, or the *kain* alone becoming synonymous with prostitution. Photography studios in Batavia printed these images on postcards, "business cards," and for pornography collectors. See Jean Gelman Taylor, "Costume and Gender in Colonial Java, 1800-1940," *Outward Appearances: Dressing State & Society in Indonesia*, Henk Schulte Nordholt, ed., (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1997) 93-94; 107-08; citing Rob Nieuwenhuys, *Tempo Doeloe: Fotografische Documenten uit het Oude*

The transformational aspect of cloth is central to Sufism and also to *topeng*, where the costume (*krodong*) is incomplete without the batik *kain* (*sarong*) and *lokcan*<sup>935</sup> that drapes over the shoulders like a cape [see figs. 28, 87, 88].<sup>936</sup>

Attitudes about batik (*dodot*) as part of the *topeng* costume is mixed. *Dalang* sisters Dewi and Sawitri of Losari are a case in point. Losari is situated near the Central Java border, thus Central Javanese batiks were more readily available to them.

According to Sonny Sumarsono from Jakarta's art center, *Taman Ismail Marzuki [TIM]*, the regional batik style was of minor significance to the sisters. Sawitri wore a red *menundung* (cloud) motif, which has only in the past few generations become an important part of the costume (a new "tradition" that many consider old). However, her older sister Dewi preferred batik from Solo since it was readily available and cheaper.

The sisters may not have seen eye to eye on the batik *dodot*, but they insisted on wearing the *lokcan*.<sup>937</sup> The *topeng* costume may be seen as yet another form of accommodation: the sarong that once sensuously enveloped the contours of the pre-Muslim Javanese body is now worn over knickers. Furthermore, a short-sleeved top partially obscured by

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*Indie, 1870-1914*. Amsterdam: Querido, (1961), 92; Rob Nieuwenhuys *Baren en Oudgasten: Tempo Doeloe – een Verzonken Wereld. Fotografische Documenten uit het Oude Indie 1870-1930*, (Amsterdam: Querido, 1981), 114-15. The elongated bras traditionally worn beneath women's transparent *kebaya* are still worn by rural women in Cirebon, sans *kebaya*. Cirebon is one of the hottest regions of Java, and the women often walk through their villages and toil the fields in this attire. No stigma appears to be attached to this state of "undress" at the village level.

<sup>935</sup> *Lokcan* silk crepe cape is part of a *topeng* costume, with the hand-drawn seagrass motif that is popular in Cirebon and Indramayu.

<sup>936</sup> Many *dalang* do not own a *lokcan* and borrow one for the performance; others have had a *pusaka lokcan* in their family for many generations, often with significant wear and tear. My guru, Dasih, who had no children gifted me with her *lokcan* when I completed my studies. Although the *lokcan* has dominated the *topeng* costume for many generations, nineteenth century costumes appear to have been made of velvet, much like the *wayang wong* costumes I examined at the Field Museum from the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. See, too, fig. 83 (Hardouin/Ritter).

<sup>937</sup> Sonny Sumarsono, pers. comm., 6 May 2006.

the *lokcan* has replaced the breast wrap of days gone by.<sup>938</sup> The lower batik is draped over the pants, tucked between the legs and folded into the back waist area, much as cloth was worn in the twelfth century.<sup>939</sup> This is consistent with all of the characters except the androgynous Panji, where the batik is draped like a long skirt concealing the legs and feet.<sup>940</sup> This points to the likelihood that the *dalang*'s pants and top are relatively recent innovations.



Fig. 87. Detail, handdrawn (*tulis*) old silk *lokcan* batik. Seagrass motif, detail. Cirebon batik, c.1950s. Collection: Enoch Atmadibrata.

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<sup>938</sup> There is no differentiation in the costumes of male or female *dalang*.

<sup>939</sup> The Chinese traveler Chau Ju-Kua described both men and women in Sunda (*'Sin-t'o*) wrapping their loins with a piece of cotton. F. Hirth and W. W. Rockhill, eds and trans., *Chau Ju-Kua: His Work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, (St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Science, 1911), 70.

<sup>940</sup> This is illustrated in fig. 117, chapter 8 (Sujana Arja performing *Tari Topeng Panji*).

Returning to our discussion of the importance of the home of the first *ronggeng* as a sacred site, a *tasawuf* definition is instructive: “The [mystical] philosophy of *ronggeng* is not about a female dancer, but about being paired, as in *tayuban*. People who understand *marifat* will have some fun in paradise, where there are no limits in praising God everywhere and anywhere.”<sup>941</sup>



Fig. 88. *Dalang topeng* Inu Kertapati (left) of Slangit performs the aristocratic *tayuban* with a female dancer on the occasion of *Maulud*. Notice the spatial distance between the dancers and the *lokcan* batik draped over Inu’s shoulders. Sumber, Cirebon. 29 March 2006.

The idea of pairing, or duality, is also found in the gender-specific life-cycle event for boys or girls, *Kasinoman* [literally: ‘youth’].<sup>942</sup> When the event includes a

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<sup>941</sup> Opan, pers. comm., 5 October 2005.

<sup>942</sup> *Kasinoman* is described in this study’s introduction. *Kasinoman* is increasingly rare today, with the exception of Indramayu.

performance, a female *ronggeng* dances for the young males,<sup>943</sup> and a male *dalang topeng* performs when young girls are the honorees.<sup>944</sup>

The home of the first *ronggeng*, *Nyi Ronggeng*, thus, is a site of pilgrimage for *ronggeng*, *dalang topeng*, and *pesindhen*, who were often one and the same person. Next, we will turn our attention to the second important site of pilgrimage for *dalang topeng*, *Mbah Buyut Trusmi*.

### ***Mbah Buyut Trusmi as a Site of Pilgrimage for Dalang***

As mentioned earlier, a literal definition of *buyut* is “great-great grandfather.” The term ‘*Ki Buyut*’ signifies both the founder of the village and the graveyard, or *kramat*. The ancestral figure associated with *Buyut Trusmi* is *Ki Buyut Trusmi*, although it is unknown precisely who this is. The three ancestors most commonly mentioned are Walangsungsang, or the ancestor or first settler of Trusmi, *Ki Gede Trusmi*, or his grandson, *Pangeran Trusmi*.<sup>945</sup> It is somewhat surprising that although *dalang* trace their lineage to Sunan Kalijaga, the locus of their meditation is Walangsungsang.<sup>946</sup> *Dalang* refer to him as *Mbah Kuwu* and pray to him often: for guidance on their path to become a *dalang* and once the goal is achieved, to excel at it; to secure a good performance, a good harvest, and for their offspring to follow in their footsteps. Whenever Dasih visited her former student, Enoch Atmadibrata in Bandung, she always brought him the same gift from her village in Ciliwung, Palimanan): a handful of dirt,

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<sup>943</sup> In this circumstance it is referred to as *kasinoman lanang*.

<sup>944</sup> This is called *kasinoman wadon*. For a full description of both forms of *kasinoman*, see Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master’s thesis, 46-50.

<sup>945</sup> A. G. Muhaimin, *The Islamic Traditions of Cirebon: Ibadat and Adat Among Javanese Muslims*, 253.

<sup>946</sup> *Mbah Kuwu* means grand village head. *Dalang* consider it disrespectful to refer to Walangsungsang by his name.

for Mbah Kuwu was said to have traveled there.<sup>947</sup> One reason Mbah Kuwu is revered by village artists is that in addition to being the *buyut*'s founder and passionate about the arts, he was a village preacher who was close to the common folk.<sup>948</sup> Walangsungsang is also significant for his father, the Hindu Pajajaran King Prabu Siliwangi's conversion to Islam. One version of the story – a Sufi version – describes his journey to Mecca in search of a magical diamond *tasbih*.<sup>949</sup> The story revolves around mobility and transformation under the guidance of a *shaykh*.<sup>950</sup> For the *dalang topeng*, transformation is both gendered and spiritual, and like the diamond *tasbih*, it is grounded in remembrance.

So how did Trusmi become so important to *topeng*? According to Muhaimin, the name is derived from two words: '*terus*' meaning "instantly," and *semi*, or "spring up." Combined, they translate as "to spring up instantly." Stories about Trusmi's birth abound. The one below was provided by Muhaimin:

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<sup>947</sup> She also brought with her incense and oil, which were likely for meditation. Enoch Atmadibrata, pers. comm., 23 June 2004.

<sup>948</sup> Dasih, pers. comm., 5 May 1978.

<sup>949</sup> A *tasbih* is similar to a rosary that is used by Muslims for purposes of prayer. It is often associated with *dzikir*.

<sup>950</sup> The story describes how Prabu Siliwangi fell in love with a Muslim girl from Cirebon, *Nyai Subanglarang*. She only agrees to marry the king under one condition: he must first present her with a rosary made of diamonds, or *bintang kerti*, from Mecca. The king is besotted with *Nyai Sunbglarang* and sets off to Mecca in search of the diamond *tasbih*. Upon his arrival, *Wali Ula* asks why he seeks the special *tasbih*. Prabu Siliwangi replied: "I wish to marry a Muslim princess." The *wali* reaches for it in the sky and tells the king, "Here, you can have it." But Prabu Siliwangi cannot reach it. The *wali* informs him "Before you may claim it you must say in Arabic, "In the name of Allah, the almighty..." Only then will it be within your reach. Prabu Siliwangi repeats the *wali*'s words, but the *tasbih* remains outside his reach. Realizing that the Hindu king has recited the wrong passage, the *wali* instructs him to spell "*shahadat*." He does so and then successfully retrieves the *bintang kerti*. Prabu Siliwangi presents it to the princess who falls in love with him and the two marry. Their first child is Walangsungsang. This version of the story was relayed by Enoch Atmadibrata. According to the *Babad Cerbon*, they have two other children including a daughter, Rara Santang, who eventually married the Sultan of Egypt during her pilgrimage to Mecca. They bore a son, Syarif Hidayatullah, who is posthumously named Sunan Gunung Jati. Prabu Siliwangi and his wife also had a second son, Raja Sangara. A version of this story is recounted in Tjetjep Permana, *Sejarah Jawa Barat*, (Bandung: Proyek Penerbitan. Pemerintah Propinsi Daerah Tingkat I, Jawa Barat, 1983-84), v.4: 11-16

It is said that once Ki Gede Bangbangan, the first settler in the area, was sitting in front of his cottage enjoying with pride a site around the cottage he had just cleared. Suddenly he heard a mysterious voice saying: “*Assalamu ‘alaikum* (peace be upon you).” Immediately all the weeds and trees he had just cleared sprang up again and returned to their former condition thus spoiling all his hard work. While he was looking around with a mixture of sadness and astonishment two men walked toward him with a greeting saying: “*Assalamu ‘alaikum*.” The voice and tone of the two men saying the words was precisely similar to what he had mysteriously heard. A dialogue occurred between Ki Gede Bangbangan and the two men and it turned out that the men were Pangeran Cakrabuana and Sunan Gunung Jati. As a result of this unexplained event Ki Gede Bangbangan finally embraced Islam and the area became known as Trusmi; Ki Gede Bangbangan became Ki Gede Trusmi.<sup>951</sup>

This, of course, is a conversion story with Trusmi’s founder, Walangsungsang [Pangeran Cakrabuana] and Sunan Gunung Jati as the guides. The weeds and trees hints at, but do not make explicit, a landscape populated with spirits, which we learn are not spirits at all but the welcoming whisper of the two revered mystics.

Trusmi’s significance is visible in its batik guilds. Paramita Abdurachman describes the village as the abode of one of *Seh Siti Jenar*’s students, Panembahan Trusmi, who represents the *tarekat* (order) of artisans. Abdurachman contends that many Trusmi citizens and probably also Kali Tengah were members of a Sufi guild that specialized in pictorial arts, including batik. Their designs reflected the guild’s philosophy in concealed, abstract forms.<sup>952</sup>

One legend about Trusmi’s relationship to textiles has been passed down from one *sep* (custodian) to the next at *Buyut Trusmi*. The legend was relayed to me by the

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<sup>951</sup> Muhaimin, *The Islamic Traditions of Cirebon*, 253.

<sup>952</sup> Paramita Abdurachman, *Cerbon*, (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1982), 149.

*buyut*'s current *sep* (custodian), Arohim Mahmud. According to the legend, Trusmi's batik lineage is traced to Sunan Gunung Jati, whose *kain* (cloth) was tattered from his travels. Sunan Gunung Jati had heard that the greatest textile guild was located in Trusmi. Thus, when the *wali* passed through town, he requested they copy his cloth. He was confused when he received the new cloth. It was identical to the tattered one, symbolizing the mystic's non-materiality.<sup>953</sup>



Fig. 89. Batik factory, Trusmi, Cirebon. 2006. Today, women do the exacting work of hand drawn batik (*tulisan*) in very close proximity to each other. Positioned in the center, is a collective pot of hot wax that the women draw from. Notice the one male worker in the far left rear. Batik stamps adorn the rear walls.

According to Abdurachman, batik production in Cirebon and Indramayu was a male enterprise seven hundred years ago.<sup>954</sup> Many eastern Javanese guilds sent painters,

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<sup>953</sup> Arohim Mahmud, pers. comm., 23 June 2006.

<sup>954</sup> The communities of Dermayu, Pauman, and Sindang (now Indramayu) worked closely with the Cirebon courts in executing their royal designs.



musicians and other artists to Cirebon from Kediri then – all of them male. This resulted in Cirebon being one of the few places until recently where men drew and painted cloth. The Cirebon style highlights bolder forms and minimizes the intricacies of Central Javanese batik. When the Dutch imposed land taxes on agricultural acreage in 1830, men's batik-making activities declined. The women who replaced them were not allowed to join the artists' guilds, resulting in their detached position from the magical aspects of batik philosophy and rules associated with it today. Those motifs associated with the Cirebon courts had to be commissioned through the few family batik guilds with the secret knowledge required to produce them.<sup>955</sup> Men remain active in the batik industry today where they work primarily with stamp (*cap*) batik. As Figs. 89 and 90 demonstrate, male batik workers are segregated from the women who, today, are responsible for the more intricately detailed batik *tulisan* (hand-drawn batik).



Fig. 90. Batik guild, male batik stamp (*cap*) worker.

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<sup>955</sup> Inger McCabe Elliott, *Batik: Fabled Cloth of Java* (New York: Potter, 1984), 76, 88.

### ***Buyut Trusmi in the Topeng Imaginary***

The structure of contemporary batik factories suggest how *topeng* guilds may have functioned in the past. Although the village of Slangit is not on the main thoroughfare, it nonetheless approximates *topeng* guilds of past generations. Slangit still boasts several active *dalang topeng*, four local mask makers, a full gamelan orchestra, and a *sobrah* specialist. Most of these artists are related to one another and arrange sales for *topeng* students in the village and in Bandung.



Fig. 91. Buyut Trusmi, Shalat Jumat, 2006.

### ***Klana's Mysterious Unveiling at Mbah Buyut Trusmi***

Perhaps no *Mbah Buyut Trusmi* encounter is more striking than that of *dalang topeng* Carpan's ancestors. According to Carpan, whose family has long lived in Lelea

in the sub-district of Trisi (Indramayu), his ancestors (*nenek moyang*) were originally from Trusmi and are buried at *Mbah Buyut Trusmi*. He described how his ancestors owned not even one one mask, and so meditated and prayed for a mask at *buyut Trusmi*. Day in and out the pilgrims (*wong nyepi*)<sup>956</sup> prayed in the centermost point between two graves until one day an old Klana mask appeared. The *pusaka* mask has passed through many generations. Carpan is its current custodian.

I had seen Carpan's Klana mask before, but only learned how it was acquired following the performance I commissioned, with Carpan concluding the full-day performance with *ayun-ayunan*. In addition to Carpan's ability to perform *ayun-ayunan* (he is the last *dalang* who can do it), I was interested in him for several reasons. First, he is not as active as other, better known *dalang* and, hence, I had not seen him dance before. Second, his village is off the beaten path, even by Indramayu standards. Third, he is one of the few remaining male *dalang* today of his generation (he is sixty-nine years old), and the only one who performs during the gendered life-cycle event for young girls, *kasinoman*, and *topeng ruwatan*, a form of exorcism that involves masks. Finally, very few *dalang* still owns *pusaka* masks. Masks of comparable antiquity to his are rare in Java.

Thirty years ago, *dalang* preferred performing with their *pusaka* masks, for their inherent power. Today, however, they are reluctant to use those masks, preferring to perform with their "new" set. Those who do not own two sets borrow new ones. They do so for precisely the same reason their relatives preferred old masks two generations

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<sup>956</sup> A pilgrim performing *ziarah*, whether the purpose is to resolve a conflict or to seek Divine revelation. An analysis of the variety of pilgrims and *ziarah* are provided in Muhaimin, *The Islamic Traditions of Cirebon*, 241-3, 262-68.

prior: their power. Because of this attitudinal shift, I asked Carpan if he would perform with his *pusaka* masks for the commissioned performance, as I wanted to see them in motion. He replied counterfactually: “Sure. I always perform with them.”

I invited a few people to attend Carpan’s performance, including my former advisor at New York University, dance scholar Ann Axtmann, who was visiting at the time. Also invited was a PhD student from Hungary, who was conducting fieldwork on Priangan-style *topeng* who had seen neither *topeng dinaan* nor *ayun-ayunan*. The other attendees included a few Indonesian *topeng* scholars/performers, a videographer, and friends. The uninvited guests, who are always welcome at performances, included neighbors and farmers passing through.

Carpan’s sister, Sayen, greeted us warmly when we arrived at their home the day of the performance (3 April 2006). Carpan appeared anxious. About an hour later, we were ready to begin. Carpan dressed in front of the *kotak topeng*. Just before he put on his *sobrah*, he approached me: “Are you sure you want me to dance Panji with the old mask?” “Yes, of course,” I responded, not quite grasping why he asked. He performed the first dance, *Tari Topeng Panji*.

He repeated his earlier question with each subsequent dance, but my answer was always the same. I reminded him that months ago he said he danced with these masks all the time. I was flummoxed. I sensed he was being evasive, but I had no idea why, so I asked him. “Nothing” he replied. “I just wanted to make sure.” I imagined that asking permission of the host was a ritual I was unfamiliar with because I had never

commissioned a performance before.<sup>957</sup> Right before the last dance, Carpan approached me again. He asked if I was sure I wanted him to dance with the old Klana mask. I tried to reassure him, “Yes, I’m very excited about it.” Carpan started dancing. Things started well, but roughly ten minutes after he donned the mask, his legs began flailing – slowly at first, but soon thereafter he lost control. The drummer could not keep up with him. Having studied Klana – albeit a different version of it – with Dasih, I knew something was terribly wrong. Klana’s legs do flail at one point in the dance, but the movements are controlled. Carpan was in a trance. Family and friends quickly surrounded him. His teeth were fiercely clenched on the rattan bitepiece keeping the mask secure on his face. A female relative prayed over a glass of water. She then gently circulated her breath over it. At the same time Carpan’s daughter held the Panji mask next to his face; Panji was literally kissing Klana.



Fig. 92. *Dalang topeng* Carpan in trance. His face is completely obscured by the Panji mask here kissing Klana (only Panji’s inner face is visible) as his daughter (left) prays. 3 April 2006.

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<sup>957</sup> In social situations, for example, it is considered polite for the host to invite guests to drink their tea or coffee several times before the guest actually does so.

Once Panji kissed Klana,<sup>958</sup> the Klana mask was removed from Carpan's face. The *dalang*, dazed, sipped the blessed water held in front of his mouth. The gamelan literally did not miss a single beat.<sup>959</sup> Carpan regained his composure soon thereafter. Still slightly off-balance, he stood up, reached his right hand into the *kotak topeng* and pulled out a different Klana mask – a new one. He placed the mask on his face and continued dancing from exactly the point he had left off, his legs once again flailing but now with the controlled staccato movement reserved for the lusty, greedy king. Carpan surprised everyone when after finishing Klana, he approached the lowered tightrope to perform *ayun-ayunan* as promised.<sup>960</sup>



Fig. 93. Carpan's *pusaka* Klana mask.

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<sup>958</sup> Carpan later said that only Panji could revive him because Panji is Klana's bride.

<sup>959</sup> I was later told that it was too dangerous for the *nayaga* to stop: it would fill Klana with rage.

<sup>960</sup> Carpan insisted that *ayun-ayunan* could only be performed after Klana, which required that it be the final event of the day.

Afterwards, Carpan informed me that this was the first time he was possessed by a mask. He had been admonished not to wear the *pusaka* Klana mask for more than a few minutes, a rule he had adhered to until this fateful day. This is when Carpan shared the story of how the Klana mask was acquired at *Mbah Buyut Trusmi*, followed by several other vignettes that illuminate the mask's inherent dangers; hazards resulting not only from the greedy king's dark power, but the primacy of the *buyut* where the mask was "conceived."<sup>961</sup>

After [the ancestor] fasted and prayed long enough, he received divine inspiration one night at the gravesite, by way of a whisper, that if he prayed long enough, the ancestral grave would provide him with a mask with sufficient 'life' [hidup] for generations to come. Once he received this inspiration, he concluded that if he continued his prayers and fast, he would receive a mask. But what do you think happened next? The ancestor was startled because the mask's purpose resulted from this inspiration, for one of the gravestones was made of wood.

For this reason, only from this inspirational practice and after sufficient time thereafter was the mask received. The *dalang topeng* ancestors have passed it down from generation to generation until now.

I have an interesting story about my experience as a *dalang topeng* related specifically to the Klana mask.

Once, when I wanted to perform at a neighboring village, I forgot to bring my Klana mask. At the time I was very busy, so three of the gamelan musicians went to retrieve the mask on a bicycle. But it was raining hard and the bicycle slid into a tree. The musicians fell, one of whom landed on top of the Klana mask. It broke into many pieces and I realized nothing could be done to put the mask together again. Not long after that, one night I had a performance to cure the mask [from a shaman]. I had to find a rare white resin[?].<sup>962</sup> Following this event I was truly happy, but also confused. I was happy that the Klana mask would be fixed, but confused because finding the glue at that time was very difficult. But because of its importance to the Klana mask, I was

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<sup>961</sup> See Appendix II for the transcript of Carpan's story.

<sup>962</sup> '*getah waluh putih*.' Possibly banana resin.

determined to find it. Furthermore, I was sure the mask could be fixed by sticking the resin on the pieces that broke earlier. When I finally repaired the mask I became confused again because a small piece of the mask was missing. The piece that broke off was lost. When I realized the situation, I prayed over and over again to find the missing piece right away. As soon as I finished, my prayer was answered. The small piece needed to fix the mask had been in the place we keep hulled rice. When I looked, the broken piece was there. Afterwards, I was able to put in that missing piece.



Fig. 94. Carpan points to the crack on the nineteenth century Klana mask.

The problem concerning the Klana mask is not yet over. Because many days after that a guest arrived with some news that the musician who earlier had fallen on the mask was now ill. And according to the visitor, he wanted to ask for a magic potion<sup>963</sup> to cure his illness. After the news I fulfilled his request and prepared the special water. I quickly went to the ill musician's house. When I arrived I had a premonition that if my sick musician friend was stronger in three days, then he would recover from his illness. But if he was not strong by the third day, we would have to wait and see. I don't know if it was because it was his time or some other reason, but on exactly the third day he died.

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<sup>963</sup> A potion is comprised of special water that has been blessed by a *dukun* (shaman). A *dalang topeng* is included within this rubric.



When my wife was pregnant I noticed there was something wrong with Klana's eye, and so without much thought, I repainted it red. But what happened the next day! I truly could not have imagined that when my wife gave birth, my baby's eye was red. Seeing that happen, I realized that I had made a mistake [to repaint] the Klana mask, in the end I realized my intention and apologized and requested a potion for the Klana mask so that my child's eye could heal.<sup>964</sup> Eventually I dispensed the liquid potion drop by drop into my child's eye. And after I placed the drops my child's eye finally healed. But sadly my child did not live long, passing away at the age of four months.

The timeline then shifts to the present moment:

Not long after my loss, a private party requested a performance at my house. I executed each movement, but when it was time to perform Klana, less than five minutes into the performance, I was possessed by spirits. I could see that the entire audience who was watching the *topeng* dance were *bule*<sup>965</sup> who were carrying weapons and those weapons were aimed at me.

As a result of being possessed, the Klana mask was angry at me, that's why ritual offerings and food were made [so there would be no problem]. As usual, Klana's anger was hushed, so then the Panji mask kissed the Klana mask. Until today, this only occurs with the Klana mask after he receives the potion from the person who requested help. Then his face looks bright white. But, if on the contrary, he does not receive the medication, his face appears black. Such is this short story of the Klana mask's origin and my experiences for as long as I have been a *dalang topeng* with a special connection to this Klana mask.

These vignettes provide a roadmap of how one family reconstructs their *topeng* inheritance, a genealogy traced back to the veneration of ancestors, the *walisanga*, and ending with the performance I commissioned. I may have been the first foreigner he knew personally. But there were two other *bule* that day whom Carpan did not know. He was introduced to Ann before the performance,

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<sup>964</sup> As noted earlier, it is considered a transgression to repaint a mask, although it is often done.

<sup>965</sup> Literally: albino, or Caucasian. This term is traced to the Dutch era. It once had negative connotations, although today it is usually a benign term that signifies a Caucasian.

but the Hungarian woman arrived very late with some friends who were shooting video close to where Carpan was dancing. This confluence of events, including wearing the *pusaka* mask beyond the designated time frame, may have propelled him into believing the *bule* were not friends, but foes. After all, they carried weapons. *Topeng* thus is a delicate ecology that seeks a middle ground between mimesis and possession.

### **Performing the Ancestors for the Ancestors: Ngunjung Kabuyutan**

*Ngunjung* is among the few ritual occasions in which *topeng* is performed today. Not surprisingly, they take place in the sacred graveyard of the village founders, or *kabuyutan*<sup>966</sup> (the root is *buyut*). *Ngunjung* is one of many forms of *wali* veneration. It is similar to *ziarah*, where pilgrims visit the shrine of any holy personage. With *ngunjung*, however, the revered figure is the founder of the village, whose honorific title *Ki* or *Nyi Gede*, designates the founder's gender (*Ki* being male) and the name of the *buyut*. *Ngunjung* is a *sedekah* (offering) to the spirit. The performance format varies greatly, depending on the needs and finances of the village sponsoring the event. *Ngunjung* is most consistently held in Pangkalan, whose ancestor/spirit is *Buyut Sanggalamsi*.<sup>967</sup>

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<sup>966</sup> Endo Suanda, "Cirebonese Topeng and Wayang of the Present Day" *Asian Music*, 16, no. 2 (1985): 94.

<sup>967</sup> During the period of Endo Suanda's research, other villages with long traditions were Mayung, Pecung Kulon, Tambi, Bulak, and Kalijaga. They are less common today. Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis, 45-46.



Fig. 95. *Ngunjung. Buyut Sanggalamsi. Dalang topeng Wangi* during the unmasked section of Klana. November 2005.

Not surprisingly, those graveyards considered most potent have ancestor *dalang topeng* and *dalang wayang* buried there. When *topeng* is part of the *ngunjung*, *dalang* whose ancestors are traced to that *buyut* are privileged. According to Suanda, the late *dalang* Brubut performed there until the 1930s, followed by his heirs. When his progeny died, the baton was passed to *dalang* Arja (Sujana Arja's father) from Slangit. Arja's sixth son, Jaya, eventually inherited the position from his father, with Sujana later inheriting the coveted position upon his Jaya's death. *Dalang* able to rally the kind of personal power expected of their elders have declined in recent years. This, in turn, has had a democratizing effect on which *dalang* are invited to perform at *ngunjung*. This shift occurred even before Sujana's death and there has been considerable variety over the past decade. The only *ngunjung* I observed was at *Buyut Sanggalamsi* in 2005,

performed by *dalang topeng* Wangi of Tambi, Indramayu. As this is a rigorous all-day affair, Wangi was joined by several of her most promising students and two *bodor*, Bolong and Plongo, both of Indramayu.

### **Making Sense of the Buyut**

Considering the importance placed on ancestor veneration by *dalang*, one would assume consistency in their *buyut* over generations and even centuries, but this is not always the case. Dasih's family is a case in point. Her father, *dalang topeng* Wentar's remains are interred in the village graveyard, *buyut Ciliwung*. His *dalang topeng* wife, Sarmi, originally from Kebagusan, was buried with her side of the family in Bongas, Majalengka. Most of their offspring were buried at *Buyut Ciliwung*. When Dasih, the last surviving sibling passed away, her late sister, Sudji's daughter, Tursini [b.1937], had Dasih's body interred in *buyut* Kempeck, the village *buyut* next to Ciliwung. Tursini states there were no more plots at *buyut Ciliwung*. It is possible that longstanding tensions between the estranged sisters had something to do with the situation. The graveyard, thus, is a compelling, transitional space, but also the site of intra-familial conflict and pilgrimage that oscillates between the past, present, and the future. Victor Turner draws a line between these spheres:

[I]t might be said that ancestral and political cults and their local embodiments tend to represent crucial power divisions and classificatory distinctions within and among politically discrete groups, while earth and fertility cults represent ritual bonds between these groups...[t]he first type stresses exclusiveness, the second inclusiveness.<sup>968</sup>

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<sup>968</sup> Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 185.

In Dasih and Sudji's case, the rupture resulted from protracted, internalized tensions. However, as Tursini's life story unfolds later in this chapter, we see that they were not completely void of tenderness.

### **KOTAK TOPENG: THE PORTABLE ALTAR**

Well over a century ago, *topeng* scholar V. de Serrière, mused that *topeng* is very much part of the public domain, but that the same does not hold true for the mask proper. The mask is stored in a special chest, the *kotak topeng* (*kottak*), that is removed from the audience's view.<sup>969</sup> He further notes that the handkerchief (*ules*) is returned to the *kotak* once the mask is donned. Today, it is either dropped in front or to the side of the *dalang* while dancing. It only returns to the *kotak* once the dance is complete and the mask is again secured inside it. Thus, the *ules* is the mask's home within its home. So what exactly is this *kotak topeng*?

The *kotak* is iconic: a sacred space of respite and contemplation for both the mask and its animator, the *dalang*. During a performance, the *kotak* is roughly center stage, that is, directly in front of the *nayaga* and behind the *dalang*. The *bodor* (clown) sits to the right of the chest, where he plays the *kecrek* that dangles from it with a wooden mallet. In addition to the masks, the *dalang*'s costume is stored in the box prior to the performance. The *dalang* lifts the *kotak* lid as the *Tratagan* (introductory music) begins and the spectators start drawing near. At this point, the male *dalang*<sup>970</sup> puts on his

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<sup>969</sup> V. de Serrière (1873) "Javaansche Volksspelen en Vermaken," *Tijdschrift Nederlandsch-Indië II*, (1873), 15-23.

<sup>970</sup> It is prohibited in Islam for female *dalang* to dress in public, thus this is an exclusively male ritual. During this ritual, a batik sarong, or tube of batik fabric is wrapped around the male *dalang*'s body for purposes of decorum, while putting on his pants and shirt. Then the sarong is removed and the following pieces are carefully removed from the *kotak* and placed on his body. Sujana Arja reasons that the dress

costume in view of them,<sup>971</sup> because the spectator must bear witness to the *dalang*'s vulnerability before God. Rogers-Aquiniga states that lifting the lid signals the gamelan to begin playing.<sup>972</sup> This may be its sole function today, but its removal may have been a more potent gesture in the past. Removing the lid, or roof, transforms the *kotak* into a hollow cavity, exposing the masks (ancestral spirits) to the elements that the *dalang* safeguards with prayer. Just as *dalang* remove their masks periodically to allow them to “breathe,” removing the top activates the dormant space within it. In this way, the moment of contact replicates the trinity of the mosque, the graveyard, and *shalat*.<sup>973</sup>



Fig. 96. Sujana Arja demonstrates *shalat* at the *kotak topeng*. *Tari Topeng Panji*.

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must occur in view of the audience because it represents the first stage in the life cycle, before they existed in the womb. See Appendix 3.

<sup>971</sup> Dressing in full view of the audience while the space is sanctified by music is also an element of the Sanskrit flexible-masked drama called *Kuttiyattam*, of Kerala, India. In *Kuttiyattam*, the dancer walks on stage with a cloth wrapped around the waist and a curtain held up while the musicians play and the actors begin dancing outside of the audiences view. The actors are still technically on stage, marking the transformation into character. This suggests the possibility of an Indic link and would explain why it is so important for male *dalang* to dress in front of the audience, while women do this in privacy. See John Steven Sowles, *The Traditions, Training, and Performance of Kutiyattam, Sanskrit Drama in South India*. PhD dissertation, (University of California, Berkeley, 1982), 239-45.

<sup>972</sup> Rogers-Aguiniga, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis, 30-31.

<sup>973</sup> The prayers incumbent upon all Muslims.

During *Tratagan*, the *dalang* faces the box with both hands on top. The *dalang*'s back is to the audience.<sup>974</sup> Seated in the *ruku* position,<sup>975</sup> head lowered, the *dalang* prays to the saint believed responsible for all Cirebon arts, Pangeran Panggung, and to the benevolent and malevolent ancestral spirits, without whose assistance the performance is at peril.<sup>976</sup> The *dalang* silently states *shahadat* in combination with *jampi* and prayers as the music crescendoes.



Fig. 97. Dewi meditates at the open *kotak topeng*. Resting the foot on the *kotak* is unique to Losari.<sup>977</sup> Rather, the *dalang* usually sits in front of the *kotak*. Note the *lokcan* silk batik draped over Dewi's shoulders versus the Central Javanese batik worn below the waist. Also noteworthy is that Dewi's back is to the audience. She faces the *nayaga*, directly in front of her. 1983. Photograph courtesy of Sonny Sumarsono.

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<sup>974</sup> According to Sujana Arja's history of *topeng* (Appendix 1), the performance arena was once perched on the west side of the stage in accordance with *qibla* from the perspective of the jurisprudent, Iman Syafi'i (alias Muhammad ibn Idris). (Sujana Arja, *Pongaweru*. Unpub. Manuscript. Slangit, Cirebon, 2005), 2: 8. Most *kotak topeng* today are approximately two to three square feet with a detachable pyramidal top. The box illustrated in Ritter and Hardouin (1872) suggests a much smaller version was preferred by itinerant artists in the nineteenth century.

<sup>975</sup> A reference to the bowing gesture during daily prayers, *shalat*. It is performed with the *dalang* kneeling.

<sup>976</sup> Rogers-Aguiniga, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis, 30-31. For related prayers, see chapter 4, "Engaging the Body and Senses."

<sup>977</sup> It is considered an insult to expose the heel of the foot in Islam.

Many observers view the box as simply a container, but it is also an important part of the gamelan. As mentioned, the instrument *kecrek* is suspended from the box and played by the clown even as the *dalang* prays [fig. 97].<sup>978</sup> Just as Gunung Jati's tomb is open once a month on *Jum'at Kliwon* so, too, is the *kotak* periodically opened so that the masks may be ritually fed and allowed to "breathe." The *kotak*, then, is a kind of tomb, whose dark, interior space contains spirit matter.

The contents of the *kotak* have been increasingly plundered in recent years in response to the burgeoning international market in tribal art.<sup>979</sup> Pillaged masks come under two categories: those stolen for the sole purpose of selling to the highest bidder – usually in the international market,<sup>980</sup> and those stolen by local thieves, whose aim is self-protection by proximity to the mask's perceived power. Unfortunately, most thieves are not schooled in how to appease their spoils. Legend has it that this is what happened to the person who stole one of Sawitri's *pusaka* masks. The thief walked right past Sawitri's door and snatched her Klana Bandopati mask from her *kotak*. But a few weeks later the mask was returned to the chest under mysterious circumstances. Sawitri reasoned it was returned because Klana's spirit was so angry and his howling so

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<sup>978</sup> During *wayang kulit* performances, the *kecrek* is suspended from the *dalang*'s puppet box. The *dalang*, whose hands are occupied with the puppets, plays the *kecrek* with his foot. Michael Richard Wright, *The Music Culture of Cirebon*. PhD diss., (University of California, Los Angeles, 1978), 31.

<sup>979</sup> Prices of African and Native American art have skyrocketed in recent years, pushing many mid-range buyers out of the market, and leading to the discovery of new markets that include Micronesian, Javanese, Balinese and New Guinea masks.

<sup>980</sup> They are often sold to collectors and dealers in Jakarta and Bandung, who are middlemen in overseas sales. I saw many superb, old Cirebon masks at a gallery in Singapore in 2004. Prices ranged from USD \$ 6000 – 12000. The going rate for *pusaka* masks sold to Indonesian collectors was Rupiah 5,000,000 (approximately \$ 550 in 2006). This is a significant amount by any standard in a country where, according to U.S. Department of State statistics, the estimated per capita income in 2007 was USD \$ 3573. Incomes are considerably lower among peasant *dalang*. The sellers understand that these masks will wind up in foreign markets and that represents the first go-round in a series of negotiations. *Dalang* families understandably mark them up far beyond their local monetary value.



constant, that he terrified the bandit and everyone in his orbit. And so, one night, as quietly as Klana Bandopati was snatched, he found his way home. Klana Bandopati is once again well fed and the proper prayers bestowed upon him. Not one discontented peep has been heard from Klana Bandopati since. He is brought out to breathe every *Jum'at Kliwon*. Even so, the high demand for old masks has prompted similar events throughout the region, making *dalang* wary about storing their *pusaka* masks in the *kotak*.<sup>981</sup>

Today, many *dalang* store their masks in old, worn suitcases, as was the fate of Sawitri's masks [see Fig. 67, chapter 6]. Replacing a durable, wood structure with one constructed from vinyl may seem sacrilege, however, it is perhaps closer to serving its original function than we know because the masks have been returned to a plain, unadorned container that is "on the go."<sup>982</sup>

Sawitri's story, which has been widely circulated in subsequent years, confirms the importance placed on the *kotak* as both a site of contemplation and restoration. These two forces, in which the dead reside in the present, are so tightly interwoven as to carry equal weight to *dalang*. Rendra contends that *topeng* only existed in the present tense for Sawitri and Dewi. He demonstrates his point with the example of Indonesia's national

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<sup>981</sup> The *Kliwon* ritual is well known by *tasawuf* practitioners in Cirebon. This is when the inner tomb of Cirebon's founder, Sunan Gunung Jati is opened. Much like the masks, it is not open for public consumption but to strike a proper cosmological balance. Similar to the ritual meals associated with *ngunjung* performances, on *Jum'at Kliwon* the chest is opened, incense burned, prayers cited, and the spirits' favorite foods offered<sup>981</sup> in a ritual called *diukup* in order to sate the *nenek moyang*. Similar ritual preparations occur for the more potent spirit masks among the Igbo of West Africa prior to performing them. Cole and Aniakor (1984: 114) describe masks as living in shrines and being awakened through sacrificial feeding before being seen in public.

<sup>982</sup> Very old *kotak* were not painted as they are today. They were quite plain and, with the exception of modest carving, void of ornamentation. When *rombongan* (informal troupes) became formalized as *sanggar* after 1965, the once-plain wood box and detachable lid received a facelift. Most of them are painted now, with the *sanggar's* name and locale painted on the side of the box.

language, which has no past or future tense. Like the Indonesian language, Rendra argues, the Indonesian people see no past nor future; they only exist in the present moment: “Dewi and Sawitri believed Panji literally came from the *kotak*. I had to tell them Panji is from East Java.”<sup>983</sup>

#### **THE *TOPENG* HEADDRESS: *SOBRAH***<sup>984</sup>

No one object in the *topeng* cosmology is static: each depends on the other ones in its orbit. The *sobrah*'s esteemed placement on top of the *kotak topeng* prior to the performance supports this. And yet, very little is known about the headdress. *Dalang topeng* of past generations referred to the *sobrah* as “the center” or “home.” This was particularly true of Panji's headdress,<sup>985</sup> commonly known as the *tekes*, *tekes Panji*, or *sobrah Panji*.<sup>986</sup> Though less common today, this special place for the *sobrah* was next to the *kris* atop the *kotak*. There, both objects were purified with incense prior to being danced. Panji, minus the *kotak* and *kris*, is simply not Panji.

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<sup>983</sup> W S Rendra, pers. comm., 8 July 2006.

The *kotak*'s significance is, of course, potently realized with Panji – the namesake of the Panji tales and the first dance in the cycle, *Tari Topeng Panji*. Panji must always be performed first during *hajat*, and only once.

<sup>984</sup> The *sobrah* is also known as ‘*gambuh*.’ In most regions it is worn in all of the dances, but in Majalengka, Indramayu, and Losari, Cirebon, a piece of cloth is wrapped around the head for Rummyang and the prime minister character, Tumenggung.

<sup>985</sup> Today, most *dalang topeng* use the same *sobrah* for all of the characters.

<sup>986</sup> The term *tekes* is still used in Central Java to describe the headdress worn in the mask *wayang wong* form, *topeng Gedhog* about the Panji tales. Converseley, it is not employed by Soedarsono in describing similar *wayang wong* headdresses worn at the Yogyakarta court. Soedarsono; *Wayang Wong: The State Ritual Dance Drama in the Court of Yogyakarta*, (Yogyakarta: Gadjadara University Press, 1984), 211-12 + plates 97-99; M. B. Pono Wiguno. *Babon Topeng Gedhog: Cariyos Panji*. Unpub. Manuscript. n.d. (c.1990s).



Fig. 98. *Teges Panji*. The special peaked top was reserved for Panji. Drawing by Kandeg Patmadjwinata from one of his unpublished notebooks, *Topeng Cirebon*, c. 1992.

Hamid Algar argues that the turban reached “its apogee of richness, variegation, and size in the Ottoman and Safavid empires.” Although the turban is of pre-Islamic

origin, within the context of Islam it first distinguished “Arab from non-Arab and then the Muslim from the non-Muslim.” Each class of Ottoman court official had a distinctive turban style whose shape was carved on the top section of the tombstone, attesting to the deceased’s prominence, particularly prominent *shaykh*, *mufti*,<sup>987</sup> or the deceased’s Sufi order.<sup>988</sup> We need look no further than a frequently quoted *hadit* in which the Prophet designated this head covering as “the crown of the Arabs.”<sup>989</sup> Islamic and Hindu iconography blend into something distinctly Javanese in some Cirebon double-headed tombstones – particularly those of the twentieth century. Turbans are carved into the top portions of some of these double-headed stones, in much the same way that the *kala* face determines the forward / backward axis of some old shrines and *sobrah*.



Fig. 99. Detail of the top portion of a double-headed tombstone, signifying a prominent person at the Gunung Jati complex. See also Fig. 100 (below).

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<sup>987</sup> An Islamic scholar who specializes in jurisprudence (*fiqh* and *shari'a*)

<sup>988</sup> For example, the towering, conical head covering worn by the Mevlevi order associated with the “whirling dervishes” is often etched on their tombstones. Hamid Algar, pers. comm., 24 September 2008; Hamid Algar, “Amāma” *Encyclopedia Iranica* 1:9, Ehsan Yar-Shater, ed., Winona Lake, Indiana, (1982), 919-20.

<sup>989</sup> The Prophet reportedly described the turban as comprising “the boundary between faith and infidelity.” *Ibid*, 919.



Fig. 100. The double-headed tombstone is visible behind two *juru kunci* (“key keepers”). The prominence of the deceased is marked by the elevated four-tier platform and location of the grave. May 2005.

As noted, *dalang topeng* have not historically been Islamic scholars nor have they self-identified with particular Sufi orders. However, this double icon goes far in explaining the double *kala* face on the crowns of some *sobrah* and the double inner eye. The *sobrah*’s esteemed position on top of the *kotak topeng* is indubitable.



Fig. 101. Carpan's *sobrah* rests on top of the *kotak*. Lelea, Indramayu 3 April 2006.

The etymology of the term '*tekes*,' the headdress worn in the various Panji tales, is frequently taken to be Javanese. Its meaning is two-fold, designating both the object and the character Panji in Old Javanese literature. Two early texts in which *tekes* are mentioned are the fourteenth century Old Javanese Hindu-Buddhist text, *Nāgarakrtāgama*, and the fifteenth century *Pararaton*.<sup>990</sup> Both are of pre-Islamic origin; however, the presence of Muslim traders and merchants on the island has been noted, resulting in a possible link between the term *tekes* and Java's then-fledgling religion, Islam.<sup>991</sup>

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<sup>990</sup> Th. Pigeaud, *Javaanse Volksvertoningen: Bijdrage tot de Beschrijving van Land en Volk* (1938), 506; Pigeaud later described the *Pararaton* (the Book of Kings), in which an historical account of the Singasari-Majapahit dynasty as a prototype of the *Babad* of the Islamic period of Java's cultural history is suggested. See Theodore G. Th. Pigeaud, *Literature of Java. Catalogue Raisonné of Javanese Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Leiden and Other Public Collections in the Netherlands. I: Synopsis of Javanese Literature 900-1900 A. D.* (The Hague: Martinus Nyhoff, 1967), 121.

<sup>991</sup> '*Tekes*' does not appear in *Loan-words in Indonesian and Malay*, It is cited in Robson & Wibisono *Javanese-English Dictionary* as a "wig made from palm fibres, worn in a certain dance." Russell Jones, ed. *Loan-words in Indonesian and Malay*. Compiled by the Indonesian Etymological Project, (Leiden:

The etymology of the Turkish term *tekke* is instructive. *Tekke* designates an intimate place of respite and learning for Sufi *shaykhs* and their disciples, similar to the *rumah suluk*.<sup>992</sup> While the Turkish term is not widely known by *dalang*, it is possible that *tekke* was Javanized.<sup>993</sup>

The Turkish connection to the Archipelago was limited to naval expeditions during the Ottoman Empire; nonetheless, their term “*tekke*” to designate Sufi retreats, combined with Ottoman tombstones that integrate Sufi order iconography, suggest a more synthetic relationship between Turkish and Javanese Sufism than previously considered. It is also possible that the term was absorbed by Javanese pilgrims during the hajj. The latter interpretation is unlikely since the majority of *dalang topeng* were too poor to travel. On the other hand, many wealthy patrons of *topeng* presumably performed the hajj. It is plausible, then, that the terms entered the *topeng* canon through the discourse of patronage.

### ***Sobrah Power***

The headdress has long been viewed as critical to the smooth functioning of the performance. The object itself is nonetheless anathema to many orthodox Muslims

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KITLV, 2007); Stuart Robson and Singgih Wibisono. *Javanese English Dictionary*, (Hong Kong: Periplus, 2002), 731.

Pigeaud suggested that the terms *sori* and *tekes* signify masked dramas of the *raket* and *wayang wong* genres, whose storylines cluster around the gendered Panji tales, with *sori* designating the male, and *tekes*, the female roles. His translation has been disputed in recent years. Th. Pigeaud, *Java in the Fourteenth Century: A Study in Cultural History*. 5v. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960-1963, 14, 107-109.

<sup>992</sup> Literally, a house of retreat. The Arabic and Persian terms for *tekke* are *zawiya* and *khanqaah*, respectively. Interestingly, the term *suluk* has a very different meaning in Javanese mystical discourse where it refers to a polemical exchange between a shaykh and his student.

<sup>993</sup> Many Arabic words have been Javanized. For example, the Arabic term, *suluk* means “wayfaring” in Arabic, whereas in Indonesian it describes Islamic mystical chants.

because it is constructed from human hair, even though there are other examples of Muslim headcoverings that utilize animals, including the fur brimless hat, *kalpak*.<sup>994</sup>

Dasih described human hair and the *picisan* (third eye)<sup>995</sup> that are attached to the *sobrah* as indicating the simultaneity of Islam's horizontal and vertical relationship to God. *Dalang* refer to the *picisan* simply as “*topeng*” (*ketop-ketop-gepeng*). In addition to human hair, contemporary *sobrah* are constructed from buffalo hide, bamboo or rattan, and beads and cotton balls that dangle from each ear are named *sumping* or *rawis*. These are the general materials, however, they vary from region to region, and even from village to village. The general structure of the headpiece has two parts. The bottom section is cupped and fits directly on top of the head. Some *sobrah* incorporate a string in the lower rear that allows for a closer fit to the head since heads vary, and one *sobrah* may be shared by many people. The top portion of the headdress is in the shape of a semi-circle and flat. The frame is constructed from bamboo or rattan strips molded in criss-cross fashion. Human hair is woven into the lower frame, providing a matted, flat finish. The top portion varies depending on the region. Hazeau (1893, 1897) described four different types of *sobrah* employed in *topeng*. One had a pointed top with straight hair brushed in an upward sweep, called *pisang sipisir* (“banana” style). It has a taller lift than the majority of *sobrah*. According to Hazeu, this style was used for the mask

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<sup>994</sup> The *kalpak*, *fez*, and turban were banished following the first World War in Turkey and Iran, by the founder and first President of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who proclaimed the Hat Law of 1925. See. Hamid Algar, “‘Amāma” (1982), 920.

The *kalpak* worn today in Central Asia are usually constructed from wool or felt. In Iran, they are made from felt or sheepskin. *Kalpak* made of sheepskin are still worn in Northeastern Iran and are not considered problematic. The issue taken with the *sobrah* may be connected to the uncleanness of human hair.

<sup>995</sup> Other terms for the third eye are *baduk* (Cirebon Javanese), *topeng*, and *tarang* (Sundanese). Rasinah and Sujana Arja referred to it as *jambut* and *ketop-ketop gepeng* (which means ‘*topeng*’ prior to donning the mask), respectively.



characters Pamindo (Samba) and Rumyang. As mentioned, the *sobrah* associated with Panji, the *tekes*, has a graduated, pointed top accentuating the vertical axis. The rounded flat top and woven hair version of the *sobrah*, called *jeruk papisi* (“orange”) was reserved for Tumenggung, or Patih;<sup>996</sup> and the *merang sagedeng* style was reserved for Klana.<sup>997</sup> Today, the *jeruk papisi* is the most common *sobrah*. This may be a function of economics since the cost of a single *sobrah* is prohibitive. Most *dalang* can rarely afford to purchase more than one.



Fig. 102. *Pisang sipisir* Slangit-style *sobrah* (lacking the *sumping* / *rawis*). The top section is brushed in an upward sweep. Notice the double *kala* motif. Provenance: Didik Nini Thowok, Yogyakarta; Sujana Arja, Slangit, Cirebon.

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<sup>996</sup> Hazeu also mentions the cloth headpiece, *cito malik*, representing a bird and visible in the rear, also employed for this character.

<sup>997</sup> See also Maman Suryaatmadja, *Topeng Cirebon Dalam Perkembangan Penyebaran Dalam Masyarakat Jawa Barat Khususnya di Daerah Cirebon* (1980), 36-37.

The *siger* (crown) [fig. 102], c.1960s, is embellished with three *kala* faces: two on the front and one on the rear. I posit that they serve a similar function to those hovering over archways at *Dieng Plateau*, *Borobudur*, *Loro Jonggrang* and *candi* throughout Bali, as does the complementary tree of life *wayang* form, the *kayon*. Foley argues that the leather puppet, *kayon* (tree) is the “cosmic whole” with a protective gate at the bottom and with two ogres guarding it. In its totality, Foley sees it as the embodiment of the *topeng* characters in non-human form, with Panji represented by a lotus bud at the puppet’s tip.<sup>998</sup> The symmetry between the *kayon* and cone-shape of the *tekes Panji* establishes a finely nuanced transformation from Hindu-Buddhist to early Javanese Islamic iconography.

The human hair woven into the *sobrah* must be natural, that is, not dyed, which limits the pool of sellers. It also must be long enough to weave into the frame. In a culture where long, black hair is prized, persuading women to part with theirs is costly. In 2006, mask and *sobrah* maker Nawi at *Kraton Kasepuhan* charged approximately two million *rupiah* (approximately USD \$185) for one *sobrah*.<sup>999</sup> However, a village *sobrah* maker in Slangit charges 300,000 *rupiah* in 2009. Both costs are out of reach for most *dalang topeng* today. Cost is one factor. The other issue is that crafting a headdress is labor-intensive. Several specialists are required to craft and blend its different components. It can also take years for a *dalang* to acquire sufficient funds to purchase one, which easily depletes a *dalang*’s savings in the process. In some cases the funds are

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<sup>998</sup> Kathy Foley, "My Bodies: The Performer in West Java," 75-76.

<sup>999</sup> Nawi purchases hair for his *sobrah* from a salon. Nawi, pers. comm., 25 June 2006

but a distant dream, in which case the *dalang* borrows a *sobrah* from a relative as needed.<sup>1000</sup>



Fig. 103. Rasinah proudly poses with her *pusaka sobrah* inherited from her father, Lastra. Although no longer serviceable, it remains a primary source of power. 23 May 2005.



Fig. 104. Tursini models one of the *sobrah* she constructed from wool. Behind her is a portrait of her late mother, Sudji. March 2006.

Depending on whom you ask today, human hair is either integral to *topeng*, or should be abandoned. Many pious Muslims deem it unacceptable. Furthermore, one is

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<sup>1000</sup> The situation is quite different with upper-middle students of *topeng*, for whom the *sobrah* is typically purchased together with their first mask and sometimes their costume.

hard-pressed to find a *dalang* active today who understands its function, making the practice hard to defend. This has resulted in some *dalang* requesting, and *sobrah*-makers crafting, *sobrah* from black wool instead. Nawi argues that while there is a theological conflict regarding the use of human hair in Islam, it was specified by the *wali*, concluding that the wool substitute is not ‘*maram*.’<sup>1001</sup> “It lacks charisma.”<sup>1002</sup> It is noteworthy that the root of “Sufi” is ‘*suf*’ in Arabic, which translates to ‘wool’. For some practitioners, however, the preference of wool over human hair is less inspired by mystical attunement than economics: wool costs a fraction of the price and, from a distance, is indistinguishable to the human eye. Tursini is one of the few *dalang* who fashions wool *sobrah*, which she sells to neighborhood *topeng* students.

### **The *Sobrah*’s *Picisan*, or Inner Eye**

The third eye is widely understood as pan-religious tantrism of the chakra. With the growth of spiritual theism over the centuries, it took on a transcendental quality of inner consciousness contrasted with the physical realm. It thus merges the nexus of enlightenment and the external “material manifestation of the senses, a world-conquering physical strength” corresponding to a higher perceptual plane.<sup>1003</sup>

The Javanese word *mripat* (eye) is derived from *marifat* which, according to the late *dalang wayang* Kalim, means that the *dalang topeng* is one manifestation of God, only made possible by the *picisan*: “The *dalang topeng* is like our God because of the *picis*. The *picis* is called ‘*topeng*’ because it has already entered the heart. One’s

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<sup>1001</sup> Something desired or wanted (Arabic),

<sup>1002</sup> Nawi, pers. comm., 25 June 2006.

<sup>1003</sup> Napier. *Masks, Transformation, and Paradox* 139.

genealogy of knowledge *ilmu*<sup>1004</sup> is more important than ordinary lineage.”<sup>1005</sup> Slangit musician Miska Lukmanul Hakim (age 75) echoes this philosophy: “The *picisan* is the equivalent of the mask before it is worn. During the unmasked part of the dance, the *picis* provides the context for *ilmu*. Once the mask is donned knowledge automatically migrates to the heart. One must be in a constant state of remembrance; one must be attentive to the different paths we may take.”<sup>1006</sup>

This *picisan* is a double-icon that, when worn, rests on the *dalang*'s forehead. The two “eyes” are sewn together at the innermost connection point: the center. The feature's antiquity is unknown, including whether it predates Islam's arrival in Java. However, the Sufi fascination with binaries would make the *picisan* a highly adaptive icon if it predates Islam.<sup>1007</sup> An excellent example of binaries is provided by Ricklefs, in his discussion of Pakubuwana II's *Serat Wulang*: the left eye is synonymous with Javanese literature and the right eye to Arabic literature. The left eye thus provides an interior perspective on the self, and the right eye an external view of the self. “Both were needed for a complete view of reality, just as one must be both Javanese and Muslim to achieve a full identity.”<sup>1008</sup> This fusion still resonates in twentieth century *topeng*.

*Dalang* Sukarta Candra contends that the left eye (*narakah*) symbolizes impoverishment of the soul and the right eye (*sorgah*) connotes the positive path. “We must always

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<sup>1004</sup> *Ilmu* refers to mystical knowledge in this context.

<sup>1005</sup> *Dalang topeng sebagai Tuhan kita karena picis. 'Topeng' namanya 'picis sebab sudah masuk hati. Keturunan ilmu lebih penting dari pada keturunan biasa.* Kalim, pers. comm., 26 June 2006. The association of the *picis* to inner knowledge is widely accepted across regions and styles.

<sup>1006</sup> Miska Lukmanul Hakim, pers. comm., 28 June 2009.

<sup>1007</sup> Some examples of Sufi binaries are: remembering/forgetting, drunkenness/sobriety, horizontal/vertical, vocal/silent, interior/exterior, etc.

<sup>1008</sup> M. C. Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries*, (Norwalk: East Bridge, 2006).

remember the good path. There is only one God. *Topeng* is the state of constant remembrance.<sup>1009</sup>

Another artist described the *picisan* in iconic terms: one eye follows *Tuhan* [Allah] and, the other, his Prophet Muhammad.<sup>1010</sup> Dasih posed a different explanation also corresponding to the *dalang*'s relationship to God: one eye gazes upon God, while the other eye is earthbound.<sup>1011</sup> This points both to the vertical/horizontal axis of Islam and the critical performer/spectator dyad. She used a Sufi term rooted in perception and intuition, '*khafi*,' to describe the *picis*. It is also associated with the color of the *sobrah*'s hair: black. She is the only artist who used the term "*khafi*" with me in relationship to the *picisan*; however, the word also designates one of the sensitive organs, or *chakra* points. The *picisan*, thus, has several interpretations.

Carpan's *sobrah* incorporates found objects with whimsy. Among the objects are plastic flowers, bobby pins, barretts, and cut tinsel. Even his *picisan* is unusual. Traditionally, the double-third eye is constructed from human hair or black cloth and may be embellished with sequins or embroidery. Carpan's *picisan*, however, is comprised of two shiny, bright, 100 *rupiah* coins. One *dalang* quietly criticized his choice. Carpan describes them as "decorative"; I posit the coins are an appropriate interpretation of the *picis*' function as a power source akin to *susuk* or stones.

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<sup>1009</sup> Sukarta Candra, pers. comm., 29 June 2009.

<sup>1010</sup> This suggests the interconnectedness of the *Qur'an* (Allah's words) and the *hadits*.

<sup>1011</sup> Dasih, pers. comm., 3 February 1978.



Fig. 105. Carpan's *picisan*. March 2006.



Fig. 106. Rasinah's *picisan*, 2003 Photo Courtesy of Taman Ismail Marzuki [d'son/PKJ-TIM/Ras 2003].

### The *Sumping/Rawis*

The strands of long beads and cotton balls that dangle from the sides of the *sobrah* are called “*sumping*” or “*rawis*” and fulfill a dramatic and aesthetic purpose today. Only one *dalang* ascribed spiritual significance to it. She says that throwing the *sumping* is a rejection of negative energy. The way it is thrown also tells us something about the character being performed. During the unmasked portion of the dance, how the *sumping* is released portends which mask will be donned. The flirtatious Samba, for instance, throws the *sumping* with caprice, as in fig. 107 below.



Fig. 107. *Tari Topeng Samba*. Mask dancer throws the left *sumping* (mid-air) with her right hand. *Buyut Sanggalamsi*, November 2005.

The *sumping* may alternately be thrown in an assertive, upward fashion to express the inherent power of the greedy king, Klana, being portrayed below.





Fig. 108. *Tari Topeng Klana*. Wangi thrusts the wrist upward to accentuate the characters' internal force. *Buyut Sanggalamsi*, November 2005.

Dasih stressed that the beads on the *sumping* are de facto *tasbih*.<sup>1012</sup> Today, the number of beads varies greatly, but she recalled a time when the number of beads on the *sumping* totaled ninety-nine – one for each of the Divine names. Even Kandeg, who was both a *topeng* scholar and theologian, did not draw all ninety-nine beads in his illustrations of the *sobrah/sumping*. Cotton balls may be a modern innovation since glass or metal beads were sometimes used in the past, similar to the one *sobrah* in the collection of the *Museum Nasional Indonesia*. A Chinese influence is possible, for interlocking strands of cotton balls and beads dangle from some Chinese shaman's ears

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<sup>1012</sup> The Muslim rosary of ninety-nine (or sometimes thirty-three, counted thrice). Each bead represents one of Allah's ninety-nine names, and was used by Dasih during silent *dzikir*.

and are also found in the itinerant Sichuan mask form, *po lien* (a/k/a *bian lian*), which were both known in Cirebon. Since throwing the *sumping* is an important movement, the bead/cotton combination is more conducive to throwing, both in terms of safety<sup>1013</sup> and achieving the desired aesthetic. *Sumping* constructed from glass beads likely served a decorative end, while the cotton and bead *sumping* was a meaningful innovation allowing for greater improvisation and freedom expanding the movement lexicon.

### COMING HOME

Finally, this chapter examines the important role of *tarekat* networks at the end of the *dalang*'s life. These networks share several important features, including bringing an emotional and spiritual dimension to religious devotion and contributing to intimacy and social life. How these networks functioned on the ground is crystallized in the *topeng* community of Ciliwung, Palimanan. As previously mentioned, Sudji had one son and one daughter, Tursini.<sup>1014</sup> Her daughter eventually married a man from Banten and settled there for many years. During her time in Banten she had an epiphany: her calling was not to be a *dalang*, but a *penolong* (literally, a helper), a bather of the dead.<sup>1015</sup> Tursini studied with a network of *penolong* led by a *kyai*<sup>1016</sup> in Banten. The *penolong*'s duties include attending to the ill, dying, and those recently departed. Her work is so fully and completely integrated into daily life as to be indistinguishable from her other duties. She still teaches *topeng* to her grandchildren and neighborhood children and, as described earlier, makes *sobrah* for them.

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<sup>1013</sup> The *sumping* sometimes breaks during performance, sending the beads and cotton balls flying.

<sup>1014</sup> Sudji's son was not a *dalang topeng*. He died in 2003.

<sup>1015</sup> This is an Islamic tradition. The Arabic term, *ghassāl* ("corpse washer"), is unknown to most rural *penolong*.

<sup>1016</sup> *Kyai* is the title for Muslim scholars who often lead *pesantren* in Java.



Fig. 109. Tursini (right) cares for her ailing aunt Dasih, shortly before Dasih's death in 1985. Photo courtesy of Enoch Atmadibrata.

Tursini is “on call” twenty-four hours a day. There is no prescribed fee though, if able, the grieving family makes a donation. The profession is considered of low status; however, the Prophet Muhammad considered it meritorious work. Interestingly, it is one of the few positions in Indonesia free of government interference. The *penolong* is chiefly responsible for performing those duties stipulated within the Islamic tradition. In addition to bathing the body of the newly deceased, she removes *susuk* from the dead if still in place at the time of death. She is as likely to be asked to cleanse the body of strangers (many of whom die in motorcycle accidents on the main road near her home) as a neighbor or family member. In all cases, emotional detachment and respect for the dead and grieving are stipulated by her trade. Tursini, who bathed her mother, Sudji

upon her death in 1982 after a long illness said she shed not a single tear while doing so.<sup>1017</sup> And while her relationship with her aunt Dasih was often contentious, her ailing aunt was invited to spend her final year at Tursini's home.<sup>1018</sup> When Dasih passed away on 23 December 1985,<sup>1019</sup> Tursini prepared her body for burial with the same calm respect she provided her own mother three years earlier.

I first visited Dasih's grave in Palimanan with Enoch Atmadibrata on New Years Eve, 2003. Within seconds of our arrival, a dozen neighborhood children had gathered and were clearing Dasih's tombstone of weeds and other signs of neglect. Enoch sat down and, facing Dasih's grave, prayed. There we were, Dasih's two heirs performing *ziarah*. After praying, Enoch opened a bottle of water and bathed Dasih's gravestone (*batu nisan*) with utmost care. He reserved a small amount of water, which I was instructed to pour into the small hole carved into the center of the gravestone. Blessing and nourishing the stone appears to be related to a *batu tapal*, or boundary stones, found in other lustrating rituals in Palembang, Sumatra and the Buddhist *sima* of Thailand. Boundary stones were once geo-political demarcations of power centers.<sup>1020</sup> The gravestone, like the *buyut* or a museum, relates to the boundary stones, each one vibrating to its own power center that bridges the living with the dead. The practice of

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<sup>1017</sup> Sudji died from bone tuberculosis, an all too common disease in Palimanan famous for its ubiquitous limestone factories and, in more recent years, two highly toxic European and Indonesian government-owned cement factories.

<sup>1018</sup> Enoch Atmadibrata had been caring for Dasih in Bandung at the time.

<sup>1019</sup> Like her sister, Dasih also died from tuberculosis.

<sup>1020</sup> I am grateful to Leslie Woodhouse for pointing out the *sima* and Palembang boundary stones as lustrating markers. In the case of the *sima* boundary stone, a monk or shaman (or a former monk now working as a shaman) pours water over the stone, which is then captured in a cup as it passes through a trough carved in the bottom of the stone. Once it transits through the trough it is blessed and the newly magic water is given to the subject to drink.

lustrating gravestones was likely readily adopted by local Muslims for its symmetry with lustrating the body prior to *shalat*.

The next year (2004) I made the same pilgrimage to the Palimanan *buyut* with Didik Nini Thowok who, as previously mentioned, had studied *topeng* with Sudji in the late 1970s. We dropped in unannounced at Tursini's home on our way to the *buyut*. Tursini was ecstatic to see Didik after many years. As is the custom, we invited Tursini and her daughter, Erli, to join us. The women freshened up, put on their *jilbab*, and we all hopped in Didik's rented SUV and headed down the road. Tursini stretched her legs all the way out in the luxurious back seat and mused, "Last night I dreamt I rode in a pedicab. ... today I'm riding in a car!" [*Tadi malam ada mimpi naik becak...hari ini saya naik mobil!*]. We first stopped at Sudji's grave, where Didik, who is Christian, led us in a *kejawen*<sup>1021</sup> ritual. Didik explained it as a prayer to God for the souls of our teachers, Sudji and Dasih, in which we ask God to forgive any sins committed during our gurus' lives [*mengampuni dosa dosa semasa mereka masih hidup*]." Each of us burned incense which, according to Didik, was for concentration purposes and to symbolize that the smoke produced by it will rise to heaven. It is thus a conduit between the living and the mysterious, invisible world beyond our reach (*alam gaib*). Didik described it as our "vertical connection to God, or with our ancestors buried in the *buyut*."<sup>1022</sup> This beautifully illustrates how Islam was absorbed into the spiritual practices of one Javanese Christian with a deep connection to the arts. After this, we

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<sup>1021</sup> An indigenous mystical Javanese tradition.

<sup>1022</sup> Didik Nini Thowok, pers. comm., 16 September 2008.

placed flower petals over and around the graves and sang *tembang*.<sup>1023</sup> We then poured water over the tombstone and prayed in silence.<sup>1024</sup> Didik describes the water's meaning as nourishing, or bringing life, to the ancestral site (*air kehidupan*). We next visited the sisters' father Wentar's grave, where the ritual was repeated. Finally, we visited Dasih's grave in the next village (*buyut Kempek*), where the same ritual was followed. When we finished praying, I told the others I was not ready to leave. Tursini, who I had just met for the first time, nestled close to me, and wrapped her arm around my waist. We looked at Dasih's tombstone and wept. Tursini had not visited her aunt's grave in a very long time, if ever. Tursini obviously had unresolved, conflicted feelings toward her aunt but, in that moment, love reigned supreme.

It turns out that the neighborhood children who dispersed after cleaning the grave area did not leave, but observed us praying from a distance. Once we concluded our prayers the children returned en masse, their hands outstretched, for donations. This is the true meaning of *sawer*: placing coins directly into the hands of those who perform an important service, in this case, preparing the sacred space for prayer.

## **REFLECTION**

The mosque and grave concretize an important binary in Cirebonese mysticism and for *dalang topeng* who trace their genealogy to the ancestral shrine and, while on earth, to the infirm and grieving. Navigating between these two worlds is an exercise in mobility and stasis. Two of *topeng*'s auxiliary objects concretize this passage in their function as portable altars: the *topeng* chest and the *sobrah*. While their meaning is lost

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<sup>1023</sup> A form of Islamic sung verse, *shalawatan*.

<sup>1024</sup> The ritual ceremony incorporating flowers and water at the graveside is called *nyekar*.

to many artists and observers, embedded in these objects is the essence of metamorphosis. Death of the body should not be viewed as morbid in this context, for what it leaves behind is an animation of spirit. In the final chapter, our attention is turned to how the mask is reconciled in contemporary local Islamic discourse.

## CHAPTER 8: TOPENG COMES TO THE PESANTREN:

### A CASE STUDY OF PONDOK PESANTREN DARUL MUSYAWIRIN

#### AND PESANTREN MA'HAD AL-ZAYTUN<sup>1025</sup>

The purposeful, albeit desultory, role Islam has played in Indonesia's democratization process is explicated by Robert Hefner in *Civil Islam*:

[T]here is no one-size-fits-all democracy but a variety of forms linked by family resemblances. Democracy's values of freedom, equality, and tolerance-in-pluralism do not come with unbending instructions for all places and times.... as societies change, people perceive old arrangements in a new light and shift the balance among democracy's values accordingly.<sup>1026</sup>

Similarly, variety and flexibility are hallmarks of performance culture among Muslims in the region, which results from a parallel historical process and is fully realized in Java's rich Islamic boarding school, or *pesantren* tradition.

The interpretation of basic religious texts was once the province of *ulama*, the local religious leaders. The *shaykh* served a similar role with his *murid* in *tasawuf* traditions. In both cases, the transference of knowledge was dependent upon an intimate, and in the case of the latter, sometimes messy, emotional affair. As knowledge becomes more systematized, the project of interpretation and its transference in the public domain takes on a more detached correspondence. This is true even in some small, ultra-reformed *pesantren* whose clientele seek a less intense *pesantren* experience. I contend that intimacy is nonetheless more vibrant and more intact in the smaller *pesantren* I

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<sup>1025</sup> Alternate spelling: *Al-Zaitun*.

<sup>1026</sup> Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and democratization in Indonesia*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 216.



visited.<sup>1027</sup> Robert Hefner has argued that the shift from *musafir* (wandering scholars) to the massification of corporate knowledge through grant-bearing institutions resulted in a change in attitude about the meaning and the economy of knowledge. This, in turn, informs a new objectivity among liberals and conservatives alike.<sup>1028</sup> The new arbiters of religion work in complex ways, both locally and transnationally. This chapter seeks to understand both spheres, through the lens of music and *topeng* at two Cirebon region *pesantren*: one local, the other transnational.

The two *pesantren* under discussion were chosen for their different views of performance generally, and *topeng* specifically. But they were also selected because their leaders are thoughtfully engaged in the topic.<sup>1029</sup> Their philosophies reach beyond intellectual pursuits; they are enacted on the ground. These ideological differences have played a significant role in shaping what it means to be Muslim in West Java today. *Topeng*, as both a genre and a performing object, provides an important lens in this context. At the first *pesantren* under discussion, *Pondok Pesantren Darul Musyawirin*, the dominant performance modality weaves music into its meditative practice. The performing arts, though stripped of their spiritual or religious tenor, are more actively pursued at the second *pesantren*, *Pesantren Ma'had Al-Zaytun*, where they are celebrated as secular forms. The acceptability of music and dance has been hotly

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<sup>1027</sup> For an analysis of the role of the *kyai* in Java, see Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition. The Role of the Kyai in the Maintenance of Traditional Islam in Java*, (Tempe: Program for Southeast Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 1999).

<sup>1028</sup> Robert Hefner, lecture. "Schooling Islam: *Madrasas* and the Remaking of Muslim Modernity." Stanford University, 30 April 2008.

<sup>1029</sup> I visited several other *pesantren* during my fieldwork. I believe *Kyai* Abdul Razak has his finger on the pulse of the contemporary discourse. However, this must be taken with the caveat that it is only one person's point of view. Al-Zaytun falls within a 'reformed' tradition, but the history, personalities, and sheer scale of this *pesantren* are so unique that it is not possible to compare it to the paradigm of other 'reformist' schools.

debated by Muslims for centuries. The core debate revolves around its temporality. Living arts, by definition, are ephemeral. They occur in real time. It is part of a larger debate about “intention” that has long percolated between proponents of the silent versus the vocal *dzikir*, discussed at length in Chapter 4 of this work.

As should now be evident, many Cirebon region art traditions are infused with *tarekat* elements. Only *dalang topeng* and *wayang*, however, trace their genealogy to the *walisanga*.<sup>1030</sup> As we also know, many Muslims believe that reproducing a living creature is not a human endeavor, but a Divine one. Life is only possible when the organs are synchronized through breath. It is God’s will. Breath signifies life; and the one who breathes life into another is Allah. Thus, if the mask is a piece of lifeless matter frozen in its expression, but if biting into a piece of leather with steady breath can bring the mask to life, where do masks fit on this spectrum? I posed this question to the leaders and students of the two *pesantren*. Their answers are as richly varied as their spiritual communities. I will first provide brief descriptions of the two *pesantren* followed by a closer examination of their philosophies about dance and music.

The first *pesantren* under discussion, *Pondok Pesantren Darul Musyawirin* (hereafter, *Darul Musyawirin*) is modest in every way: its size, its living conditions, and its philosophy. The *pesantren* was founded in the 1960s by *Kyai* Martin Ali. It is located in the Cirebon district’s Weru village (sub-district Plered). Weru is a bustling neighborhood situated near the main thoroughfare that connects Cirebon with Sumedang and Bandung. It is the direct neighbor of Cirebon’s important batik village, Trusmi,

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<sup>1030</sup> As discussed elsewhere in this study, anyone may study and perform mask dance, but only those whose genealogy is traced to the *wali* earn the title “*dalang topeng*.” Mask dancers without this lineage are called “*penari topeng*” or “masked dancers.”

approximately six kilometers east of the city of Cirebon. The *pesantren* is neatly tucked away from street traffic, requiring one's full attention to find it. Shaykh Martin's grandson, *Kyai Haji Abdul Razak*, now thirty-years-old, inherited the school upon his father's death in the 1990s. *Kyai Abdul* is a contemplative man, whose candor and curiosity about alternate views of Islam was unexpected. He describes his grandfather and father's approach to *pesantren* education as "classical, but with a modern perspective." *Kyai Abdul* has continued this tradition, though his philosophy leans closer to the "traditionalist" stream in accordance with the non-political *Salaf* model.<sup>1031</sup> In the realm of the arts, musical expression at his *pesantren* is limited to percussive instruments and sung text traceable to the Prophet Muhammad or the *Quran*, called *shalawat*. Dance is prohibited.<sup>1032</sup> Herein is one of the central debates between the *salaf* and reformist (*talaf*) schools: the acceptance or denial of ritual and secular expressions of music and dance.

*Darul Musyawirin's* bustling surroundings stand in sharp contrast to the second *pesantren* under discussion in this chapter: the geographically-isolated *Pesantren*

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<sup>1031</sup> *Salaf* should not be confused with the Saudi-inflected movement, *Salafiyya*, which approximately translates as "in the manner of our predecessors." Although named after the same predecessors, *al-salaf al-salih*, a sharp division exists in their views. By "traditional Islam" I defer to Dhofier's definition: "Islam that is still strongly bound up with established Islamic ideas created by scholars, jurists, doctors, and Sufis during the early centuries of Islamic theological and legal development, sectarian conflicts, and the rise of Sufi movements and brotherhoods in the thirteenth century." Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition*, xix.

<sup>1032</sup> Dance is an ambiguous term in Islamic mysticism. Although it broadly means body movement, it is distinguished from the rhythmic body movement that sometimes accompany *Quranic* recitation and the Divine name during *dzikir*.

*Ma'had Al-Zaytun's* (hereafter, *Al-Zaytun*), located in the Mekarjaya village, sub-district Hargeulis<sup>1033</sup> in Indramayu.

*Al-Zaytun's* has no immediate neighbors, only vast stretches of land and the workers who toil it. The twelve-year-old boarding school is situated in a burgeoning metropolis; it is both the largest and the wealthiest *pesantren* in Indonesia.<sup>1034</sup> The leader of the unflinchingly modern *Al-Zaytun* is AS (Abdussalam) Panji Gumilang (alias Abu Toto), age 63. Shaykh Panji received his education from the respected modern *Pesantren Gontor*, in Ponorogo, East Java, before attending the State University of Islam (IAIN) in Cuputat (Jakarta).<sup>1035</sup> *Al-Zaytun's* philosophy about performing arts is far removed from that of *Darul Musyawirin*. Music and dance flourish at *Al-Zaytun*. While Javanese arts dominate their art curriculum, secular forms resonant with their international population are also included. One example is “break dancing,” which is performed by the West African students.<sup>1036</sup> *Al-Zaytun* added Slangit-style *topeng*

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<sup>1033</sup> Hargeulis, Indramayu, was isolated by PKI Chairman D. N Aidit as a region to conduct research on the state of West Java's peasantry.

<sup>1034</sup> There are over 14,000 independently-operated *pesantren* in Indonesia. According to the Department of Religious Affairs (Jakarta) in 1985 there were a minimum of 274 known *pesantren* in the Cirebon region (7 in the city of Cirebon; 91 in the regency of Cirebon; 39 in Indramayu, 65 in Majalengka; and 72 in Kuningan). Current statistics are unavailable; however, in 1992 the number of *pesantren* in the regency of Cirebon alone had increased by nearly 40% to 133 schools. Cited in A. G. Muhaimin, *The Islamic Traditions of Cirebon: Ibadat and Adat Among Javanese Muslims*, (Jakarta: Centre for Research and Development of Socio-Religious Affairs Office of Religious Research, Development, 2004), 20.

<sup>1035</sup> IAIN is now run by Azumardi Azra.

<sup>1036</sup> It is interesting that it is called “break dance” at *al-Zaytun* and presumably in West Africa since West African students introduced it to the *pesantren*. Break dancing as an American art form; however, all movement genealogies are complex. Barbara Browning has noted the symmetry with break dancing and the Brazilian marital art form, capoeira, which incorporates acrobatics, kicks, and Kongo dance movements. Barbara Browning, pers. comm., 17 August 2008. For more on capoeira, see Barbara Browning, *Samba: Resistance in Motion*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 86-126. Others have pointed to capoeira's symmetry with the martial art forms of the Hausa of Nigeria (West Africa).

*Cirebon* to its art curriculum in 2005. To the best of my knowledge, it is the only *pesantren* where fashioning masks and performing them is allowed.

### **PONDOK PESANTREN DARUL MUSYAWIRIN**

I first met *Darul Musyawirin*'s leader, *Kyai Abdul Razak* in 2005 during one of many visits to *Astana Gunung Jati*. He was then twenty-seven years old. I was wearing a head covering, or *jilbab*, at the time, as this is a revered space for Muslims and it was Friday prayers, *shalat Ju'mat*. *Kyai Abdul* assumed I was Muslim, albeit from a distant shore. We struck up a conversation. I was fascinated to learn about his *pesantren*. I hoped to strike a balance between *Al-Zaytun*'s "city unto itself" philosophy and the intimacy of a homespun *pesantren*. I asked *Kyai Abdul* if I could visit his school. He seemed pleased to accommodate me. That is, until he asked where I was from. "*Amerika Serikat*," I responded. He was nonplussed. Just as quickly as our plans were made, they began to unravel.<sup>1037</sup> The next day he called, flustered, wanting to know why I was interested in visiting his school. He was skeptical about any link between *topeng* and his *pesantren*. Two conversations later, the waters calmed.

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<sup>1037</sup> I learned later that those *pesantren* who welcomed non-Muslim foreigners were scrutinized.



Fig. 110. *Pondok Pesantren Darul Musyawirin*. *Santriwan* and *Santriwati* help with the housework in the kitchen courtyard.

*Darul Musyawirin*'s funding is chiefly derived from tuition fees,<sup>1038</sup> which cover board, food, and education. Like the majority of *pesantren*, it is dependent upon private donations.<sup>1039</sup> In 2006, twenty-seven *santri*<sup>1040</sup> were enrolled at *Darul Musyawirin*. The *santri* had lived there between one and four years. It was among the most financially impoverished *pesantren* I visited during the course of my fieldwork. Unlike *Pesantren*

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<sup>1038</sup> 130,000 *rupiah* per student/per month. In 2006, this was roughly the equivalent of US \$15.00 per month.

<sup>1039</sup> The source of private donations to Indonesian *pesantren* is of great international intrigue. Jane Perlez's oft-quoted 2003 *New York Times* article, "Saudis Quietly Promote Strict Islam" contends that Saudis fund many Javanese *pesantren* as terrorist training grounds, although there was scant evidence of this on the ground at the time of her writing. In June and July 2009, I noted a strong Saudi presence in Cirebon, including billboards advertising cheap phone rates between Saudi Arabia and Indonesia. It is noteworthy, however, that many poor Indonesians wind up as maids and chauffeurs in Saudi Arabia as well, so the link is complex. *The New York Times*. "Saudis Quietly Promote Strict Islam" by Jane Perlez. 5 July 2003.

<sup>1040</sup> *Santri*, in the context of Java's 'traditional' *pesantren*, comprise Muslim students in Java who mainly adhere to the traditional Sunni tenets of Islam. This is further delineated by the terms *santriwan-santriwati* to distinguish between male and female students. For a detailed analysis of *santri* and *abangan*, see Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

*Al-Zaytun*, whose students, or *siswa-siswi*,<sup>1041</sup> must take both their religious and formal education at the *pesantren*, the *santri* at *Darul Musyawirin*'s are free to choose where they study and live. Neighborhood students who live with their families are referred to as *santri kalong*. Those residing on the *pesantren* grounds are chiefly from Indramayu, followed by Losari (Cirebon), Subang (West Java), Central Java, and Jakarta. One female student (*santriwati*) is from Riau, Sumatra. All had learned of *Darul Musyawirin* by word-of-mouth. The *santriwati* make ice for the *pesantren*'s food preparation with the remainder sold to local vendors. The *pesantren*'s income is boosted by revenues from a second school owned by *Kyai Abdul*'s family. It is situated directly behind the *pesantren*, near their mosque, and offers a general curriculum. In 2005-06, the additional school accommodated approximately 1,700 neighborhood children. Technically speaking, it is a private institution although it is supplemented with both private and government contributions. It, thus, must conform to the Indonesian government's approved general curriculum, including science and language courses (Indonesian, Cirebon Javanese, and English),<sup>1042</sup> whereas Arabic is privileged at the *pesantren*. *Santri* are expected not only to memorize the *Quran*, but to explicate its meaning. Formal education occurs in the morning. At 4pm, religious studies begin at the *pesantren*, which last until sunset prayers (*maghrib*). A formalized version of Quranic recitation, called *tajwid*, follows.

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<sup>1041</sup> Most modern *pesantren* refer to their male and female students in the secular terms 'siswa' and 'siswi,' respectively, instead of the pious 'santriwan' and 'santriwati' designations.

<sup>1042</sup> Like many other *pesantren*, *Darul Musyawirin* has adopted the *madrasah* system, which links it with the national education system to some degree, although it is under the Ministry of Religious Affairs rather than the Ministry of Education.



Fig. 111. *Santriwati* study the *Quran* at *Darul Musyawirin*'s library

Once a week the *santriwan* perform a traditional percussive form of Islamic music set to poetry called *rebana* or *shalawatan*,<sup>1043</sup> in which the Prophet Muhammad is exalted. *Shalawatan* is similar to recited poetry, or *syair*. They are similar to songs, though not quite sung. *Kyai Abdul* stresses:

They are singing to glorify the Prophet Muhammad. So the feeling of admiration is expressed in the form of poetry. The poetry says: ‘Yes, Prophet [Muhammad], may you be showered with abundant health.’<sup>1044</sup>

*Kyai Abdul* does not prohibit listening to music without Islamic elements, e.g. *dangdut* and rock, but stops short of allowing it to be “put into practice” in his school because it

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<sup>1043</sup> At this *pesantren*, *rebana* is accompanied by blessings on the Divine. This could fall within the category of *saman*, depending on whether performed soberly (controlled) or rhythmically. In the case of the latter, it is often a prelude to *dzikir*. At *Darul Musyawirin*, it is performed in controlled form.

<sup>1044</sup> *Merrka menyanyi untuk mengagungkan Nabi Muhammad. Jadi kekaguman kita terhadap Nabi Muhammad itu dalam bentuk syair seperti itu. Syairnya : “Ya Nabi, semoga keselamatan terlimpahkan kepadamu, semoga kesehatan terlimpahkan kepadamu.* Abdul Razak, pers. comm., 13 September 2005.



has “no positive value.” While this view seems paradoxical, it is not unique to this *pesantren*. A clear line, thus, is drawn between music in praise of God and the Prophet and music whose sole function is entertainment.



Fig. 112. *Shalawat* at *Darul Musyawirin*.

Following *maghrib*, *Kyai Abdul* asked the *santri* to play *shalawat*. Although I had been introduced as a guest beforehand, they knew nothing about me except my name. *Kyai Abdul*'s request provoked a palpable tension. It quickly dissipated, however, when they began to play their tambourines. The six *santriwan* began from a seated position, while eight others, also seated, read aloud [fig. 112]. As the tempo gained momentum, the musicians stood up and continued playing.<sup>1045</sup>

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<sup>1045</sup> *Saman dzikir* often begins seated (*qu'adi*) and the players start to arise along with the tempo until the musicians are fully standing (*qiyāmī*).



Fig. 113. *Shalawat*.

The *santriwati* gathered outside the doorway to listen. The sound was enchanting in its simplicity. I let it wash over me. An informal discussion followed. At first I was met with silence. I attempted to break the ice by asking if they had any questions about me. More silence. After a minute or two, one of the *santri* asked me, “Where are you from?” “*Amerika Serikat*,” I replied. Their faces soured and an outpouring of negative comments about the U.S. followed. I thanked them for their honesty and suggested we break down their concerns. It soon became clear that their anger was not personal. It was neither directed at me, nor the American people, but at our then President and his international policies. The *santri* were extremely curious about the views of American youth based on what they had seen on American television. They asked why American girls dress provocatively. These were not complaints; they grew out of deep curiosity. This was followed by an honest conversation about growing pains. Their last question was about music: “Do you think Americans would appreciate our music?” I described

the American love affair with “world music,” including gamelan and the Sufi *qawwali* music from Pakistan. They had not heard of *qawwali* before. Their eyes lit up at news of another kind of Islamic music. They were eager to know why it was so special, which I described to the best of my ability. When I asked their feelings about dance, I received a frosty reception. Simply put: they do not accept it.



Fig. 114. *Shalawat. Darul Musyawirin. Kyai Abdul Razak (foreground) looks on.* 13 September, 2005.

### ***Kyai Abdul Razak’s Views of Topeng***

*Kyai Abdul* and I shared many conversations during my stay in Cirebon. Below are excerpts from a formal interview conducted on 30 October 2005. I asked *Kyai Abdul* where he believed *topeng* fit in the spectrum of Islamic arts:

Actually, regional [Javanese] dance, such as [*topeng*] is not Islamic. These dances relate to Javanese culture that were agreeable to and adopted by Sunan Kalijaga. Perhaps an *ulama* suggested Sunan Kalijaga use it to proselytize Islam. Finally, he offered *topeng* as a way to teach [Islam]. This is what I know. Thus, it does not originate with Islam. Just like *wayang*, which I know came from India.

*Kyai Abdul's* emphasis on the origin of *wayang* and *topeng* rather than their storylines prompted me to ask whether the medium necessarily excluded the message?

Yes, *wayang* is not from Islam. Sunan Kalijaga injected a story – an Islamic story – into *wayang*. People who wanted to watch it were required to embrace Islam. The Javanese people were not familiar with *wayang*. The original story is from the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, which are Hindu.... I do not know about *topeng*. I doubt it is Islamic. I don't believe it. Mystical elements might exist in *topeng*. There are many magical charms in *topeng*, right? [But] they are actually not Islamic prayers. They are like mantras. Mantras do not exist in Islam. This is what I know. I don't know if it eventually was integrated into Islamic culture, because so far, I don't know how [*topeng*] is practiced... Returning to the question of *topeng*, all *dalang* are Muslim. They seek to justify their belief that *topeng* is related to Islam. But I don't fully understand its meaning since the process of assimilation carried out between Sunan Kalijaga, between Islam and Javanese culture, is still debated by Muslim intellectuals in Java.

When the topic turned from *topeng* and *wayang* to human representation, *Kyai Abdul* was less philosophical, drawing instead from the *hadit*.<sup>1046</sup>

In Islam, we may not draw a picture [of a human being]. We may not create a painting or a work [in any medium] in the shape of an animal or person in which a living creature is visible. Therefore, it is acceptable if I limit the drawing from the chest to the head. But if I draw a living creature from the thigh [to the head] it is prohibited. One cannot live with only a chest. There is no person who can live in this condition.... But a person can live without two legs. This is why it is prohibited. [It is said that] later in the beyond, Allah will ask us to return the soul He created. It was stated by the Prophet Muhammad.... I agree that we have no right to create humans. [Only] God has this right. This is so if it's a painting.

LMR: That is for paintings? What about a mask?

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<sup>1046</sup> The Sayings or Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad that form the *sunnah*. *Hadit* are ancillary to the *Quran*.

AR: The mask is just a face. Therefore, it is acceptable. But [illustrating] the full body is not allowed. If we make a statue of an animal, we can only show the animal's head.

LMR: But the mask is worn by the *dalang*. So if we combine the *dalang* with the mask, we have created something new beyond a *dalang* [wearing a mask] before us.

AR: It is not a problem. The point is the mask. It does not matter if the mask expresses the charisma of another person. There is no issue about masks inside Islam.

LMR: If I ask this question to conservative Muslims, will they agree or not? Or perhaps, there are many perspectives about it?

AR: Perhaps photography is different and there may be a problem. Some people believe photography is not acceptable and others say it is fine. ... A photograph is not a painting, right? It's only our reflection. I accept photography. I permit people to take pictures from top to bottom [from head to toe]. It's as if we are looking in the mirror. Reflection. Mirror. A photograph is only our reflection. If it is a painting, we are creating it. This will be controversial. Some [scholars] will not agree with me.

LMR: Returning to the topic of the mask ... why is *topeng* not allowed at your *pesantren*?

AR: The mask is allowed [here], but the masked dance is not. We have not accepted the dances yet. Should I change my mind in the future, there will not be a problem.<sup>1047</sup>

Imagining a day when *Kyai* Abdul will reconsider his position on mask dance is significant. Even from a *salaf* perspective with a “modern” bent, *Kyai* Abdul's

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<sup>1047</sup> See Appendix IV for the original Indonesian version.

philosophy underscores the fluid inter-generational dialogue among religious scholars today.<sup>1048</sup>



Fig. 115. View of the *Al-Zaytun* campus from my window at the *Wisma al-Islah*, 2005. The main mosque is on the right side; *Gedung Soeharto* (with the raised dome) is rear center. To its right is the agriculture building. Far right is the as-yet unfinished (as of July 2009) massive new mosque.

### ***PESANTREN MA‘HAD AL-ZAYTUN***

One day Sujana Arja’s son Astori mentioned in passing that he and his brother Inu had recently taught *topeng* at Indonesia’s largest *pesantren*. I asked if I could visit the school. The protocol was for visitors to first submit a fax request and wait for their

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<sup>1048</sup> This exchange became palpable in the late 1980s and 1990s with a small movement in both *Nahdatul Ulama (NU)*<sup>1048</sup> and *Muhammadiyah*<sup>1048</sup> circles, who took a more accommodating stance towards Javanese and Sundanese arts. This was likely reinforced by the state Islamic colleges and universities (IAIN and UIN), when the rector at several of their schools began promoting a more accommodating approach to the arts. This trend has lost some ground due to a backlash from some conservative and militant Muslims who view cultural openness as further ‘liberalizing’ Islam. Robert Hefner, pers. comm., 24 August 2008.

reply. A few days later I received clearance. The next day we were on our way to *Al-Zaytun*.<sup>1049</sup>



Fig. 116. Sujana Arja's two sons Astori (left) and Inu (second from right), Inu's wife, Eti, her brother, and two musicians from Slangit's then junior gamelan.<sup>1050</sup> This picture was taken in the glass-enclosed performing arts building. Looming in the background is the Soeharto Building, (then under construction).

The level of security at *Al-Zaytun* is on par with many embassies. Our arrival was announced at the first security point while we were still in our vehicle. There the guard notified the secretariat, Ali, that we were in the parking lot. We were instructed to go to the *Wisma al-Islah*.<sup>1051</sup> We were greeted in the Wisma lobby by *Al-Zaytun*'s

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<sup>1049</sup> *Al-Zaytun* is approximately four hours from Slangit, Cirebon.

<sup>1050</sup> Since my 2005-06 fieldwork the majority of senior gamelan members have died, leaving four of Sujana's members including Miska and Carmin. Thus, the junior gamelan has become the senior gamelan.

<sup>1051</sup> *Wisma* usually designates a family-style hotel. The *wisma al-Islah* is on *Al-Zaytun* property. It is where Soeharto, his daughter Tutut, Wabibie, and other officials stay when they visit the *pesantren*.

Minister of Art and Sport, Ihsan Fathan Mubinan (Fathan). Also present were two other *pesantren* representatives, Wisnu and Hawan.<sup>1052</sup> The meeting was cordial, although I was a bit mystified as to why our visit provoked this royal treatment. Fathan asked if he could answer any questions about the *pesantren*. Not knowing how much time we had, I got right to the point. I said I was fascinated that *topeng* was being offered at *Al-Zaytun* and was interested in learning about their views on masks and masking, in light of doctrinal injunctions on reproducing the human form. Secondly, I said I was fascinated because it is the only *pesantren* where *topeng* is integrated into its art curriculum. My comments apparently threw Fathan off-guard. He was not happy. The Slangit artists sunk deep in their seats as the informal meeting came to an abrupt halt. Fathan said in perfect English:

You are asking official questions. The only person in a position to answer them is Shaykh Panji himself. A one-day visit is not long enough to understand our philosophy. You need to spend one week or a month.<sup>1053</sup>

He said we were welcome to tour the grounds with Wisnu and Hawan, but anything more would require Shaykh Panji's approval and this would take time. If clearance was granted, Fathan would arrange for me to interview the leader during my next visit. Wisnu and Hawan then gave us an extensive tour of the 1200-hectare facilities<sup>1054</sup> before heading home. In addition to the school proper, *al-Zaytun* boasts its

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Parents also stay there when visiting their children. I was instructed that I had to stay at the *wisma* as leaving the grounds is not allowed. The cost was RP 225,000/per night, much more expensive than other hotels in Indramayu. It is but one contributing force to the institution's financial luster. Barter is another vehicle for staying there. One parent told me that she and her husband's "fee" for staying at the *wisma* was ten sacks of cement. It is impeccable and luxurious by Indonesian hotel standards.

<sup>1052</sup> Wisnu and Hawan are no longer employed there.

<sup>1053</sup> Ihsan Fathan Mubinan, interview, 15 July 2005.

<sup>1054</sup> One hectare is the equivalent of 2.471 acres; thus, their property resides on just under 3,000 acres.



own bank, barber shop, mini-mart, clothing shop, hotel, office supply store, and other amenities associated with city life, including a major sports arena<sup>1055</sup> and a fledgling art program.

In anticipation of my return visit, I was required to submit my dissertation abstract, a cover letter specifying my interest in the *pesantren*, and proof of sponsorship in Indonesia (Aminef and STSI, Bandung). Finally, a complete list of questions I planned to ask Shaykh Panji had to be submitted for his approval. My project was accepted, and I returned on 26 August 2005 for one week.

Astori received permission to be my assistant on the second visit; however, he stayed in one of the dorms. Upon arrival, we once again registered at the first security post, where we were instructed to meet Ali in his office at *Gedung Abu Bakar* (Abu Bakar Building). When we arrived, Astori was instructed to wait outside, while I was being “processed.” There, I was interviewed and then escorted to their security department to be photographed. We passed Astori outside. Not one word was exchanged between us – the hush of unarticulated truth. Two photographs were taken: one was deposited in their computer registry system, and the other one was pressed on to my identification card, to be carried at all times. When the card was handed to me I had the nascent sense of how artists must have felt receiving their artist registration cards in 1965.<sup>1056</sup> Lose it and you are in trouble. Ali and I then picked up Astori, who was patiently waiting outside. We were taken on a walking tour of the rehearsal space, which

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<sup>1055</sup> *Palagan Agung* field has a sophisticated irrigation system that prohibits flooding during games. Another aspect of their irrigation system is an 8-meter canal in which the students’ waste flows to a place where it is filtered by machine prior to flowing into the lake. This process occurs daily and affords sufficient water supply during the dry season.

<sup>1056</sup> See chapter 1 of this study.

sat atop a futuristic-looking building, as well as the canteen, and other points of interest. The tour, fascinating as it was, was unnecessary as I was later escorted every place I went, every minute of every day. My only solitude was in my room at the *wisma*. Each morning I was picked up in the lobby at 6am and, with the exception of a daily rest period, was kept busy until I was escorted home, usually around 11pm. During the week, I observed daily classes and rehearsals, including several English classes. A few minutes before each class ended, I was introduced and invited to speak with the students in English. My American accent was often met with giggles. Shy at first, the *siswa-siswi* eventually warmed up and we had friendly, if controlled, conversations. In addition to observing the English classes, I observed history and Arabic lessons. A special meeting was set up for me to meet *Al-Zaytun*'s best and brightest college-bound students. Most importantly, I was able to observe many *topeng* rehearsals and on my final night, enjoyed a fully costumed *topeng* performance in my honor.



Fig. 117. *Tari Topeng Panji*. It is performed here by the late Sujana Arja to commemorate 8 *Shawal* at *Kraton Kanoman*, 12 November 2005. This is identical with the *shalat* movement for the call to prayer (*adzan*). “Panji,” which is taught at *Al-Zaytun*. Dasih referred to this movement as *Udan Liris*.



Fig. 118. *Kyai Abdul Razak demonstrates adzan.*

### **A Modern-Day Panji Tale: Abu Toto Comes to West Java**

Just as *Darul Musyawirin*'s philosophy is a reflection of its leader, *Al-Zaytun* has become so intimately linked with Panji Gumilang that it is impossible to make sense of the institution's motto "tolerance and peace" without contemplating the path that brought him there. When I was introduced to Shaykh Panji, I mentioned that the *topeng* character, 'Panji,' was my favorite dance in the *topeng* pantheon, yet it had lost its appeal in recent generations: as a subject of study, as a meditation for the dancer, and as a contemplative experience for the spectator. Shaykh Panji, with a twinkle in his eyes, looked into mine and, said:

Then we will teach it here. This is because the leader is Panji. In East Java, [Panji] is called 'Ande-Ande Lumut'.<sup>1057</sup> ... When he came to Cirebon he became Panji. He disseminated religion [Islam] then... Many people have stated this. I personally do not understand it. My parents told me the *Ande-Ande Lumut* story. According to my parents, he moved to West Java, and in Cirebon he changed his name to Panji.<sup>1058</sup>

One could thus say that Panji Gumilang, who is from the northeast coast of Gresik, East Java has, unconsciously or not, retraced the steps of East Java's culture hero.

As discussed elsewhere in this study, the name 'Panji' and stories of his travels are said to predate Islam's arrival, but in *topeng* and the political arena, Panji and Islam are synonymous.<sup>1059</sup> His name, much like the characters he morphs into in the Panji tales, conveys his flexible mobility. Regardless of the version, certain features are omnipresent: our hero is a wanderer and a master of disguise in search of his lost princess, Candra Kirana. Naming, thus, can be both a form of disguise and illusory. I asked Astori why he thought *topeng* was introduced at *al-Zaytun*'s. He quoted a *pesantren* official:

Shaykh [Panji] said 'It is now the season of the mask.'<sup>1060</sup>

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<sup>1057</sup> As mentioned, Panji Gumilang is from East Java.

<sup>1058</sup> "Maka diadakan di Zaytun. Karena pimpinannya Panji... Itu kalau di Jawa Timur namanya 'Ande-Ande Lumut'... Ya, datang ke Cirebon menjadi Panji. Itu penyebar agama dulu. Konon cerita banyak orang. Saya sendiri tidak paham. Dikasih orangtua cerita Ande-Ande Lumut. Konon menurut orangtua kemudian dia pindah ke Jabar adanya Cirebon dan berganti nama menjadi Panji." Panji Gumilang, interview, 21 July 2005.

<sup>1059</sup> Panji was a title of nobility during the Mataram kingdom. Some examples are Raden Panji, Panji Asmarabangun, Panji Kuda Aning Pati.

<sup>1060</sup> *Shaykhnya sendiri bilang bahwa 'sekarang sedang musimnya topeng.'*

Panji Gumilang's alliance with the Javanese culture hero, then, is multivalent. His name alone connotes both refinement and an enigma. As such, it is a befitting metaphor for the leader.

When Sujana was first approached by *al-Zaytun* representatives about performing at the *pesantren* he was told that Shaykh Panji was related to *Panji Asmara* (the name of Sujana's *topeng* troupe). He was also told that the Shaykh was a descendant of Sunan Kalijaga. Sujana agreed to perform. The *siswa-siswi* attended Sujana's performance. Immediately thereafter, the *dalang* was invited to teach *topeng* there. Sujana's health precluded him from doing so, so he sent his sons Astori and Inu in his place.

### **Pesantren Al-Zaytun and the Cult of Tolerance**

I arrived at Shaykh Panji's office a few minutes before our scheduled 11:15 a.m. interview on 21 July 2005. I was escorted to the room where the interview would take place. Several guards awaited my arrival. A few minutes later, Shaykh Panji's aide, Abdul Halim, entered the room and asked me a few questions.<sup>1061</sup> Shaykh Panji entered the room a few minutes later and took a seat on the other side of the table. I requested his permission to turn on my mini sound recorder. He agreed. As I set it on the table, Abdul Halim pulled out his own recorder and set it upright a few inches from mine. Shaykh Panji flashed a knowing smile my way. I smiled back. We were on the same page. Abdul and I flipped our machines to the "on" position in unison.

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<sup>1061</sup> I subsequently learned that just one year earlier Abdul Halim was criminally charged with preventing thirteen journalists from "seeking information that was in the public's interest." The Indramayu police pressed charges under Indonesia's Press Law. *The Jakarta Post*. "Al-Zaytun exec named suspect in press case" by Nana Rukmana. 23 July 2004.

Education is a leitmotif running through Panji Gumilang's life. Teaching has been in his blood from a young age. He described studying Arabic literature at IAIN as a turning point in his "socialization process":

Then I wanted to teach and my friends and I formed a group of educators, with whom I remain close. So I did not start from a university with a connection to art and culture. I was from a *pesantren* and entered religious college to study Arabic literature. That is when I became aware of the condition of education. My friends and I fell into education together and honed our expertise... I have enjoyed teaching since I was small. When I was young I enjoyed teaching at a modest school. In the 1950s, when I was in public school, my friends and I would gather to study art and participate in sports. My father was the village head.<sup>1062</sup>

According to Panji Gumilang, he and his friends formed a foundation with the aim of creating the *pesantren* in 1994.<sup>1063</sup> The land was purchased from Shaykh Kumahad, who may have been one of the above-mentioned friends.<sup>1064</sup> Construction began in earnest in 1996 and the school officially opened in 1999. According to Shaykh Panji, he took over the institution's leadership from B. J. Habibie in 1997.<sup>1065</sup>

The Indramayu landscape is flat and expansive. It is common to see for miles and miles, both land and sea. It lacks the visual charm of its Wilayah III Cirebon neighbors' rolling hills and active volcanoes. Indramayu was once a rich source of teak

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<sup>1062</sup> *Kemudian bermasyarakat, kemudian ingin mendidik dan sekarang bersama – sama banyak sahabat. Jadi saya bukan keluar bukan dari fakultas yang ada urusan seni, budaya. Saya dari pesantren kemudian masuk ke universitas agama ambil Sastra Arab kemudian melihat keadaan pendidikan seperti ini kami terjun ke pendidikan bersama – sama sahabat yang memiliki kepakaran dalam hidup.. Saya dari kecil suka mengajar. Dari kecil dari sejak sekolah rendah. Dulu kami tahun 50-an sekolah rakyat. Itu sudah mengumpulkan kawan – kawan untuk diajar untuk diajak berkesenian, berolahraga. Itu dari sejak kecil. Orangtua saya kepala desa.*

Panji Gumilang, interview, 21 July 2005.

<sup>1063</sup> Panji Gumilang, interview, 21 July 2005.

<sup>1064</sup> This must have been more than a business relationship, since Shaykh Kumahad stays in a special house whenever he visits the *pesantren*.

<sup>1065</sup> Habibie was then the Minister of Research and Technology. He became Indonesia's third President when Soeharta stepped down.

wood, but illegal logging over the past decade led to massive deforestation. The village of Mekarjaya, where *Al-Zaytun* is located is among the most deforested regions in the district [Fig. 119]. Everything about the school seems oddly out of place. This becomes apparent the moment *al-Zaytun*'s skyline emerges against the flattened landscape.



Fig. 119. View of the utopian *Pesantren Al-Zaytun* off in the distance (center rear). This photo was taken from the main road, c. 4 miles away.

I asked Shaykh Panji how the Indramayu site was selected for the school:

Why did we build this school far away from the city? So that we could unite the Indonesian village with the city. [This is] because people prefer living in the city more than the village. We wished to come to the village to turn it into a city. Formerly, this was not a village. There was not a single home here. There was only jungle without any large trees. There were only bushes and grass. People said there were evil spirits here. They said there were jinn<sup>1066</sup> here because they were afraid to live here... We told them "It is good if there are jinn, we are their friends." This is why people believe spirits helped us to erect [the *pesantren*] so quickly. Look at us. This one is a jinn. That one is too.

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<sup>1066</sup> In this context, jinn are spirits of demonic nature with supernatural powers.

But they are geniuses. The jinn were transformed into geniuses. So that's it!<sup>1067</sup>

It is widely believed that the posh school was funded by the Soeharto family,<sup>1068</sup> Habibie, and the separatist *Darul Islam (DI)* movement, who sought to establish an Islamic state,<sup>1069</sup> claims that Shaykh Panji and his associates rigorously deny. There is no question that Shaykh Panji's past activities have cast a permanent shadow, much like those evil spirits whom he counts among his friends.

The most difficult shadow for Shaykh Panji to avoid goes hand-in-hand with his former name, Abu Toto, whose ties with a violent wing of *DI* are well known.<sup>1070</sup> His position as the Ninth Regional Commander (*KW9*) of the organization has been widely

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<sup>1067</sup> *Mengapa kami membuat tempat yang jauh dari kota? Supaya Indonesia ini desa dan kota menyatu. Sebab orang paling suka tinggal di kota, desa ditinggalkan. Kami ingin masuk desa supaya desa ini juga menjadi kota. Dulu, disini bukan kampung Tidak ada satu rumahpun disini. Ada hutan belantara yang tanpa tanaman besar. Rumput – rumput ataupun semak – semak saja. Orang bilang disini tempat jin. Kata orang tempat jin, karena manusia tidak ada yang berani tinggal disini.... Kita bilang pada mereka "Bagus kalau ada jin, kami berkawan pada mereka." Maka orang banyak bilang dibantu jin kata ini pasal cepat berdiri. Anda tengok jinnya. Ini jin, ini jin. Tapi genius. Sekarang berubah jinnya, jadi genius. Jadi seperti itu!* This is Shaykh Panji's account. A scan of the landscape [fig. 199] surrounding *al-Zaytun* tells another version of the story, one beyond the scope of this study. However, the idea of uncultivated land anywhere in Java due to a fear of jinn seems tendentious at best. Panji Gumilang, interview, 21 July 2005.

<sup>1068</sup> The late President's daughter Tutut is a frequent guest of the *pesantren* and represented her father at many official functions during his final years. *Al-Zaytun* spokespeople expected Tutut would represent her father when Soeharto Building, named after the former president, was to be unveiled in conjunction with the institution's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2006. Indonesia's then-ailing former president surprised everyone by making a personal appearance.

<sup>1069</sup> Islamic State of Indonesia, or *Negara Islam Indonesia (NII)*.

<sup>1070</sup> *KW9* is connected to *Negara Islam Indonesia (NII)* and *Darul Islam (DI)*. Panji Gumilang was accused of pro-General Wiranto vote-rigging in Indonesia's 2004 elections, where the majority of the schools' votes went to the Wiranto /Solahuddin Wahid ticket. *DI* is discussed in chapter 1 of this study. For more on Panji Gumilang's militant roots, see Martin van Bruinessen, "'Traditionalist' and 'Islamist' pesantren in contemporary Indonesia" Paper presented at ISIM workshop on 'The Madrasa in Asia' 2004; *International Crisis Group* (13 September 2004); "Indonesia Backgrounder: Why Salafism and Terrorism Mostly Don't Mix" Asia Report 83.



reported.<sup>1071</sup> Shaykh Panji's motives are not completely clear; however, he appears to be at the vanguard in trying to forge a modernizing path for former *DI* members.

### **Networks, Mobility, and Economies, *Al-Zaytun*-style**

Martin van Bruinessen has pointed out that the religious curriculum of many Indonesian *pesantren* is inspired by *Shafi'i* jurisprudence.<sup>1072</sup> This means that it is grounded in Sufi ethics, whose leaders exercise considerable authority not only within the *pesantren* proper but among the larger populace. For this reason, *pesantren* leaders are often courted by politicians during election years. The concept of cooperation was allegedly dependent upon a give-and-take relationship between the *pesantren* and the money pouring in from Soeharto, Habibie, and other political leaders. As part of this Indonesianization process, *al-Zaytun* students wear uniforms befitting the school's nationalistic fervor: navy uniforms accented with red and white scarves to replicate the colors of the Indonesian flag, and a red fabric shoulder strap. The girls wear black *jilbab*. One student per class wears a white shoulder strap, identifying them as class leader.<sup>1073</sup>

In addition to the Soeharto family, a substantial donation was made of "all of the red bricks for the Soeharto Building" from a Mr. Hendra. The building houses *al-Zaytun's* new university, *Universitas Al-Zaytun Indonesia*. "Hendra" is a common name in Indonesia; however, the *pesantren* representative described the donor simply as a

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<sup>1071</sup> Al Chaidar has accused Panji Gumilang of heterodoxy and collecting funds from the Ninth Regional Command of *NII*, the organization he has been linked to. Al Chaidar, *Sepak terjang KW. IX Abu Toto Syech A.S. Panji Gumilang menyelewengkan NKA-NII pasca S.M. Kartoewirjo*, (Jakarta: Madani Press, 2000).

<sup>1072</sup> The *Shafi'i* school is assumed to have come to Indonesia by way of Arab traders from the Hadramawt region of Yemen.

<sup>1073</sup> The uniforms have been modified from the typical brown ones worn by students at other Indonesian schools and modern *pesantren*.

non-Muslim Taiwanese. Donations for *al-Zaytun*'s massive new mosque, *Mesjid Rahmatan* have come from as far away as Turkey, Malaysia, Africa, Singapore, and Australia. Even the Dutch government reportedly contributed synthetic grass for the *pesantren*'s massive international field. When asked why, Wisnu responded with a vague reference to past Dutch hegemony in the Archipelago: "I believe they wanted to compensate us."

A person with even the most rudimentary knowledge of "classical" and "modern" Islamic movements would categorize *Al-Zaytun* as fitting squarely under the modern rubric. I was thus surprised by Shyakh Panji's response to my query: "What exactly about *Al-Zaytun* is modern? What distinguishes it from a traditional *pesantren*?"

We never said this. But we want people who live here to be modern people. Thus, the *pesantren* is not modern, but the people are. You can build a modern building. *Al-Zaytun* makes people modern. *Al-Zaytun* provides many benefits to the community. Modern people benefit all of the world's creatures. That is why we want modern people to come here. [We want] people who are rational. Whose actions are based on knowledge. [People] with strong organizational skills. [People] with a strong work ethic, and whose ideals will be sustained from generation to generation. This is the kind of "modern" we desire. Eventually, the modern people we cultivate will be tolerant, capable, and respectful of others living in the world. Therefore, it is not the *pesantren* that is modern, but we are teaching the people to have modern lives.

*Kami tidak pernah mengatakan ini pesantren modern. Tapi kami ingin masyarakat yang hidup di dalam sini menjadi masyarakat yang moderen. Jadi bukan pesantren yang modern tapi manusianya. Kalau pesantrennya apapun boleh dibuat. Manusianya modern kalau pesantrennya Al-Zaytun saja. Al-Zaytun banyak manfaat bagi umat manusia. Manusia modern pun banyak manfaat bagi makhluk di dunia ini. Makanya masyarakat modern yang kami kehendaki disini. Itu masyarakat yang rasional. Berbuat, bertindak berdasar ilmu pengetahuan. Mempunyai organisasi yang kuat. Mempunyai etos kerja yang tinggi, kemudian sambung – menyambung tidak pernah putus antara generasi ke generasi. Itu 'modernnya' kami inginkan di dalam*

*sini. Kemudian ciri-ciri masyarakat modern yang kita tanamkan disini berjiwa toleran, mampu menghormati banyak orang yang hidup di dunia ini. Jadi bukan pesantren yang modern, tetapi manusianya yang kami ajak berhidup modern.*

And this is precisely the utopian network the *pimpinan* crafted. In the months prior to *al-Zaytun* opening its university in 2005, they boasted 7,084 *santri* from every regency in Indonesia. There were also over 200 students from Malaysia, 13 West African students, and students from Timor Leste, Brunei, and Singapore.<sup>1074</sup> As of July 2009, those numbers have dwindled.<sup>1075</sup> Since the majority of students come from far away and marked their first time living away from home, new students must live in groups of twelve with their new teachers for the first six months of school. Psychologists are available to help the students adjust to their new environment, where, not surprisingly, homesickness is the norm. *Al-Zaytun* offers twenty-six subjects, including memorization of the *Quran*.<sup>1076</sup> A far cry from *Darul Musyawirin*'s environs and tuition, *Al-Zaytun* students must pay USD \$ 3500 for six years, due in advance of their arrival. This amount, however, is misleading, for it only covers the first year. The remaining five years are subsidized. I asked Shaykh Panji how they are subsidized. He replied:

We have a foundation. We have a vast plantation. The prepaid [amount of] USD \$ 3500 is used as capital for our expenses. The profit

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<sup>1074</sup> In 2006, Robert Hefner was told that the enrollment was 12,000 and that they projected 25,000 students by 2012.

<sup>1075</sup> As of July 2009, there are approximately 7,000 students total. This number includes the 600 students enrolled at their new university, *Universitas Al-Zaytun*. These statistics were provided by Edi from the sekretariat's office. I suspect the numbers are even lower because the students had just arrived on campus, yet it was very quiet – much quieter than my previous trips. Parents have registered complaints to the government and media about how their children “changed” during their time at the *pesantren*, and when the children returned home for vacations they were often estranged from their families. It appears that many parents removed their children from the school since that time.

<sup>1076</sup> Proven memorization of at least half of the *Quran* is a prerequisite of all university-bound students at *Al-Zaytun*.

is used to provide education for the Indonesian students... thus we help to relieve the government's burden.<sup>1077</sup>

*Kami punya usaha yayasan, jadi kami tanah luas. Dan uang 3500 yang dibayarkan di depan itulah modal herakan untuk membiayai usaha kami. . Untungnya kami gunakan untuk membiayai pendidikan putra – putra Bangsa Indonesia, jadi kami ikut membantu meringankan beban Negara.*

Still, \$ 3500 is beyond the pocketbook of the vast majority of Indonesians. One parent informed me that their child's tuition was paid for with cattle and other livestock, which are turned over to their agriculture program. She said such exchanges were common there.

**Topeng at al-Zaytun**



Fig. 120. “Mask Dance Comes to the Pesantren,” *Al-Zaytun* magazine, *Edisi* 39, 2005.

In addition to students' intense academic load, they must choose one elective course in either sports or the performing arts. The dance and sports curricula are heavily gendered; the majority of dance and music students are female, while most males

<sup>1077</sup> Panji Gumilang, interview, 21 July 2005.

participate in sports. Male students who elect the arts gravitate to the wide range of music genres available there. The *topeng* classes I observed had the same students every day, of which there was only one male. Many university-bound *siswa-siswi* privately inquired about whether they could study *topeng* after the other students finished, that is, secretly. Evidently, they felt embarrassed they had not studied the dances before, particularly those students from the Cirebon region.



Fig. 121. *Siswi* during *topeng* class. The older students stand in the front, while the younger ones follow from behind. This is similar to the *ngintil* approach wherein the more experienced students lead.

*Topeng*'s incorporation into *al-Zaytun*'s agenda occurred in February 2005. The students were expected to learn the dances in time to commemorate the first month of the Islamic calendar, *1 Muharram*. Astori, Inu and their gamelan taught the students *topeng* and the music accompaniment. The students studied all five of the main dances:

Panji, Samba, Rummyang, Tumenggung and Klana, memorizing all five characters in only ten days.<sup>1078</sup> The schedule was grueling. Breaks in *topeng* instruction conformed to *shalat* and meals. The schedule was the same every day: *topeng* classes ran from 10 am until 12pm, picking up again at 2:00 until 5pm when students returned to their dorm to bathe before *maghrib* prayers.<sup>1079</sup> Classes resumed at 8pm and ended at 10pm. According to Astori, the students were eager to master the dances quickly and never complained about the schedule or exhaustion. This type of rigorous learning parallels the *Iqra* method employed for *Quran* memorization.<sup>1080</sup> The *pesantren* faculty, none of whom were artists, participated in the workshop and assisted the Slangit artists. They, too, were required to memorize the dances in ten days. The faculty became the *de facto dalang* at the *pesantren* when the Slangit troupe returned home.

*Al-Zaytun*'s dance instructors were drawn from disparate disciplines, including a female English teacher, a male math teacher, a male history teacher, and a female secretary/administrator. The students' ages ranged from twelve to seventeen. The older (advanced) students danced first, and were later joined by the younger ones. During the first part of the rehearsal, before the *nayaga* (musicians) arrived, the advanced students counted out the rhythm part of each movement for the young dancers from the beginning of the dance until its completion. Following the first practice session, the

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<sup>1078</sup> As a point of comparison, I studied the same dances for ten months, averaging eight hours every day. My goal was to memorize and refine the movements in 1977-78. Although all of the dances I studied then have since been greatly condensed, ten days is a remarkably short time to memorize the lexicon by any standard.

<sup>1079</sup> Today, the same schedule exists, except that instead of daily, classes are held each Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday.

<sup>1080</sup> The technique is a memorization tool only, and has no bearing on comprehension. Because it is incumbent for the *santri* to memorize large parts of the *Quran* quickly, the *Iqra* method comprises a natural part of their learning processes. In East Java the *Laduni* method is used for this and for studying English too.

*nayaga* joined the dance students. The *nayaga* is chiefly composed of day laborers that work on the grounds in the morning, mainly in agriculture and play gamelan at night. But this is only during rehearsals, according to Shaykh Panji. The *nayaga* is comprised of students during weekly Friday night performances.

The students' masks are carved by *Al-Zaytun*'s chief woodworker, Suryanto al-Fatah. He has been employed at the *pesantren* for eleven years. The craftsman had no previous mask making experience when he was called upon to supply masks to the *topeng* students.<sup>1081</sup>

One evening I attended a music rehearsal from 10pm until midnight. Music styles ranged from gamelan to cello, organ, *suling* (flute), conga drums, *terbangan*,<sup>1082</sup> jazz, and Indonesia's indigenous *kronchong*.<sup>1083</sup> Songgo Hardjo, who heads the rice processing department, played guitar. The math teacher who, hours earlier, taught *topeng* had morphed into a bass guitarist with a jazz-rock group. One male singer had an exceptional voice. The room fell silent when he sang. His unruly beard and slightly eccentric demeanor seemed out of place with his angelic voice and the clean-cut look of the other employees. As he sang, *Al-Zaytun*'s Minister of Art whispered to me that the singer's real job was as a driver (*sopir*) for the *pesantren*. He had been granted special permission to keep his beard; the decision was officially announced to the entire *al-Zaytun* community since, I was told, many parents registered fears he was a terrorist.

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<sup>1081</sup> *Al-Zaytun* faculty and students told me in 2005 that they made their own masks by copying examples provided by Astori and Inu. However, Suryanto al-Fatah said he has been carving them for students since the *topeng* program was launched in 2005.

<sup>1082</sup> A form of Islamic choral music that has enjoyed a revival in recent years.

<sup>1083</sup> *Kronchong* is an Indonesian genre that includes string instruments of Portuguese origin that interlock with gamelan.

## Shaykh Panji Riffs on the Arts

I asked Shaykh Panji his personal perspective on the arts and what prompted the decision to integrate music and dance into *al-Zaytun*'s curriculum. Below are excerpts from this interview:

PG: Obviously, the arts must be taught here. Art must exist; it is unacceptable for it not to, [it is] necessary. We need art to smile. For instance, if you are angry, and you have a smile on your face, you can hide your anger. But if you smile in the arts, your anger is not obvious. So art is necessary. We must have art. Even during meals art is necessary. We need art in our friendships. We need art in order to express ourselves. We can not speak without art. We need art to refine our reasoning. You can imagine that if thousands of people lived in one place without having a sense of art, there will be clashes between them. [People will be] offended here, offended there. But if we have artistic experiences we feel gratified.

LMR: Why did you choose to offer *topeng* here?

PG: It is only one type of dance that we offer at this school or this *pesantren*. We have a dance called *Buto Galak*, which illustrates a coarse person. We offer this [dance] as an example of a coarse person. We also have *Tari Cakil*. *Cakil*'s character conveys an immoral demon. We offer this too as an example of an immoral person. But there is also a beautiful dance, *Tari Putri* that illustrates young people with high morals. So there are some examples of moving in one way for a person who is immoral and moving in another way to describe a moral person. So it is not only *topeng* that we teach here. *Topeng* is just one form. However, we chose it because it is nearly forgotten by the Indonesian people. We feel it is too precious to be forgotten because it is our cultural heritage. If we do not preserve it, it will vanish. Later it will exist in California even though originally it comes from Cirebon!

LMR: What role do you think art plays in the life of Muslims?

PG: We need it. Muslims need art. We very much need art. We assume that art is part of Islam, we assume art, sports, eating, and life must be integrated. Our Prophet [Muhammad] was an artist, to the point that he was able to dance on the back of a horse.<sup>1084</sup> He didn't

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<sup>1084</sup> A reference to *al-Buroq*, the celestial steed that the Prophet rode during the Night Journey.



have to control the horse, he did so just by holding onto the horse's hair. Sport and art became one. Our Prophet suggested that when we read the *Quran* [aloud] we should do so with a good voice. He dislikes unrefined expression. In Islam, art is necessary. Hence, art is necessary in Islam, in my opinion. For those who don't like it, that is alright. Don't ever force people who do not like art. But we will urge the young generation to like it, because with art, you can refine your behavior in the social context.... Yes, some people forbid [human illustration], but there are others who do not. Because Islam is a perfect religion, why should there be a prohibition, where there is no place? Now, if we want to illustrate an evil person, there is no way to say he looks like him [pointing to another person]. No way. He will be angry. So we just draw a picture and say, "this is an evil person." We create a mask to symbolize an evil character. Which character is evil in *topeng*? Klana... yes, Klana! If an evil character resembled a person's face, that person would be angry. We only make an evil mask. What is wrong with that? So Islam does not place such limitations. In our opinion, it is allowed.

LMR: But *topeng* images resemble human beings So, will this be accepted by all Muslims?

PG: It will be accepted by those who find it appropriate. We cannot wait until the art is accepted or rejected. 100% of the people will not be able to empathize with it. There are many opinions in art. You just have to present the beauty of the art itself. Even God said to all of humanity: "You may neglect me and you may put your faith upon me." Who are we to dictate higher than God?

Now, I'd like to ask you a question. Why are you, who live so far away, in love with *topeng Cirebon*?

LMR: Many people ask me this question. I was involved with theatre when I was young. I wanted to understand theatre methods. I was very interested in masks. I appreciated that women were allowed to wear masks and understood the movements. This was what first interested me. I wanted to understand the movement. Also, *topeng Cirebon* is different from dance styles found elsewhere.

PG: What is different?

LMR: Its relationship to Islam. It is rare to find another place where [Muslim] women wear masks in a religious context. So I am interested in what makes Cirebon different from other places. This is why I want to understand what makes Cirebon different. I am still not certain. I am

still looking around. Also, both women and men may become a *dalang topeng*. Why? You don't find this other places. And I am very happy to study Islam here so that I can understand its relationship with *topeng*.

PG: So this is the reason? That is good. Art and religion aren't supposed to be separated.

LMR: Yes. And *topeng Cirebon* has an element of Islam. I wondered why *topeng Cirebon* is offered here, and I thought it must be related to the institution's philosophy. In fact, I was wrong. *Al-Zaytun* wants to teach its students performing arts from other places.

PG: From everywhere, but *topeng Cirebon* must be preserved here. *Al-Zaytun* will preserve *topeng Cirebon*. Why? Because it was brought here [by the *wali*]. At that time, people were urged to behave and be religious and tolerant. *Topeng Cirebon* makes a point about tolerance. We like this. We prohibit dances that use weapons here. In Central Javanese dance, they always use the *kris*. It is not allowed here. We are peaceful, so it is not acceptable. So *topeng* dance is allowed.

LMR: What about Panji? Panji wears a *kris* [dagger].

PG: No, it is not allowed here. The *kris* is put in here and here [mimics fighting] because it can conquer anything in its way. It destroys. We want peace here. So we had better not place a *kris* in our chest and our head.<sup>1085</sup>

Panji's query about my interest in *topeng* threw me off guard. He seemed genuinely curious about why an outsider was interested in something locals take for granted. But there was also a sense of disbelief, of "Are you for real?" about the question. The question elevated the conversation by injecting authenticity into it. It also afforded more space for open communications with the students.

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<sup>1085</sup> For the full transcript of this interview see Appendix 5.

### *Al-Zaytun's Students Speak about Topeng*

As previously mentioned, there were two groups of *siswa-siswi* during *topeng* rehearsals. The core group was composed of five high school girls, ages 14 to 16, and one 17 year-old male. The late afternoon classes included the advanced students who led the younger girls, ages 12 and 13. The girls came from different regions, though all were Javanese. The one male *topeng* student, Darmawan Rahdianto, was born in Cirebon, but attended school in Tegal, Central Java, before transferring to *Al-Zaytun* in 2002.<sup>1086</sup> He said that modern dance was introduced at the *pesantren* earlier, but he preferred traditional dance. When the school's board invited Sujana to teach he felt his time had come. Darmawan described his introduction to *topeng*, thus:

At first I felt shy because I was the only male student interested in studying it...[b]ut I thought the art of dance is not only for girls. For example, the instructor, Mas Inu, is a man. This made me more attracted to study it.... When I was in elementary school, my friends said that those who practice dance are girls. I was considered a *banci*.<sup>1087</sup>

*Pada awalnya saya merasa malu karena saya laki – laki sendiri yang mau belajar...[t]etapi saya berpikir seni tari itu bukan hanya untuk perempuan saja. Dan contohnya pelatihnya Mas Inu adalah laki – laki, jadi saya semakin tertarik untuk mengikuti.... Kalau saya teliti sejak jaman SD saya juga dibilang orang yang ikut latihan tari itu adalah perempuan. Dan saya pernah dibilang banci.*

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<sup>1086</sup> I met with him again in June 2009 at *Al-Zaytun*, where he now attends Al-Zaytun University.

<sup>1087</sup> Darmawan Rahdianto, interview, 20 July 2005, 'Banci' is a derogatory term with no precise English equivalent. It generally signifies a transvestite or homosexual. According to Didik Nini Thowok, the term literally refers to a male prostitute who serves male clients, but in its common use may refer to a feminine male or a transvestite. In either case, the connotation is negative. Ross, "Mask, Gender, and Performance in Indonesia," 214-26, 219.



Fig. 122. Darmawan performs *Tari Topeng Panji* at *Al-Zaytun*. Note the elongated sleeves and pants, in conformity with *pesantren* regulations about *aurat*<sup>1088</sup> that apparently applies to males too.

I asked the *topeng* students if they feel different before versus after the mask is donned. One replied: “Before wearing the mask, I could not connect to the mask’s soul, so I was only moving. But after putting it on the character immediately appeared. Their five different characters suddenly emerged. The differences were so striking.” Another student noted that she could feel her mind calm down when she put on the mask of Samba, only then was she able to fully concentrate. She described feeling nervous

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<sup>1088</sup> *Aurat* refers to those parts of the body that are not acceptable to show in public. For males, this is genitalia, but for women, it refers to most of the human body, specifically the hair, neck, limbs, kneecaps, and for many Muslims, the feet. The latter, however, is not widely adhered to in tropical Java, where sandals are the norm. As mentioned elsewhere in this work, veiling is not explicitly mentioned in the *Quran*, but is described in the *hadit*.

performing in front of the audience without a mask, but was confident once she put it on.<sup>1089</sup>

The advanced students were asked if masks were simpatico or conflicted with their religious views. There was consensus that it depended upon the objective. One student repeated their *topeng* teacher, Inu's explanation, for supporting *topeng* philosophy:

Inu described *topeng* to the class as representing five characters created by Sunan Kalijaga to disseminate Islam. [At that time] people were so intrigued by his dancing that they asked, "Can you teach me this dance?" to which Sunan Kalijaga replied, "You may learn it, but first you must profess your faith, you must spell *Shahadat*."<sup>1090</sup>

This explanation satisfied all of the older *siswa-siswi* I interviewed, for whom conversion was an acceptable and legitimate objective. However, two *siswi* were quick to note that they would reject masks if their purpose was malevolent, which they stressed is prohibited in Islam.

Displaying one's *aurat* is an example of something students consider negative. *Al-Zaytun* has resolved this issue by insisting that the students cover their hair with a *jilbab*, which, as noted earlier, is visible beneath the *sobrah*. Another revision was elongating the *topeng* short-sleeve top (*klambi*) to below the wrists. Moreover, the *clana*

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<sup>1089</sup> As discussed in chapter 4, psychological and physiological phenomena are often associated with mask use and cross all kinds of borders – cultural, religious, and social.

<sup>1090</sup> *Shahadat* is the first pillar of Islam. It marks the Muslim profession of faith: "[I bear witness that] there is no god but Allah and [I bear witness] that Muhammed is His Messenger." Inu's story is a variation of the other dominant legend about Islam's dissemination in Java. The other version is that villagers would hear the gamelan music in the village square and they would gather to see the performance. They were told they were welcome to watch, but first they must profess their faith.

(pant legs) that fall just below the kneecap in *topeng*,<sup>1091</sup> extend to the ankle at *al-Zaytun*. The dancer's feet, which are bare during *topeng* rehearsals at the *pesantren*, are covered with white socks when performed before an audience. Furthermore, the *sobrah* is constructed from black wool, cotton, and velvet, in place of human hair. Noticeably absent is the *picisan*. The other important revision, as mentioned earlier, is the absence of the *kris*.

Following the *pesantren*'s soccer game every Friday night, the fledgling *topeng* dancers perform for the entire *Al-Zaytun* community in the massive outdoor *Palagan Agung* soccer field. I asked several students unaffiliated with the dance program their opinion of *topeng*. Not one student felt masks conflicted with their religious beliefs, though a few of them did not understand the point of the dance at first. They were bored and some felt it was a waste of their time. But they gradually adapted and now seem to genuinely enjoy watching it.

## REFLECTION

The two *pesantren* discussed in this chapter blur the lines of the traditional/reformist [*salaf*/*talaf*] dyad. As Eric Hobsbawm<sup>1092</sup> reminds us, "tradition" is a construct that is fluid and susceptible to change. Traditions come and go. Art, according to *Kyai* Abdul and Shaykh Panji, is a powerful instructor. *Kyai* Abdul draws from the *hadit* and the *Quran*, while Shaykh Panji is avoidant of both, beyond justifying the place of *topeng* at the school. His approach, thus, speaks more to his role as a leader than as a

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<sup>1091</sup> This length is in keeping with the prohibition on showing the knees. However, the pant leg often rises slightly while dancing, revealing part of the knee. Similar costume modifications have become popular among some *topeng* dancers in Majalengka as well.

<sup>1092</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

religious scholar. Shaykh Panji's acceptance of *topeng*, a form so deeply at odds with the values of the majority of other *pesantran*, begs the question: How much *toleransi* can one take? A sharp ideological schism was forged with the Islamic resurgence<sup>1093</sup> between orthodox Muslims and those Muslims who combine Islam with indigenous beliefs. Cirebonese performers fall squarely within the second category. Endo Suanda describes the former bearing down on the latter even earlier for potentially inspiring "immoral activities." During a 1960 *wayang* performance – five years before *Gestok* – a letter was handed to the puppeteer instructing him to avoid religious topics.<sup>1094</sup> After 1965, many people who had rarely set foot in a mosque during *Ramadan* became devout Muslims to avoid the whiff of lingering *PKI* doubts. At the same time, Islamic performing arts groups were sprouting up, including *rebana*, that present Arabic songs. Many of the new artist crop were not professionals, but *santri*, much like the *shalawat* performance I observed at *Darul Musyawirin*.<sup>1095</sup>

Even twenty years ago, it was primarily artists and *tasawuf* practitioners who believed the *walisanga* introduced the arts in Cirebon. Today, this role is assumed by the vast majority of Muslims. The new question, as was eloquently posed by *Kyai* Abdul, is not whether the *wali* used *wayang* and *topeng* to spread Islam, but whether it matters if the stories presented are of Muslim origin. Attitudes about performance in the religious educational sphere, thus, are as nuanced as the communities they serve.

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<sup>1093</sup> The Islamic resurgence was an international phenomenon that began in the 1970s, though its tendrils had no effect on the *topeng* community until the 1980s.

<sup>1094</sup> Endo Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis, 29.

<sup>1095</sup> *Ibid.* 29, 77 (fn. 35).

## CONCLUSION

The *dalang topeng*'s asceticism had two central aims in the late 1970s: to draw the spectator in and to participate in an elliptic, transcendent experience. Encapsulated in that moment are the relics of a rich history spanning centuries of religious conversions, oppressive regimes, and cultural evolution. These occurrences are encoded in one collective experience. Many core ascetic practices associated with *topeng* are absent today, even while it retains its profundity.

Among other requirements, the *dalang* must intuit space and transcend all obstacles in her path. Children clamoring, giggling, and impinging closer and closer upon the *dalang*'s finite physical sphere; babies crying; and the musicians who may be only inches from the *dalang* are nearly always outside her visual field. The cacophony of the quotidian continues, as the *dalang* remains focused with her eyes fervently earthbound. This illustrates one of Sufi Islam's core tenets: the importance of maintaining solitude in the public sphere.<sup>1096</sup>

This study confirms that performance space is never neutral. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o argues, it memorializes time "in terms...of what has gone before – history – and what could follow – the future. What memories does the space carry and what longings might it generate?"<sup>1097</sup> For itinerant *topeng* artists, that space is as much expansive as it is charged. Walking mile after mile in heavy costumes, their instruments

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<sup>1096</sup> Referred to by the *Naqshbandiyya* as *khalwat dar anjuman* ("retirement in gathering").

<sup>1097</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o defines three schemas for understanding performance space as "a self-contained field of internal relations" or "the totality of its external relations to these other centres and fields" or, as mentioned above, "in its entirety of internal and external factors...in its relationship to time." Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams. Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 39-41.



and cooking utensils in tow is, in itself, performative and designates one kind of performance space. The other performance arena is delineated space. It is where artists set up their instruments and *topeng* “happens,” whether in the village square or in front of wealthy patrons’ homes. Thus, the politics of performance space is as much about the geography traversed as the public square where neighbors gather to participate in a shared experience.

As mentioned earlier, pilgrimage is not unique to Islam. It figures prominently in Christianity, Judaism, and the religions of India – particularly Saivite<sup>1098</sup> and Buddhist tantrism, both of which make appearances in old Javanese texts.<sup>1099</sup> Agehananda Bharati stresses that those pilgrimages corresponding to circumambulatory rites that mark the pilgrims’ progress carry prestige.<sup>1100</sup> This also rings true for Indonesian Muslims, for whom performing the hajj indicates sufficient financial means. Among the important rituals Muslim pilgrims undergo is circumambulating the *kabbah*.<sup>1101</sup> While there is no singular, definitive answer to its purpose, Hamid Algar describes circumambulation as a divinely mandated duty that replicates the angels circling the divine throne (celestial), while acknowledging that at the center of the individual’s being is the Divine Presence: the heart.<sup>1102</sup>

*Kyai Haji* Abdul Razak invited me to join him and others during a daily exercise (*latihan hajj*) in preparation for performing the hajj. All Indonesians are required to

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<sup>1098</sup> The worship of Siva.

<sup>1099</sup> Both *Tantra* and *Vajrayana* have been cited there. Judith Becker, *Gamelan Stories: Tantrism, Islam, and Aesthetics in Central Java*, (Tempe: Program for Southeast Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 1993).

<sup>1100</sup> Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, (Garden City: Anchor, 1970), 85.

<sup>1101</sup> The Divine house of worship situated at the center of Mecca.

<sup>1102</sup> Hamid Algar, pers. comm., 5 May 2009.

undergo government-sponsored classes so that they will know what to expect and how to execute the protocol properly.<sup>1103</sup> The classes are run by an official guide, *manasik haji*.<sup>1104</sup>



Fig. 123. *Latihan haji*. The participants circumambulate the practice *kabbah* in preparation for the hajj. Plered, Cirebon. 11 September 2005. The guide (right) is speaking into a microphone.

Pilgrimage, of course, also defines diasporic patterns of migration. As such, it has sacred contours even within a secular frame.<sup>1105</sup> For Muslims of all stripes, however,

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<sup>1103</sup> Interestingly, those Muslims best prepared for the hajj are said to be from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Turkey. Hamid Algar, pers. comm., 5 May 2009.

<sup>1104</sup> Literally: the preparatory manual for the hajj. The training was held at a very old mosque in the village of Gamel in Plered, Cirebon.

<sup>1105</sup> Diasporic migration often results from religious strife, but repressive political regimes can also spur border crossings.

circulation is the way community is imagined, be it the *hajj*, *hijra*,<sup>1106</sup> or *ziarah*. The *walisanga* were not a homogenous group; rather, they are said to have traveled from as far away as Baghdad, China, Iran, Champa, and India.

Many Muslims consider performing the hajj not only their duty, but the apex of their spiritual lives. For Cirebon artists, however, pilgrimages to the sacred shrines of Sunan Gunung Jati, *Seh Siti Jenar*, *Buyut Trusmi*, *Buyut Kalijaga*, and *Buyut Ronggeng* carry equal import. Unlike the hajj, *ziarah* is not an obligation; it is about one's evolving intimate relationship to God. *Ziarah* and *bebarang* share some important features: they may be brief or extended journeys; and they have a beginning point (home), a goal (the ancestral or performance site), and return (the journey home). As such, each form is in and of itself a circumambulatory passage. Even those performances designated for *hajatan* or *bebarang* employ a circular performance space, whose audience gathers around its periphery.

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<sup>1106</sup> Literally: flight or migration, as in “to abandon.” In its original context, it refers to the Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina, but its tendrils extend to all Muslims today for whom physical movement is incumbent and whose meaning spans metaphoric, religious, spatial, and political borders.

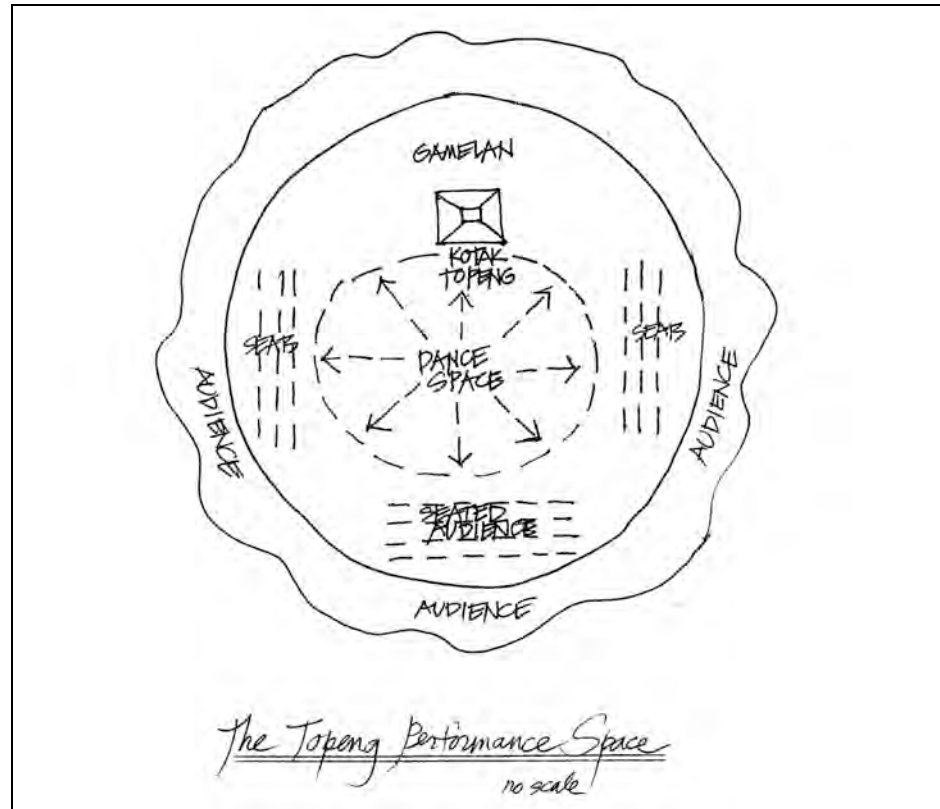


Fig. 124. The *topeng* performance space. Drawing by Ron Bogley.

Martial law silenced these conspicuous travelers in 1965. This may have become a permanent state of affairs for all branches of *topeng* were it not for Ibu Tien's (Soeharto's wife) mission to build the expensive neo-colonial playground, *Taman Mini Indonesia Indah* ("Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Garden"), discussed in the first chapter of this study. Concurrent with *Taman Mini*'s development was the project of elevating Indonesia's village arts abroad. Global tourism for *topeng* and other art forms followed, wherein circulation continued; its prior nuances now muted. In every other way, the ritual was intact: it had a beginning, middle, and return. In this way the schema continued, at least for a while. Although many of today's masked dancers do not have

the prescribed genealogy once required to become a *dalang*, they still study and eventually may teach *topeng*, and students will likely, in turn, study with them.

Thus, over the next few generations, I envision non-*keturunan* masked dancers functioning in much the same way as their *keturunan* gurus did before them: teaching their children who, in the child's marvelous capacity to see herself in her parents' reflection follow in their footsteps. In so doing, the range of who is eligible to become a *dalang topeng* and what it means to be one, will expand. Indeed, this is already happening. Just two generations ago a sharp division was drawn between *dalang* from a lineage where both parents were *dalang* (*turnunan*) versus those with only one *dalang* parent (*keturunan*). The former was considered more potent and, hence, preferable.<sup>1107</sup> Today, as fewer young people follow in their *dalang* parents' path, this distinction is rarely mentioned. The two terms are used interchangeably.

As such, association, rather than bloodline may determine lineage in the future. In this scenario, training with someone who has proper genealogy will be sufficient to propel the dancer to *dalang* status. In much the way that the *wali* are the friends or messengers of God, the non-*keturunan* dancer may be the friend or messenger of the ancestral *dalang*. This is happening already. Sudji's last student, Nani Kadmini, was a young girl from neighboring village Kempek when she was Sudji's student. Although they are not related, Nani now teaches "Sudji's style" at two Cirebon *kraton*. The new '*dalang topeng*' is coming into the orbit of the saints. Perhaps this is the way it has long been with secondary and tertiary *topeng* traditions, meaning those regions that do not have their own distinctive style. In this light, an archaic trajectory continues in

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<sup>1107</sup> Endo Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis, 16-19.

contemporary Indonesia today. This capacity for adaptation and translation is the lubricant that keeps *topeng*'s engine running smoothly.

#### **A BRIEF SUMMARY**

This study has demonstrated *topeng*'s longevity on Java as dependent upon its capacity to circulate and adapt to its surroundings at least as far back as the ninth century, where material evidence signals the mask's likely beginning as a popular entertainment during festival celebrations. Many centuries would pass before the mask became associated with mystical Islam and, then, in concealed form. Concealment, of course, is consistent with the Sufi fascination with binaries whose counterpart is revelation. By fusing long-held pantheistic indigenous beliefs and the Hindu epics so beloved in Java with monotheistic Islam, these seemingly incompatible belief systems were rendered compatible.

Artists have been negotiating their theological differences by combining Arabic and Cirebon Javanese at least as far back as the late nineteenth century, when it became an important route for transmitting esoteric knowledge. But the mantra or wish had to be first introduced and then sealed with Arabic. Foregrounding Allah assured that conflict was avoided. This was not an exercise to create a new language through loanwords. Its purpose was protective. This is as true of the mantras painted on the verso of some Cirebon masks as those uttered in isolation or contemplated in small groups, e.g. mystical chants (*suluk*), or in conjunction with *susuk* implantation. That the Arabic renderings are void of diacritic flourishes and in some cases unintelligible to readers of Arabic matters not. Nor is it problematic that today's custodians of these masks – the *dalang* – cannot decipher their encoded message. The writing *performs*.

Esoteric messages were not limited to pictorial hieroglyphs, but were encoded in the objects themselves. The three primary examples with which this study engages were selected because they spoke to me most clearly: the *kotak topeng*, the *sobrah* (headdress), and, of course, the mask. The names of these objects are revelatory; each expresses its idiosyncratic meaning in its vertical and horizontal relationship to the ancestors and to God. A miniature version of the heavy *kotak* traveled with the troupe, where it served the multiple function of storage unit, prop, and, most important, portable altar.<sup>1108</sup> The *sobrah*, which was stored in the *kotak* with the masks when not in use, likely served a similar function. We know this from the word *tekes*, which is an older term for the *topeng* headdress, which was likely derived from the Turkish term *tekke* designating a place of spiritual retreat. This is further supported by the unified position of the *sobrah* that “stands” atop the closed *kotak topeng*, a motif repeated in turban designs etched into the top portion of some Muslim tombstones to signal the deceased’s spiritual affiliation. And in a potent nod to Indonesia’s Hindu past, the *sobrah*’s beaded strands envelop the *kotak* much like the *kala*’s mane drapes dark portals.

The united *kotak* and *sobrah* comprise the spectator’s first visual encounter when entering the performance space. They remain One until the *dalang* removes the headdress and places it on her head. The transfer of power is completed when the lid is lifted off of the *kotak*. Finally, the *kotak topeng* is home to the mask – the respected and feared object, whose outer face, when worn, covers and presses upon the *sobrah*’s inner

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<sup>1108</sup> Sujana’s *topeng* troupe did not bring their *kotak* to the U.S. for their 1977 tour. Due to the prohibitive cost of transporting it, architect Ron Bogley constructed the *kotak* and all of the gamelan instrument frames in California. Tursini described the box she and Dasih used during *bebarang* as approximately half the size of a traditional *kotak topeng*.

eye, forging a pathway of knowledge from the head to the heart. As such, the mask is the über-object around which everything else clusters.

Yet, all of these objects, invested with so much recondite power, are rendered effete without the *dalang topeng*, who breathes life into the mask and animates it with each focused breath. And it is the *dalang*'s body that propels the story's meaning. Indeed, she *is* the story.

But there is another narrative implicit in this one: how the mask was accepted and integrated within a larger religious community that prohibits the reproduction of the human form. This is the question I asked religious leaders at two Cirebon region *pasantren*. Their responses tell us that not only is *topeng* fluid and subject to change but how the mask is framed in contemporary religious thinking is equally adaptive.

As should now be clear, the mask and its attendant objects are far from static. They are human-made. And it is human beings who invest them with meaning and set them in motion. In this regard, *topeng* is a human endeavor, not a Divine one. However, for its practitioners, it is the most direct pathway to God. The mind-body relationship must be exquisitely tuned to multiple zones and ways of "being." This interdependence is less intuitive today, but just like the *dalang*'s inherited *jampi*, one need not "read" them in order to be empowered. It is encoded in the *dalang*'s DNA.

### **CONTEMPORARY TOPENG**

One of the most striking shifts in *topeng* today is that many *dalang topeng*'s heirs are pursuing higher education at Bandung's performing arts academy, *STSI*. Recent graduates and current students include Dewi's granddaughter, Noor Anani (Losari), Sujana Arja's son, Astori (Slangit), and Rasinah's granddaughter, Aerli (Pekandangan,



Indramayu). The institutionalization of *topeng* has had a decisive impact on young *dalangs*' bodies and body awareness. This is seen in different approaches to body alignment and technique. The early stages of studying *topeng* in the village, alternately, concentrate on memorizing the movements. Only much later does the emphasis shift to the execution of movements, such as alignment of the spine, arms, and legs (the latter are nearly always grounded). Finally, characterization and attitude are mastered. "Style" is something that each dancer locates within her own body in due time. It is an organic process that can not and should not be rushed. Dasih, Sujana, Dewi, and Sawitri viewed practice sessions as "foreign" and "strange" and tampering with the spirit of the dance. Much has changed since then. Rehearsals are common today.

While *topeng* praxis is different on the ground today, whiffs of the old New Order remain. On 2 April 2006, I observed a full-day event commemorating Prophet Muhammad's birthday (*Maulid Nabi Muhammad SAW*) sponsored by *Pataraksa Sumber*, in association with *Kabupaten Cirebon's* Culture and Tourism Department. The *topeng* portion composed part of the event. Government officials were seated on stage, directly behind the dancers. The performance was scheduled to begin at 8:30 a.m. Through no fault of the *topeng* troupe, it began two hours late, bringing the climax of the battle scene between Tumenggung and Jinggaanom smack into *duhur* (noon prayer). When the call to prayer began at 11:35 a.m. over the loudspeaker at a nearby mosque, the gamelan musicians stopped.<sup>1109</sup> The *dalang* and *bodor* sat down on the proscenium stage, lifted their masks and held them approximately two inches from their faces. They

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<sup>1109</sup> The reader will recall that during Carpan's trance (chapter 7), the gamelan refused to stop playing, citing the implicit danger of doing so.

sustained this position for nearly ten minutes in observance of *duhur*. Following *shalat*, the gamelan started up again as the dancers secured their masks on their faces and resumed the fight scene precisely where it had ended.

### ***THE SANGGAR TODAY***

Whereas a *rombongan* was once an informal group of artists, its supplanter, the *sanggar*, evolved into big business. *Sanggar* today are often a quirky assemblage of genres. Two generations ago it would have been unthinkable for *topeng* to be in the same *sanggar* with *dangdut*<sup>1110</sup> or *organ tunggal*.<sup>1111</sup> However, each obeys the rules of an accepted trajectory.<sup>1112</sup> *Dangdut* and *organ* begin with a female singer/dancer who slowly begins singing. Within a minute or two, her hips start swaying to the music as she seductively motions to the male spectators to join her on stage. It is customary for the man to give her money during their dance. Sometimes an additional tip is slipped to her upon completion.

The fusion of *topeng* and *dangdut* is now so complete that it is taken for granted. I observed two *hajatan* where *topeng* and *dangdut* shared the same stage. Although there is no interaction between the two forms nor the artists, it is called “*Topeng Dangdut*.” On these occasions, the *dalang topeng* performs for approximately one hour and then the troupe takes a break. Then the contemporary music group performs with the two groups alternating for the duration of the event. The *dalang* and musicians I

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<sup>1110</sup> A contemporary music style in which Malay, Indian, and Arabic music are combined, accompanied by a female singer/dancer.

<sup>1111</sup> Similar to *dangdut*, *organ tunggal* includes an organ.

<sup>1112</sup> *Dangdut* entered international consciousness when Indonesian *dangdut* diva Inul Daratista, whose Middle-Eastern-inflected hip gyrations made such a national stir that sensual dance became the focus of the Indonesian Ulama’s Council (MUI) anti-pornography *fatwa* (Islamic ruling). In spite (and perhaps because) of the Inul factor, contemporary music and dance have found a welcome home with Cirebonese Muslims of most, if not all, stripes.

observed were palpably uncomfortable, but resigned to sharing the stage. The musicians who lingered on stage, lowered their heads and seldom looked up.

During a brief visit in June 2009, much had changed. Invitations for *topeng* at *hajatan* are now rare, with only two or three invitations a year. Furthermore, it only exists in conjunction with *dangdut* or when sponsored and/or subsidized by the local government, *Pemda*, or one of the Cirebon *kraton*. A relatively new form of *topeng* was initiated by *Pemda* in the late 1980s called *rampak topeng* I first saw *rampak topeng* at Inu Kertapati's 2005 wedding. There, many Slangit students, ranging from young children to late teens, performed a synchronized version of *Tari Topeng Samba* in successive groups lasting several hours. Regardless of the situation, *rampak topeng* is a synchronized form where several mask dancers perform a synchronized dance in one regional style. In June 2009 at the *Keresidenan*, five young *dalang topeng* performed *Tari Topeng Klana*. Although the dancers were from Gegesik, Losari, Majalengka, and Slangit – each region with its own distinctive style – it was performed in the Slangit style (*gaya Slangit*) complete with the distinctive costume of that region. Inu Kertapati, who performed that evening, was contemplative about this recent change in *topeng*. “It is what it is,” he said. “I’m neither sad nor disillusioned...the important thing is to continue dancing... there are many detours along our path in life...we sometimes turn right or left and, hopefully, we find our way back.”

Cirebon has long enjoyed one of the most varied performance traditions in the Archipelago, second only to Bali. A reassessment of local arts following *reformasi*, confirm that some forms have dropped off the radar of official local performance activity. On a positive note, the porous nature of the *sanggar*'s borders during this same

period is a stunning democratic achievement in the city of Cirebon. Today, only the troupe's leader must be registered, which translates to open hiring practices. This is particularly important to musicians who frequently perform on a contingency basis, as it increases their work opportunities. The expanded *sanggar*, which offered ten different genres in one group in 2005, provides one-stop shopping in today's hypercommercial performance market.<sup>1113</sup>

In 2005 there were 112 different *sanggar* in the city of Cirebon. Not one of those groups, however, was led by a *dalang topeng*. Closer inspection of these *sanggar* reveal that, of the nineteen dance groups listed, thirteen offered *topeng*. Of those thirteen *sanggar*, five were affiliated with Cirebon's three *kraton* (*Kasepuhan*, *Kanoman*, and *Kacirebonan*) whose respective Sultan served as the *pemimpin*. There are two additional *kraton*-affiliated *sanggar* listed at *Kacirebonan* and *Kanoman*. In both *sanggar*, the *pemimpin* is an *elang* (a scholar and respected intimate of the court).

Three years later (2008), the list of *sanggar* in the city had a very different composition. Appendix 6 of this study provides a comparative breakdown of *sanggar* in 2005 and 2008. The chart delineates several important shifts occurring over this three-year period. First, a trend away from visual arts and an increase in music is evident. Second, the majority of *sanggar* listed in 2005 were assumed to be active.<sup>1114</sup> By 2008, the majority of the same groups were assumed to be inactive, since they neither paid their dues nor had they designated *pemimpin*.<sup>1115</sup> Of the twenty-five registered *sanggar*

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<sup>1113</sup> In 2005, the Cirebon *rombongan*, *Intan Sari*, offered *Gamelan Tradisi Sunda*, *Degung Jaipong*, *Topeng*, *Tari Bali*, *Jaipongan*, *Dewi Merak*, *Tari Pohaci*, *Tari Angasmara*, *Tari Kondagan*, and *Tayub*.

<sup>1114</sup> Wiyono (formerly of Cirebon City's culture and tourism department), pers. comm., 6 July 2005.

<sup>1115</sup> Dede Wahidin (formerly of Cirebon City's culture department), pers. comm., 19 February 2008.

in 2008, *topeng* was only included in three *sanggar* (*Intan Sari*, *Puser Langit*, and *Kraton Kacirebonan*). *Wayang*, surprisingly, was not listed with any active group. *Kraton Kesepuhan* and *Kraton Kanoman*, although still in the culture department's database, were not registered in 2008.<sup>1116</sup> Only *Kraton Kacirebon* was registered, according to the culture departments' 2008 records.

While the performing arts have apparently undergone a sharp decline in the past three years, it just as likely indicates the apparent looseness with which the arts function in the city of Cirebon culture department today.<sup>1117</sup> Any group that registers with the department in the City of Cirebon is eligible to be subsidized,<sup>1118</sup> yet the individual artist registry has been disbanded (it is still required in *Kabupaten* Cirebon). This favors group, rather than individual, membership. In this sense, recordkeeping (or its lack thereof) has come full circle to the early Sukarno era. There is real poetry in that.<sup>1119</sup>

## REFLECTION

Having ruminated about *topeng* for so many years, I hoped to discuss it in its entirety in this manuscript. However, once I began writing in earnest, I realized this was wishful thinking. I hope future scholars will share my enthusiasm for this under-studied form. The bi-directional relationship between *peranakan* Chinese and *topeng* is an important avenue to explore. This would contribute to our knowledge of possible linkages between patronage, shamanism, and performance. As this study demonstrates,

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<sup>1116</sup> According to one local official this means that they did not pay their dues in 2008.

<sup>1117</sup> I refer here only to the city of Cirebon. I have not analyzed data from the four regencies (*kabupaten*) that comprise *Wilayah III Cirebon* (Kabupaten Cirebon, Majalengka, Indramayu, and Kuningan),

<sup>1118</sup> This is different from *Kabupaten* Cirebon, where *sanggar* are still required to register and are not necessarily subsidized.

<sup>1119</sup> I am grateful to Wiyono and Dede Wahidin at Cirebon city's department of culture and tourism for making these statistics available to me.

many of the words associated with *topeng* convey their spectral past, and deserve further study for understanding how they were internalized at the local level. Thus, an examination of loanwords would reveal how ideas traveled between and among artist guilds. Another area that could not be fully developed here is the dense emotional palette that is fortified in the *topeng* characters. Its sophisticated synthesis deserves further study. Finally, it is my fervent desire that future Indonesianists will have the opportunity to address how *topeng* is imagined in a thriving democracy. As I write these words, my hope appears to be within reach.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX I:

**PONGAWERU (KNOWLEDGE), 2005, BY SUJANA ARJA<sup>1120</sup>**

**2 VOLUMES. UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT. SLANGIT, CIREBON.**

#### Volume I:

p.1

A long time ago, before the age of the *wali*, the highest mountain in India was called Mount Indra. The majority of people at that time embraced Hinduism as their religion. They used the book of *Weda* as their holy book. *Weda* is an Indic language that means “The Holy Book.”

There were five knights at that time called *Pandawa Lima*.<sup>1121</sup> They were Ki Dharma Kusuma, Berata Sena, Arjuna, Nakula and Sadewa.

Ki Dharma Kusuma became the only knight when the rest of the knights had gone to heaven. He could not go to heaven like the others, because he had an heirloom called *Layang Kalimah Syahadat*.<sup>1122</sup>

p.2

He felt very sad. He cried day and night because of this.

Ki Dharma Kusuma meditated. He could not eat nor sleep while waiting for divine inspiration. Day after day, so many years went by, when he finally received divine

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<sup>1120</sup> Spoken to his son, Astori, who committed it to paper. I am indebted to Rakhmat Hidayat for his assistance in translating the above text from the original Cirebon Javanese to Indonesian.

<sup>1121</sup> The five Pandawas from the *Mahabharata*.

<sup>1122</sup> The profession of faith to Islam.

inspiration. It is said that he had to go to Java, Indonesia. While on the island of Java, at Mount Dieng, there was a knight meditating by himself. He wanted to proselytize Islam in Indonesia.

After asking some people the direction, Ki Dharma Kusuma finally arrived in Indonesia, and headed to Mount Dieng. There he met the knight. He introduced himself as Ki Sarif Abdurrahman from Tuban.

p.3

“I’m Sarif Durrahman from Tuban. Who are you?”, he asked.

And Ki Dharma Kusuma replied, “My name is Ki Dharma Kusuma. I just arrived in Indonesia from India looking for an answer to my question.” “I don’t know what is inside my heirloom, *Layang Kalimah Syahadat*. I want to know. And you – what are you searching for?”

Ki Sarif Durahman replied, “I want to Islamicize the people of Java. If you help me, I will help you too. I will take you to my teacher in Cirebon.” Ki Dharma agreed to this.

Then, they walked together proselytizing Islam every day. They lectured people about Islam. People did not like it. Some people attended the lecture and others did not.

P.4



They were curious about why their method of proselytization did not work. So, they decided to make it more attractive to them. Ki Sarif Durrahman, who was known as Sunan Kalijaga, created *Topeng* and made it a popular attraction, while Ki Dharma Kusuma became a *dalang wayang*. *Topeng* was performed during the day and *wayang* was performed at night. The people wanted to watch them perform but were prohibited from doing so. On the way to the performance, they were asked, “What are you going to watch?”

“We are going to watch the shows,” they replied.

Sunan Kalijaga said, “If you wish to watch it, you must spell *shahadat* first. You can not watch them if you do not spell it.” So everyone had to state *shahadat* if they wanted to watch the entertainment at that time. This included the person holding the feast where the attraction was performed.

p.5

At that time, *dalang* did not want to be paid. They only wanted the people to spell *shahadat*. The condition of *dalang* today contradicts this position. They only want the money. Sometimes, they have already spent all the money, before they perform. *Topeng* actually describes the life of a human being. From the beginning to the end, humans pass four worlds; they are: Jan, the womb, the world, and eternity.

For example, *dalang* are forbidden to get dressed outside the temporary shed or stage because it describes the first stage of the human being's life. Humans were perfected in Jan before they existed in the womb. Jan is a Javanese term. It means "the heaven." This is why *dalang* are not allowed to get dressed outside the temporary shed or the stage because it illustrates the life of humans in the world of Jan.

p.6

Before performing, the *dalang* bows in front of the box. This describes the life of human inside the womb, or the so-called fetus.

The dance describes the life cycle of human beings in the world. The dance has so many movements. They convey barriers in life.

After dancing, the *dalang* removes his costume. This describes the human in the eternal life. He returns to where he belongs: from nothing to nothing.

The life of human beings is in four worlds. This is because humans are comprised of four elements: water, fire, wind and earth.

- There is a question about why the *dalang topeng* should be male. This is correct. Because *topeng* was originally danced by Gusti Sunan Kalijaga.

- There is another question. Why *topeng Cirebon* is not the same as *topeng Losari* in Indramayu and [*topeng* in] Bandung. The origin of *topeng* was not Losari, Indramayu, or Bandung. Sunan Kalijaga was from Cirebon.
- Why, if the *dalang* are female, must they get dressed anywhere other than the stage? If the *dalang* are female, they must not show their body parts to the public. It is *haram* [prohibited] for Muslims. If they want to get dressed, they may do it any other place than the stage. The female *dalang* are allowed to get dressed away from the performance space because they are not the original dancers.

## Volume II:

P.1

*Topeng* means to live the Islamic way. *Topeng* is derived from the expression, *Tongtonane para Pinangeran* or an attraction of the princes. Some have said that *topeng* means *topong gepeng*, or “flat mask.” Others said that it means *ketop – ketop gepeng*.<sup>1123</sup> *Topeng*, including the gamelan and the dance, means to live the Islamic way.

p.2

For example, the dances are Panji, Samba, Rummyang, Tumenggung and Rahwana [alias Klana]. They are five dances. Just like the Five Pillars of Islam, they are *shahadat*, *shalawat* [praying five times daily], *zakat* [almsgiving], *puasa* [fasting] and the Hajj.

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<sup>1123</sup> The double inner eye, which is commonly referred to as the *picisan*.

The costume is also five parts: *cunduk* or *sobrah*, *dodot*, *gelang*, *kris*, and *soder* [long scarf that is attached at the waist]. The gamelan consists of seventeen items. They are the same as the number of *rukun shalat* or pillars of daily prayers. The names of the gamelan instruments are: *kendang*, *gong*, *saron I*, *saron II*, *tutukan*, *penerus*, *bonang I*, *klenang*, *jengglong*, *klemanak*, *gambang*, *beri*, *suling*, *piyul*, *titil*, *gender*, and *bonang II*.

Furthermore, either *topeng* or *wayang* is a show. It also means *tungtunan* or guidance in living the Islamic way.

*Topeng* movements of the past were *Ngadeg* [standing], *Melampa* [walking], *Sepak Soder* [kick the soder], *Jangklung Nilo*, *Gedut*, *Laras Konda*.

*Ngadeg* means that we stand tall in the world. We must stand upright and walk a straight path in life. *Sepak soder* means that we must disband with complicated things in our life so that they won't become barriers that block our way.

*Jangkung Nilo* is derived from the word *Jangkung* and *Nilo*. *Jangkung* means high or on top. *Nilo* means to look down. Thus *Jangkung Nilo* means that if one becomes a successful or important person, he must look upon and love orphans and the poor.

*Gendut* means fat. Being 'fat' alone is not suggested in living our lives. We must be concerned with our neighbor. We must not be indifferent to others.

p.3

*Topeng* has 120 movements. They are jerking hands, moving the palms upward, downward, and sideways, *endab gulu* [turning the neck], *tetepak*, *biyikan*, *bokong*,

*dengkul epek – epek* [shaking the knee], *tangan epek – epek* [shaking the hand or moving the foot sideways/forward]. There are a total of 120 movements. They correspond to the book of *Akokid*. Javanese people use this book for counting. Here is how it works:

p.4

120 minus 20, which comes from the Javanese alphabet characters Ha Na Ca Ra Ka, which equals 100. 100 minus 30 comes from the number of days in a month, which equals 70. 70 minus 12 comes from the amount of months in a year and equals 58. 58 minus 8 is from the amount of years in *Sawindu*<sup>1124</sup> and equals 50. 50 minus 7, which is the number of days in a week, equals 43. 43 minus 5, represents the number of days of *Pasaran*:<sup>1125</sup> *Manis, Paing, Pon, Wage, Kliwon*, which equals 38. 38 minus 30, comes from the number of days in a month, is equal to 8. 8 minus 4 is derived from the number of the best hours in a day: 4. 4 minus 4 is the number of directions: East, South, West, and North, which equals 0.

And then, the costumes have their own meaning. First, *dodot* employs four colors: red, white, yellow, and black. Red is the color of fire, yellow is the color of wind, white is the color of water, and black is the color of earth. Humans are composed of these four colors.

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<sup>1124</sup> Javanese eight-year period.

<sup>1125</sup> The five-day cycle of the Javanese calendar

p.5

Second, is called *cunduk*, which means *asem*, a local term for tamarind. It is also called *Tri Murti*, as *tri* is a Javanese term for 3, and *murti* means the flavor. The shape, the name, and the flavor are *asem*, which also means ‘sour.’

Third, *gelang* or bracelet is also called Candra Kirana. Candra is the moon, and Kirana the writing. All humans are observed every day by two angels: Rokib and Atid. They make notes about all living humans in the world every month and every day.

Fourth, there is a *kris* called *panca roba*. *Panca* means “5” and *roba* is derived from the word *Robi*, which mean God. Thus, *panca roba* means we must not forget God during the five times we pray throughout the day.

Fifth is *soder*. It is derived from the words *asor* (down) and *sederek* (family). It means that we must look all around us. We must not be arrogant to our friends.

p.6

In a gamelan set, there is an instrument called *kendang*. This is derived from the word *ngadang* which means to expect. We expect God’s blessing in living our lives in the world. This is because we want to reach heaven after death. A small *kendang* is called *ketipung*. It means that we must not take advantage while we are in our glory. Another instrument is the gong. The Cirebon gong has a special characteristic. A small gong is usually stroked five times, while a large gong is usually stroked once. This means that

we must perform *shalat* five times a day. *Kening* is derived from the word *ngrekening*, which means “to count.” It means that everything in our life must be counted: how old we are, how many good deeds we have done, and whether they are sufficient or not.

p.7

Saron comes from the word *Sareng – sareng rongokaken* (to listen together). If we open the number one [kettle], then we have to close the number one also. If we open the number two, then we have to close the number two also. It means that our human body will not bring anything when we die.

*Gambang* is another instrument in the gamelan set. The word *gamblang* means clear, explicit and understandable. It is not important to be talkative, or a good speaker, but we must apply what we say. *Gambang* consists of twenty elements. They are twenty main attributes of God, such as: *Allah Wujud, Khidam, Bako*, etc. We must not talk about other people’s obligation of *zakat* if we don’t do it ourselves.

The instrument *jengglong* means *nglongok di pukul*, or “watch and hit it.” If we watch the performer play this instrument, we will see that he must watch and hit it. That is usually performed by the musician. This means that we must share with each other. If we have something, it is nice for us to share a little with our neighbor.

p.8

*Dalang* is derived from the word *Dalil*, which means the expression of God, and the word *langgeng* which means eternal. In the past, the performance space for all *dalang*

*topeng, dalang wayang, or the wali* was on the west side. It was believed that the *kiblat* of Imam Syafii was in the West. But on the other side, the gong player faced the east side. This was because there was no time reference or means for providing direction.



## **APPENDIX II:**

### **PAK CARPAN'S HISTORY ABOUT THE KLANA/PANJI MASK AT BUYUT TRUSMI**

#### **ASAL USUL KEDOK/ TOPENG KLANA MILIK CARPAN,**

#### **(Indonesian translation from the Cirebon Javanese)**

*Waktu dulu, buyut saya pernah melakukan tapa di makam Buyut Trusmi yang terletak di Desa Trusmi Kabupaten Cirebon. Dalam Melakukan tapa, buyut-melakukannya dengan cara duduk bersemedi di tengah – tengah dua makam, artinya disebelah kanan dan kirinya makam.*

*Setelah melakukan tapa yang cukup lama, maka pada suatu malam buyut mendapat wangsit/bisikan yang mengatakan bahwa tapanya sudah cukup, dan sebagai hasilnya buyut akan mendapatkan sebuah kedok untuk bekal hidup sampai anak cucu kelak. Setelah mendapat wangsit tersebut, maka buyut pun mengahiri tapanya. Tapi apa yang terjadi waktu itu? Buyut menjadi terkejut karena kedok dimaksud dalam wangsit, sudah ada di salah satu nisan kayu makam.*

*Oleh karena hasil dari melakukan tapa itu hanya medapat kedok maka beberapa waktu kemudian, buyut pun menjadi dalang topeng sampai turun temurun hingga ke saya.*

*Ada sedikit cerita tentang pengalaman saya menjadi dalang topeng yang berhubungan khususnya dengan kedok Klana antara lain:*

*Dulu, waktu saya mau manggung di tetangga desa, saya lupa tidak membawa kedok Klana. Oleh karena waktu itu saya sibuk, maka yang mengambil kedok itu, adalah tiga orang nayaga yang mengendarai sebuah – sepeda. Tapi Malang, pada waktu membawa kedok, dan akibat hujan yang cukup deras, sepeda yang mereka kendarai menabrak sebuah ponn beringin. Dan pada waktu para nayaga itu jatuh, ada salah satu nayage yang jatuh menimpa kedok. Dan akibatnya kedok itu pecah menjadi beberapa bagian. Mengetahui kejadian itu saya pun tidak bisa berbuat apa-apa, kecuali membungkus pecahan kedok it jadi satu.*

*Tidak lama setelah kejadian itu, pada suatu malam saya mendapat petunjuk, bahwa untuk mengobati / memperbaiki kedok itu, saya harus mencari getah waluh putih. Mendapat petunjuk itu saya sungguh sangat senang, tapi juga bingung. Sebab senang saya dapat memperbaiki kedok Klana, tapi bingung karena untuk mencari getah waluh putih – saat itu sangat susah sekali. Tapi karena itu merupakan suatu perintah dan untuk kepentingan kedok Klana, maka saya bertekad untuk segera mendapatkannya. dan melalui usaha yang serius, maka getah waluh putish itu pun bisa saya dapatkan. Dan selanjutnya tentu saja kedok itu saya perbaiki dengan cara menempelkan bagian –*

*bagian yang pecah tadi dengan mempergunakan getah waluh putih. Menjelang ahir perbaikan itu saya sempat menjadi bingung lagi, sebab ada bagian kecil dari muka kedok itu yang masih berlubang, sedangkan untuk menutup bagian yang berlubang tadi, pecahannya tida ada / hilang. Melihat keadaan itu, lagi-lagi saya pun berdo'a mohon petunjuk, agar pecahan yang hilang tadi dapat segera ditemukan. Waktu demi waktu saya lalui, akhirnya do'a saya dapat dikabulkan. Terbukti dari petunjuk yang saya terima dan mengatakan bahwa, pecahan kecil untuk menambal kedok itu ada di tempat beras. Dan setelah saya cari, ternyata memang benar pecahan itu ada di tempat beras. Dan selesailah pekerjaan itu setelah saya dapat menutup bagian kedok yang berlubang tadi.*

*Persoalaan yang menyangkut kedok Klana itu, rupannya belum selesai sampai disitu. Sebab beberapa hari kemudian saya kedatangan tamu yang memberitahukan, bahwa nayag yang dulu tujuh menimpa kedok sekearang sedang sakit. Dan maksud kedatangannya pun sekalian mau minta air / obat untuk si sakit. Mendengar kabar dan permintaan itu, sambil membawa air obat. Saya pun bergegas berangkat kerumah nayaga yang sedang sakit. Dan sesampainya disana, saya punya firasat dan firasat itu saya sampaikan juga kepada teman nayaga yang sedang sakit, bahwa kalau dalam waktu tigat hari dia kuat, maka dia akan sembuh. Tapi kalau tidak kuat, maka pada hari ketiga kita lihat saja nanti. Entah karena sudah waktunya atau lain hal, persisi pada hari ketiga nayaga itu meninggal dunia.*

*Ketika istriku sedang hamil, saya melihat keadaan mata kedok waktu itu kelihatannya kurang bagus, maka timbul niat saya untuk memperbaikinya dengan cara mengecat mata kedok itu dengan warna merah. Dan tanpa fikir panjang lagi, niat itu pun saya laksana kan. Tapi apa yang terjadi di kemudian hari! Sungguh diluar dugaan, sebab pada waktu istriku melahirkan, warna mata anak saya juga menjadi merah. Melihat kejadian itu saya sadar, bahwa saya telah melakukan kesalahan terhadap kedok Klana, untuk itu akhirnya timbul niat saya meminta maaf dan sekalian minta obat kepada kedok Klana, agar mata anak saya dapat disembuhkan. Alhasil saya pun di beri obat beruba air untuk di teteskan kemata anak saya. Dan sesudah kiteteskan akhirnya mata anak sayapun sembuh. Tapi sayng umur anak saya tidak lama, sebab pada umur empat bulan, anak saya meninggal dunia.*

*Kejadian yang belum lama alami adalh, waktu manggung di rumah saya atas permintaan pribadi. Satu per satu gerak tari sudah saya laksana kan, tapi pada waktu saya menarikan tari Klana, dalam waktu kurang dari lima menit saya sudah kesurupan, artinya alam fikiran saya waktu itu seolah terbawa kea lam goib topeng, hal itu dapat saya rasakan karena waktu itu saya melihat penonton yang menyasikan tari topeng semuanya orang bule yang sedang membawa senjata, dan senjata itu diarahkan kepada saya.*

*Yang menjadi sebab waktu saya kesurupan adalah, kedok Klana marah kepada saya karena sesaji / makanan untuknya tidak ada. Dan seperti biasanya, bahwa untuk meredam kemarahan Klana, maka topeng Panji lah yang dapat mengatasinya, dengan*

*cara keluarga saya membaca mantra lalu topeng Panji itu di ciumkan kepada topeng Klana. Hal unik yang sampai sekarang masih dapat dilihat pada kedok Klana adalah, apabila ia dapat memberikan obat pada orang yang minta tolong. Maka mukanya kelihatan putih cerah. Tapi kalau sebaliknya ia tidak bisa memberi obat, maka mukanya kelihatan hitam. Demikian sedikit cerita asal usul kedok Klana dan pengalaman say selama menjadi dalang topeng yang berhubungan khusus dengan kedok Klana.*

**(Cirebon Javanese version of above).**

*Bengen, buyut kula ngranapi tapi ning pesareane Buyut Trusmi, sing enggone ning Desa Trusmi Kabupaten Cerbon. Cara Nglakoni tapa, nuyut nglakonie karo ndodok semedi ning tenga –tenga antara rong kiburan, tegese sebela tengen lan kiwe’e kuburan. Sewise nglakoni tapa rada suwe, ning sala sijining bengi, buyut kula oli wangsit / wisikan sing ngupai weru, baka pap’e buyut kuh wis waktue liren. Toli nganggo hasile, buyut arep dipai kedok sing cukup kanggo sangan urip sampe anak putu.*

*Sewise oli wangsit kuen, buyut ge tapa’e liren. Toli ana kedadian apawaktu kuen! Buyut dadi kaget, sebab kedok sing kimadsud sajeroning wangsit, wis ana ning kayu maesan sala sijining kiburan. Lantaran hasil sing nglakoni tapa kuh mung oli kedok, suwe-suwe toil buyut kula dadi dhalang topeng sampe turun temurun, sing ahire teng kula.*

*Ana setitik crita bengalaman kula dadi dhalang topeng, sing ketalian kusus karo kedok Klana, antarae:*

*Bengen, waktu kula arep manggung ning tangga desa, kula klalen bli ngga wa kedok Klana. Lantaran waktu kuen kula lagi repot, dadi sing njukut kedok kuh, telung nayaga sing numpaki siji sepede, tap apes, waktu lagi nggawa kedok lan akibat udan deres, sepede sing ditumpaki nayaga mau nabrak wiwtan baujan, lagi nayaga padatiba, ana sala sijining nayaga sing tiba pas nendeni kedok, dadi bae kedok kuh peca dadi pirang – pirang pecan. Ngrungu kedadian mongkonon nuh kula wis bli bisa apa-apa, sejene mbungkus pecan kedok mau dadi siji.*

*Bli swere sing kedadian mau, ning sala sijining bangi kula oli wangsitsing madsude, baka arep mberesi / ngobati kedok, goletana geta walu puti, oli petunjuk kuen kuh kula seneng pisan, tapi uga keder, seneng sebab bisa mberesi kedok Klana, keder sebab nganggo nggolati geta walu puti waktu kuen kuh angel pisan. Tapi berubung ngrupakaken prenta lan kanggo kepentingane kedok Klana, dadi kula nekad arep luru sampe oli. Bari usaha sing telaten, ahire geta walu puti kuh bisa tak temokakentoli, karuan bae kedok kuh tak beresi nganggo cara nempelnang pecan-pecaan mau nganggo geta walu puti. Setitik maning pegawean kuh areppragat, kula digawe keder maning lantaran rai’e kedok masi ana sing bolong, sedeng nganggo nambal sing bolong mau, pecaane langka/ilang. Ndeleng keadaan mengkonon, maning-maning kula dedonga njaluk petunjuk amber pecan sing ilang mau bisa gelis di temukaken maning. Pirang-*

*pirang dina tak lakoni, ahire donga kula dikabulaken, kebukti ning petunjuk sing kiterima kula, nuturaken yen pecan cilik nganggo nambal kedok kuh ana ning padaringan. Lan sewise diluru, nyata pecan kuh ana ning pedaringan. Pegawean kuh wis tak anggep pragat, sewise kula bisa nutup rai'e kedok sing bolong mau.*

*Urusan sing ketalian bari kedok Klana, rupane during pragat sampe ning kono, sebab pirang-pirang dina maning, kula ketekan tamu sing ngupai-weru, baka nayaga sing bengen tiba nendeni kedok, sekian lagi gering, uga maksud silaturahmie ge sekalian arep njaluk banyu obat kanggo sing gering ngrungu kabar karo jejalukan kuen, bari nggawa banyu obat kula buru-buru mangkat ning umae nayaga sing lagi gering. Sewise teka ning kana kula duwe pirasat, toil pirasat kuen ge tak omong nang ning bature nayaga sing lagi gering, baka telung dina deweke kuat, berarti deweke arep waras. Tapi baka telung dina bli kuat, ning dina ketelu engko delengen bae. Embuh sebab wis waktue, atawa sejene. Persis ning dina ketelu nayaga kuh ninggal.*

*Waktu rabi kula lagi meteng, kula ndeleng kondisi matae kedok Klana kuh kedelenge kurang bagus, toil bae kula kuh duwe niat arep mberesi nganggo cara, ngecet matae kedok nganggo werna abang, bli mikir kesuwen toli niat kuh tak laksanakanang, tapi apa akibate mbesuk! Bener-bener bli manjing akal, sebab waktu rabi kula nglairaken, lare kula matae abang. Ndeleng ke dadian kuen kula sadar, baka kulak uh wis gawe kesalahan ning kedok Klana. Lantaran kuen ahire kula duwe niat arep njaluk pangapura, sekalian njaluk obat ning kedok Klana, amber matae lare kula bisa di warasakan. Hasil le kula dipai obat ngrupai banyu kanggo ditetesnang ning matae lare kula. Sewise ditetesi ahire mata lare kula dadi waras. Tapi eman, umur lare kula bli suwe, sebab waktu umur papat bulan, lare kula ninggal.*

*Keadian sing during suwe tak alami, yaiku waktu manggung ning uma kula nuruti jejalukan wong. Siji-siji jogedan wis tak lakoni, mung pas waktu kula njoged Klana, ning itungan waktu kurang sing limang menit, kulawis kesurupan, artie alam pikiran kula waktu kuen kayae kegawa ning alam goib kedok, kedadian kuen kuh bisa tak rasakenang, sebab waktu kuen kula ndeleng sing nonton tari topeng kabeh wong bule sing nggawa bedil, lan bedile ditodongaken teng kula.*

*Sing dadi gara-gara waktu kula kesurupan kuh, kedok Klana nyewot tengkula gara-gara sajen / panganan kanggo deweke langka. Toli kaya kedadian sing uwis-uwis, nganggo ngerep-ngerep nyewote Klana, mung kedok Panji sing bisa nanggulangi, carae sedulur kula mbaca mantra, toil kedok Panji diambungaken ning kedok Klana.*

*Kelakuan aneh sing sampe sekien masih bisa dideleng ning kedok Klana yaiku baka deweke bisa ngupai obat ning uwong sing njaluk tulung, pasti rai'e kedeleng puti. Tapi baka deweke bli bisa ngupai obat, pasti rai'e kedeleng ireng.*

*Mengkenen setitik crita asal usule kedok Klana karo pengalaman kula sejob dadi dhalang topeng sing ketalian kusus karo kedok Klana.*

### APPENDIX III:

#### THE HISTORY OF BEROKAN,<sup>1126</sup> AS TOLD BY THE LATE MASKMAKER, SADRIYA.<sup>1127</sup>

1. In the kingdom of Guparman (Kuparman), a meeting was led by King Menak Amir Jayang Rana. He discussed his missing heirloom *Tongkat Kalipa (Cumeti Rukmin)*, with his soldiers. The king's brother, Adipati Umar Maya, who was trusted to guard the *Tongkat Kalipa*, was accused of being responsible for its disappearance. The King arranged for his troops to get the heirloom back from Adipati Umar Maya. The troops started their mission.

2. In Giling Wesi, the residence of Adipati Umar Maya, Umar Maya, his wife Dewi Bastari, and his sons, Umar Sandi and Umar Said, were discussing the missing heirloom called *Kasang Puti*. Before the discussion ended, the troops of Guparman Kingdom suddenly came and asked him about the *Tongkat Kalipa*. Umar Maya answered, "I have also lost my heirloom called *Kasang Puti*." The troops did not believe what he had said. Umar Maya and Guparman's troops were now fighting. Umar Maya conceded to Guparman's troops. Umar Maya and his family ran away from their house. The troops finally returned to Guparman.

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<sup>1126</sup> The full-body mask dance is said to be a lion. It is a large mask with a moveable jaw. It is very old in Java.

<sup>1127</sup> Sadriya, who was originally from Losari, married a local *bodor topeng* in Kalianyar and relocated there in the late 1960. This history was told by Sadriya to the mask maker Daimin who heads a *Berokan* troupe in Kalianyar, Cirebon. Daimin shared it with Rafan S. Hasyim (Opan) who transcribed it. For more on Sadriya, see Endo Suanda, *Topeng Cirebon*, Master's thesis, 209-10.

3. The troops didn't chase Umar Maya and his family. When Umar Maya and his family were resting on the side of the Nile River, they saw two messengers of the Ayaban Kingdom carrying two heirlooms: *Tongkat Kalipa* and *Kasang Puti*. He became angry and attacked them. Adipati Umar Maya was killed and his body thrown in the river. The priest of Kondaka took Dewi Bastari to the Ayaban Kingdom. Umar Maya's sons cried as they searched for their father's body along the side of the Nile River.

4. In the center of the earth, there were two people: the Prophet Khidir and his student, Klabang Kures. Klabang Kures was asked by the Prophet Khidir to draw things under the sea. When he finished drawing the head of Eyang Sang Baruna, he was told to stop. He was told to carve the head of Eyang Sang Baruna from wood. The Prophet Khidir made the head an heirloom called *Lading Panurat*. After he finished the head of Eyang Sang Baruna, he walked along the side of the Nile River. The prophet Khidir saw Umar Maya in the river and said, "Umar Maya, wake up! It is not your time to die." And then Umar Maya woke up. The prophet Khidir added: "I know you have a problem, but don't be afraid, you can still take revenge by using these two heirlooms. The first one is the head of Eyang Sang Baruna, which can be made into *Berokan*. Your body will be covered by *Berokan* so that you cannot be recognized. The second one is *Lading Panurat*. First, you must perform *bebarang* and proselytize Islam and find your sons who are now looking for you. After you find your sons, you have to contact the Guparman kingdom and tell them that the messengers from Ayaban kingdom stole their heirloom. You may leave now." Umar Maya had finally found their sons and contacted Guparman Kingdom.

5. In Guparman kingdom, Menak Amir Jayang Rana mentioned Umar Maya to his soldiers. They determined he had not stolen the heirloom. The King asked, “So who took my heirloom?” While they were talking, Umar Maya showed up and told them the truth: that the messengers of Ayaban Kingdom, led by Sang Prabu Sri Baginda Maharaja Klana Druwis, stole their heirloom. He said, “My heirloom, *Kasang Puti* and my wife were also taken by them.” He added that both heirlooms were at the Ayaban Kingdom. “The prophet Khidir had given me two heirlooms; *Bang Berokan* and *Lading Panurat*, to seek revenge by performing *bebarang* and proselytizing Islam.” After Umar Maya said that, Guparman kingdom attacked Ayaban Kingdom.

6. King Klana Druwis was very pleased because he had everything he wanted in the Ayaban kingdom. He had two heirlooms and the lovely Dewi Bastari. Dewi Bastari had refused to marry King Klana Druwis. She said, “I am willing to marry you under one condition: I want to be entertained with *Berokan*.” The King ordered his soldiers to find *Berokan*. Soon after the soldiers were outside the Ayaban gate, they saw a man resting under the tree. They asked the man, “Who are you? Where are you headed?” The man replied, “I am a *Berokan* performer, and I came here seeking an invitation to perform *Berokan* so I can earn some money.” The soldiers said, “What a coincidence, my king has requested *Berokan* be performed.” Soon thereafter, Umar Maya was taken to the King and the King ordered him to perform *Berokan*. Umar Maya said, “I will perform *Berokan* under one condition; I only want to be watched by the King and Queen. I do not want anyone else to watch me.” The king agreed to his condition. He was very

happy to watch the performance of Umar Maya. He laughed while watching the *Berokan* performance. In the middle of the dance, the King stopped him and asked, “May I wear that *Berokan* [mask]?” Umar Maya replied, “Yes, your Majesty.” Soon, the King was wearing the *Berokan* and played it throughout the night. Umar Maya saw a sword of Sapu Jagad on the King’s throne. He also saw his wife, Dewi Bastari, and felt very happy. He took the sword and swung it at the King’s head. The King died and the *Berokan* head flew away. Outside the palace, there was a war between Guparman and Ayaban’s troops, which Guparman’s troops won. The head of *Berokan* and *Lading Panurat* flew away to the island of Java. After the king’s death, Umar Maya changed the name of the kingdom to Arabic and led the kingdom himself. The troops returned home carrying the *Tongkat Kalipa* heirloom.

7. In Cirebon, Java, the nine saints proselytized Islam by using popular entertainments. They made *wayang kulit*, *renteng*, *topeng*, and many others. They found two heirlooms on the border of Cirebon in Prapatan Panjalin, Rajagaluh. The two heirlooms were the *Berokan* head and *Lading Panurat*. The nine apostles made those heirlooms as entertainment. They made *Berokan* in order to proselytize Islam during *bebarang*. The people who wanted to watch it weren’t asked to pay any money. They were only asked to embrace Islam by reading *shahadat* and for males to be circumcized. They agreed to embrace Islam because they were curious to watch the entertainment. After almost all of the people embraced Islam, the saints were very happy. At that time, *Berokan* was also used to help people. It was used to bless a home, to cure childrens’



fever, and to bless crops. Sunan Gunung Jati played *Berokan* at that time; the rest of the saints were the musicians. Our artists continue the tradition today.

This is the history of *Berokan*.

## **INDONESIAN TRANSLATION OF SADRIYA'S HISTORY OF BEROKAN**

### **SEJARAH BEROKAN**

- 1. Di Kerajaan Guparman (Kuparman) yang dipimpin oleh Prabu Menak Amir Jayang Rana sedang dilakukan musyawarah dengan Wadiya Bala tentang hilangnya Pusaka Keraton yang bernama Tongkat Kalipa (Cumeti Rukmin) yang dituduh mengambil pusaka adalah Adipati Umar Maya yaitu kakaknya Prabu Menak Amir Jayang Rana karena beliau adalah yang dipercaya untuk menjaga pusaka tersebut. Prabu Menak Amir Jayang Rana mengatur wadiyabala (pasukan) untuk mengambil pusaka di Adipati Umar Maya. Pasukan pun berangkat.*
- 2. Di Giling Wesi, di kediamannya, Adipati Umar Maya sedang berunding dengan istrinya yang bernama Dewi Bastari dan kedua anaknya yang bernama Umar Sandi dan Umar Said tentang hilangnya pusaka beliau yang bernama Kasang Puti. Ketika perundingan belum selesai, tiba – tiba datang pasukan dari Guparman yang menanyakan pusaka Tongkat Kalipa yang hilang. Umar Maya menjawab “saya juga kehilangan pusaka yang bernama Ajimat Kasang Puti”. Pasukan dari Guparman tidak percaya dan akhirnya bertengkar mulut sampai terjadi perang. Umar Maya sekeluarga mengalahkan dan melarikan diri. Pasukan pun pulang kembali ke Guparman.*

3. *Larinya Umar Maya sekeluarga tidak dikejar oleh pasukan Guparman. Ketika Umar Maya sekeluarga sedang istirahat di pinggir Bengawan (sungai) Nil, tiba – tiba mereka melihat kedua kondaka utusan dari Negara Ayaban yang sedang membawa dua pusaka; Pusaka Tongkat Kalipa dan Pusaka Kasang Puti. Umar Maya pun langsung marah dan langsung menyerang. Akhirnya Adipati Umar Maya tewas (kalah) dan mayatnya dibuang di Sungai Nil. Dewi Bastari dibawa oleh kedua pendeta Kondaka menuju Negara Ayaban. Kedua anaknya Umar Maya mencari ayahnya di pinggir Sungai Nil sambil menangis.*

4. *Di Puser Bumi ada dua orang, yang satu bernama Nabi Khidir dan lainnya adalah Pawongannya yang bernama Klabang Kures. Klabang Kures ditugaskan oleh Nabi Khidir untuk menggambar yang ada di dalam laut. Baru saja dia menggambar kepala Eyang Sang Baruna, Nabi Khidir mencabut Klabang Kures dan menyuruhnya berhenti. Tiba di tempat Nabi Khidir, Klabang Kures disuruh untuk membuat kepala Eyang Sang Baruna dengan bahan kayu dan kemudian diberikan sebuah alat oleh Nabi Khidir yang bernama Lading Panurat. Setelah sudah selesai, Klabang Kures diajak oleh Nabi Khidir jalan – jalan di Sungai Nil. Di tengah Sungai Nil, tiba – tiba Nabi Khidir memanggil Umar Maya “Hai Umar Maya, bangunlah! Kamu belum waktunya untuk meninggalkan dunia ini”. Umar Maya pun bangun di pinggir Sungai Nil. Nabi Khidir pun berkata lagi, “Saya tahu kamu sedang kena musibah. Tapi jangan takut. Kamu masih bisa membalas dendam dengan menggunakan pusaka ini, yaitu yang pertama kepala Eyang Sang Baruna, dan yang kedua Lading Panurat. Jangan khawatir. Istrimu masih sehat ada di negara Ayaban sedang diminta oleh Raja Ayaban untuk*

*dijadikan Permaisuri (istri). Dengan syarat kamu bisa membalas dendam dengan menggunakan pusaka ini yaitu yang pertama kepala Eyang Sang Baruna dijadikan Berokan, sedangkan badannya kamu bikin sendiri saja supaya muka kamu tidak kelihatan. Dan yang kedua adalah Lading Panurat. Kamu harus bebarang terlebih dahulu untuk menyebarkan Agama Islam. Kamu berangkat dari tempat ini dan carilah anak – anak kamu yang sedang menangis mencari kamu. Setelah kamu menemukan anak – anak kamu maka kamu harus mampir di Negara Guparman dulu dan memberitahu mereka bahwa yang mencuri pusaka Guparman adalah utusan dari Negara Ayaban yang langsung dipimpin oleh Sri Baginda Maharaja Prabu Klana Druwis. Kamu berangkatlah!”. Umar Maya mencari anak – anaknya dan setelah ketemu langsung mampir di Negara Guparman.*

5. *Di Kerajaan Guparman Menak Amir Jayang Rana sedang berunding dengan prajuritnya tentang Umar Maya yang tidak mengambil pusaka. Sang Raja bertanya “Jadi siapa yang mencuri pusaka saya?”. Sedang mereka asyik berunding, tiba – tiba Umar Maya datang memberitahu bahwa yang mencuri pusaka tersebut adalah utusan dari Negara Ayaban yang langsung dipimpin oleh Sang Prabu Sri Baginda Maharaja Klana Druwis. Umar Maya berkata “Pusaka saya Kasang Putii dan istri saya yang bernama Dewi Bastari pun dicuri juga oleh Negara Ayaban”. Jadi pusaka itu ada di Negara Ayaban kata Umar Maya. “Saya juga diberi barokah oleh Sang Nabi Khidir yaitu diberi dua buah pusaka; Bang Berokan dan Lading Panurat untuk bisa membalas dendam di Negara Ayaban dengan syarat bebarang Berokan dan untuk*

*memperjuangkan Agama Islam”. Setelah dapat laporan dari Umar Maya, Negara Guparman menyerang Negara Ayaban.*

6. *Di Negara Ayaban, Sri Baginda Maharaja Klana Druwis sedang bergembira karena apa yang dicita – citakan telah tercapai semua. Dia sudah memiliki kedua pusaka tersebut dan Dewi Bastari yang cantik jelita. Namun Dewi Bastari masih menolak keinginan Prabu Klana Druwis. “Saya mau menikah dengan kamu asalkan diberi hiburan. Yang saya minta adalah hiburan Berokan”. Langsung saja Raja meminta prajurit untuk mencari tontonan Berokan. Ketika prajurit keluar dari pintu gerbang Ayaban tiba – tiba terlihat oleh mereka ada orang sedang istirahat di bawah pohon. Mereka bertanya pada orang itu “Siapa kamu? Kemana tujuanmu?”. Orang itu pun yang tidak lain adalah Umar Maya menjawab, “Saya tukang bebarang Berokan mau mencari nafkah”. “Kebetulan raja kami membutuhkan tontonan Berokan”, sahut prajurit. Umar Maya langsung dibawa masuk dan dilaporkan ke Sang Maharaja dan akhirnya langsung disuruh untuk mementaskannya. Umar Maya berkata “Saya mau mementaskannya dengan satu syarat”. “Apa syaratnya?” kata sang raja. “Saya bersedia mementaskannya asalkan yang menontonnya hanya Sri Baginda saja dan Ratu. Yang lainnya harus keluar”. Sang Raja pun menurutinya. Akhirnya Berokanpun pentas dan sang Raja senangnya bukan main melihat Berokan itu. Dia terbahak – bahak melihatnya. Tiba – tiba Berokanpun disuruh berhenti oleh sang Raja. “Kenapa kami disuruh berhenti?” tanya Umar Maya. “Karena saya ingin memakai Berokan itu. Boleh tidak?” kata raja. “Boleh Sinuhun (Sang Prabu)” jawab Umar Maya. Akhirnya rajapun bermain berokan. Umar Maya melihat di kursi Raja sebuah pusaka yang bernama*

*Pedang Sapu Jagad kepunyaan sang prabu. Ketika melihat Dewi Bastari, Umar Maya merasa senang sekali atau merasa bahagia. Pedang Sapu Jagad diambil oleh Umar Maya dan dibabadkannya ke kepala Berokan. Kepala Berokan melesat dan sang prabu yang memakainya tewas di tangan Umar Maya. Di luar Keraton Ayaban terjadi peperangan antara prajurit Guparman dan prajurit Ayaban yang dimenangkan oleh prajurit Guparman. Kepala Berokan dan Lading Panurat terbang ke tanah Jawa. Setelah tewasnya Prabu Klana Druwis, Negara Ayaban namanya diganti oleh Umar Maya dengan nama Negara Araban yang langsung dipimpin oleh Adipati Umar Maya sendiri. Prajurit Guparman setelah berhasil mengambil pusaka langsung pulang kembali ke Negara Guparman.*

7. *Di Pulau Jawa yaitu di Cirebon, perkumpulan Para Wali sedang memperjuangkan Islam. Mereka ada yang membuat tontonan Wayang Kulit, Renteng, Topeng dan lain – lain. Tiba – tiba Para Wali menemukan dua benda pusaka di perbatasan Cirebon yaitu di Rajagaluh di bagian Prapatan Panjalin. Dua pusaka itu adalah Kepala Berokan dan Lading Panurat. Setelah menemukan benda – benda tersebut, Para Wali langsung membuat tontonan Berokan untuk menyebarluaskan Agama Islam dengan cara bebarang masuk kampung keluar kampung. Mereka tidak meminta bayaran akan tetapi meminta syarat. Syaratnya adalah penonton mau masuk Agama Islam dengan membaca Shahadat dan bagi yang laki – laki dikhitan (disunat). Masyarakat setuju masuk Agama Islam karena ingin tahu pentas Berokan itu. Setelah memperjuangkan Agama Islam hingga kurang lebihnya 100 % penduduk, para Wali merasa gembira. Berokan tersebut bisa digunakan untuk menolong masyarakat.*

*Contohnya, pada jaman dulu digunakan untuk meruwat rumah, untuk mengobati anak – anak yang sakit panas, untuk membuat panen bagus. Yang menjadi Berokan itu dahulu adalah Sunan Gunung Jati dan Nayaganya adalah Para Wali. Sekarang sudah dilanjutkan oleh para seniman – seniman kita ini untuk mencari nafkah demi tanggung jawab terhadap keluarga masing – masing.*

*Begitulah Sejarah Bang Berokan.*

## APPENDIX IV:

### TRANSCRIPT OF *KYAI HAJI ABDUL RAZAK* INTERVIEW, 13 SEPTEMBER 2005

AR: Sebenarnya tari – tarian daerah seperti itu bukan dari Islam. Tari – tarian tersebut itu dari budaya Jawa yang kemudian disetujui oleh Sunan Kalijaga. Sunan Kalijaga itu mempunyai pendapat, yang mungkin dikutip dari seorang ulama, akhirnya beliau mencoba agar Islam itu diterima masyarakat maka tarian topeng itu diajarkan. Yang saya tahu seperti itu. Jadi bukan asli dari Islam. Seperti wayang yang saya tahu bukan asli dari Islam melainkan dari India.

AR: Iya. Wayang itu bukan dari Islam tetapi Sunan Kalijaga memasukkan cerita – cerita Islam di dalam wayang. Orang – orang yang ingin nonton wayang harus masuk Islam terlebih dahulu. Orang Jawa tidak kenal wayang. Cerita asli wayang itu kan Mahabarata dan Ramayana yang berasal dari Hindu.... Kalau misalnya Tari Topeng sebenarnya saya kurang memahami. Saya masih sangsi kalau Tari Topeng itu dari Islam. Saya tidak percaya topeng itu berasal dari Islam. Kalau unsur mistik itu mungkin ada. Tari topeng itu pakai doa – doa ya kan? Sebenarnya itu bukan doa – doa yang seperti dalam Islam. Itu seperti mantera – mantera. Mantera – mantera itu bukan dari Islam. Setahu saya begitu. Kalau akhirnya kemudian masuk Islam saya kurang tahu karena prakteknya sendiri saya tidak tahu... Kembali lagi kalau masalah topeng setahu saya memang mereka semua orang Islam. Dan mungkin untuk mencari pembenaran, untuk membenarkan dirinya bahwa itu adalah ajaran Islam maka mereka berpendapat seperti itu. Tapi sesungguhnya saya sendiripun buta artinya saya tidak mengerti masalah itu. Karena proses asimilasi yang terjadi antara Sunan Kalijaga antara kebudayaan Islam dengan kebudayaan Jawa masih diperdebatkan di kalangan intelektual Muslim di Jawa sendiri.

AR: Dalam Islam kita tidak boleh menggambar. Membuat sebuah lukisan atau karya di mana karya itu menyerupai binatang atau manusia yang menampakkan sebuah makhluk hidup. Jadi kalau saya dilukis sebatas dada itu diperbolehkan. Tapi kalau dilukis sebatas paha itu tidak boleh. Kalau sebatas dada itu orang tidak mungkin untuk hidup. Orang tidak akan hidup dengan hanya sebatas dada badannya. Tidak ada orang yang hidup seperti itu. ....Tapi kalau manusia sampai kaki, manusia masih bisa hidup. Manusia masih bisa hidup tanpa kedua kaki. Itu yang tidak boleh seperti itu. Nanti di akhirat dia akan diperintahkan oleh Allah untuk memberikan nyawa pada makhluk ciptaannya tersebut. Saya setuju itu adalah ucapan Nabi Muhammad. . Itu kalau lukisan.

LMR: Itu lukisan. kalau kedok bagaimana?

AR: Kalau kedok itu kan cuma muka. Jadi diperbolehkan. Jadi kalau semua itu tidak boleh. Kalau membuat hewan tetapi hanya kepalanya saja itu boleh.

LMR: Tetapi kalau pakai kedok itu ada dalangnya ada kedoknya. Jadi kalau digabungkan seperti hal yang baru bukan dalang lagi yang tampil.

AR: Tidak masalah.

LMR: Kenapa?

AR: Yang dipermasalahkan kan kedoknya. Adapun nanti akan memancarkan kharismatik orang lain bukan menjadi masalah. Tidak ada masalah dalam Islam tentang Topeng.

LMR: Kalau saya tanya pada orang Islam yang sangat konservatif mereka akan setuju atau tidak setuju tidak? Atau barangkali ada bermacam – macam ide tentang itu?

AR: Mungkin akan terjadi perbedaan pendapat dalam masalah fotografi. Sebagian orang tidak setuju dengan fotografi dan sebagian orang bilang boleh – boleh saja dengan fotografi... Kalau fotografi itu bukan lukisan, itu hanya cermin dari kita. Saya membolehkan fotografi. Saya membolehkan orang untuk berfoto dari atas sampai bawah... Ibaratnya itu adalah kita bercermin. Reflection, mirror. Kalau fotografi itu cerminan. Kalau lukisan kita membentuk. Itu nanti akan terjadi perbedaan pendapat. Ada yang tidak setuju dengan saya.

LMR: Tetapi kalau kita kembalikan topik kedoknya...kalau tidak ada masalah dengan kedok, kenapa topeng tidak boleh di pondok pesantrennya?

AR: Kalau topengnya boleh, tetapi kalau tarian topengnya kita tidak membolehkan. Kalau tari topengnya saya belum menerima. Kalau ke depannya nanti saya berubah pikiran ya bisa saja.



## APPENDIX V:

### TRANSCRIPT OF PANJI GUMILANG INTERVIEW, 21 JULY 2005

PG: Kami nyatakan itu mesti ada. Seni mesti ada tidak boleh tidak, wajib. Sebab orang tersenyum tanpa seni juga tidak enak dipandang. Coba Anda sedang marah, dan tersenyum itu tetap nampak wajah Anda yang marah. Tapi kalau senyum dengan seni tinggi marahpun tidak nampak. Jadi mesti ada seni. Harus punya seni. Makanpun harus punya seni. Hidup dengan kawanpun harus punya seni. Bersuara pun harus diatur dengan seni. Sebab kalau kita bersuara tanpa ada nilai seni tidak boleh. Jadi disini seni untuk memperhalus budi, untuk menata budi orang. Anda dapat bayangkan kalau ribuan yang tinggal di satu tempat yang sempit ini tanpa jiwa seni akan terjadi clash sini tersinggung, sana tersinggung. Tapi kalau punya rasa seni akan menyenangkan.

*LMR: Mengapa Anda memilih tari topeng untuk diajarkan disini?*

PG: Itu salah satu dari berbagai tari yang ada di Mahad ini atau di pesantren ini. Ada tari yang dinamakan Buto Galak. Artinya Penampilan orang yang kasar. Kita tampilkan juga ini macam orang yang kasar. Ada tari Cakil. Cakil itu raksasa yang tidak bermoral. Kita tampilkan juga. Itu contoh orang yang tidak bermoral. Tapi ada tari yang indah, Tari Putri, tari pemudah – pemudah yang bermoral. Jadi sebagai contoh kalau bergerak seperti ini tidak bermoral, bergerak seperti ini bermoral. Jadi bukan hanya tari topeng. Tari topeng itu salah satu. Namun, kita memilih itu karena itu tari tradisional yang hampir – hampir dilupakan masyarakat Indonesia. Kita merasa sayang, itu warisan budaya bangsa. Kalau kita tidak lestarikan maka akan hilang. Nanti ada di California. Padahal awalnya dari Cirebon!

*LMR: Bagaimana pendapat Anda tentang seni di dalam kehidupan Islam.*

PG: Perlu. Muslim perlu seni. Sangat memerlukan kesenian. Kami memandang antara seni atau Islam memandang antara seni, olahraga, makan, hidup harus menyatu. Nabi besar kita seniman, sampai pandai menari di atas kuda. Tanpa kendali, dipegang rambut saja dia bisa melaksanakan. Olahraga plus seni menjadi satu. Nabi kita menganjurkan suara yang bagus tatkala membaca sesuatu bacaan. Beliau paling tidak suka kepada ungkapan yang kasar. Jadi dalam Islam seni itu mutlak diperlukan menurut saya. Yang tidak suka silhkan. Jangan pernah memaksa orang yang tidak suka seni. Tapi bagi

kami akan mengajak generasi muda untuk mencintai kesenian, karena dengan kesenian kamu bisa menghaluskan budimu dalam pergaulan... Ya, ada yang melarang, tapi ada juga yang tidak melarang. Karena Islam itu agama yang sempurna, mengapa harus ada larangan yang tidak pada tempatnya? Sekarang kita menggambarkan manusia jahat. Saya tidak mungkin menggambarkan oh ini seperti ini. Tidak mungkin. Marah nanti. Ah kita gambar saja macam 'beginilah manusia jahat.' Dibuatlah topeng jahat. Siapa itu yang topeng jahat itu? Klana... nah Klana! Nanti kalau topeng jahat itu digambarkan seseorang mirip orang itu marahlah orang itu. Kita buat saja topeng jahat? Apa salahnya? Jadi Islam tidak membatasi yang seperti itu. Boleh – boleh saja menurut pemahaman kami disini.

LMR: Tapi tari topeng menggunakan gambaran yang sangat mirip manusia. Dapatkah hal ini diterima di mana saja?

PG: Bagi yang menerima tepat dapat. Jadi mestinya apapun seni itu tidaklah harus menunggu diterima orang atau ditolak orang. Buat saja keindahan, memang tidak serta merta diterima orang. Tidak serta merta 100% orang setuju. Tampilkan keindahan itu. Kata Tuhan kepada umat manusia: "Kamu boleh ingkar kepada Saya dan boleh Iman kepada Saya." Mengapa kita harus lebih dictator daripada Tuhan? Sekarang saya mau bertanya. Mengapa anda dari jauh sekali mencintai tari topeng Cirebon?

LMR: Banyak orang ingin tahu itu. Yang pertama waktu saya masih kecil saya selalu orang teater. Saya selalu ingin mengerti metod – metod teater itu. Dan saya tertarik sekali tentang topeng. Saya senang sekali karena perempuan boleh memakai topeng bisa mengerti bagaimana gerakannya. Jadi itu yang mulai. Saya ingin mengerti gerak – gerakannya. Apalagi topeng Cirebon itu lain dari seni – seni di mana – mana.

PG: Apa lainnya?

LMR: Itu dengan agama Islam. Jarang sekali ada tempat lain perempuan yang boleh memakai kedok dalam konteksnya agama Islam. Jadi saya ingin mengerti ada apa di Cirebon yang berbeda? Saya belum tahu. Saya masih lihat – lihat dulu. Dan apalagi perempuan dan laki – laki kedua – duanya boleh menjadi dalang topeng. Kenapa? Itu tidak ada di tempat – tempat lain. Dan saya sangat senang bisa belajar agama Islam disini supaya bisa mengerti hubungannya antara tarian dan agama Islam.

PG: Begitu? Bagus itu. Jadi tarian dan agama Islam hubungannya ya agama dengan seni tidak boleh berpisah.

LMR: Ya. Dan topeng Cirebon itu sebenarnya Islam kuat sekali di dalamnya. Memang saya tanya kenapa topeng Cirebon disini saya pikir mungkin ada hubungan dengan filosofi pesantren ini tetapi tidak cuma mau belajar topeng Cirebon. Sebenarnya tari – tarian dari mana – mana.

PG: Dari mana – mana. Namun, khusus tari topeng Cirebon mesti diabadikan di Al-Zaytun itu. Mengapa? Karena ini dibawa oleh tokoh – tokoh penyebar agama. Kemudian dengan itu pada jamannya orang diajak beragama yang baik yang toleran. Disitu ada jiwa toleransi. Maka kami suka itu. Kalau sampai kepada tari yang mengeluarkan senjata, kami larang disini. Tari Jawa Tengah selalu menggunakan kris. Disini tidak boleh. Kita disini damai tidak boleh begini. Jadi kalau tari topeng boleh.

LMR: Tapi kalau tari Panji harus pakai kris.

PG: Tidak boleh disini. Krisnya ada disini dan disini. Sebab ini bisa menundukan apa saja dan ini bisa menaklukkan apa saja. Kalau ini merusak. Jadi nanti disini damai tapi ada begini. Maka tidak ditampakan krisnya masukan ke dada simpan di kepala. Sekali – sekali pakai ini krisnya.

**APPENDIX VI:****SANGGAR IN THE CITY OF CIREBON 2005 / 2008<sup>1128</sup>**

| <b>Art forms:</b>                                 | <b>Number of Groups<br/>Active/Registered<br/>2005:</b> | <b>Number of Groups<br/>Active/Registered<br/>2008:</b> |
|---|---|---|
| <i>Karawitan</i> (gamelan music and singing)      | 31/31   | 26/7  |
| <i>Tari</i> (dance, including topeng)             | 19/19   | 15 /3   |
| <i>Wayang</i>                                     | 6/6   | 0/0   |
| <i>Performance Arts</i> (general)                 | 12/12   | 0/0   |
| <i>Religious</i> (Islamic) art                    | 6/6   | 0/0   |
| <i>Gending Kontemporer</i> (contemporary gamelan) | 2/2   | 0/0   |
| <i>Seni Upacara</i> (Ritual)                      | 4/4   | 0/0   |
| <i>Seni Musik</i>                                 | 14/14   | 30/0  |
| <i>Seni Rupa/Lukis</i> (chiefly glass-painting)   | 29/29   | 10/10   |
| <i>Seni Kerajinan Cendra</i> (crafts)             | 11/11   | 0/0   |
| <i>Seni Teater</i> (Traditional and Modern Drama) | 10/10   | 7/5   |

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<sup>1128</sup> Source: *Departemen Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata* (Culture and Tourism Department) 2005, 2008.

## GLOSSARY

*Adat*: custom or customary law

*Adzan*: the call to prayer

*Al-Zaytun*: (*Allshlah Ma'had Al-Zaytun*) The largest *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in Indonesia.

*Alun-alun*: village square near the *kraton* or mansion of the local *regent* (governor). This was often the locale of *topeng babakan* performances, particularly during *bebarang*.

*Amarah (marah)*: anger, fury, becoming angry. Associated with the character Klana.

*Astana Gunung Jati*: the Sunan Gunung Jati palace complex

*ASTI, Bandung* (Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia, Bandung) The Art Academy in Bandung. It is now called *Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia (STSI)*.

*Aurat*: The parts of the body considered taboo in Islam. For women this includes genitalia, hair, chin and neck. Orthodox Muslims consider the feet *aurat* as well. Genitalia is considered *aurat* for males.

*Ayun-Ayunan*: a type of light acrobatics performed during *topeng dinaan* in Lelea, Indramayu.

*Babad*: a text that describes the descent of rulers of a specific region written in chronicle form.

*Babad Cirebon*: chronicles of Cirebon.

*Barangan*: see *bebarang* and *ngamen*.

*Barisan Tani Indonesia (BTI)*: Indonesian Peasant Front

*Barongsai*: A full-body mask tradition of Chinese origin.

*Batin* (Arabic): esotericism, i.e. the internal path (*tarekat*) that leads to truth (*hakekat*) in Sufism.

*Bebarang*: itinerant form of *topeng* performance.

*Berokan*: (a/k/a *Barongan* or *Barong Kepit* (Cirebon Javanese). Literally: not yet bathed ('*belum mandi*'). This old mask theatre tradition is unique to Cirebon. An animal mask (usually a tiger) is performed from inside a large sack. The dance is accompanied by flute, tambourine, drum, and bamboo trumpet.

*Bian Lian*: “changing faces.” A Sichuan mask form that was once known in Java. Associated with Sichuan opera, but it was also performed as an itinerant form. Also known as *Po Lien*.

*Bismillah*: In the Name of Allah

*BKI*: *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde* (abbreviation for the Dutch journal)

*BKKNI*: *Badan Koordinasi Kesenian Nasional Indonesia*: Coordinating Body for Indonesian Arts.

*Bodor/Bodoran*: clown characters in *topeng Cirebon*; comedy

*Bule*: literally: albino or Caucasian.

*Bupati*: a high administrative official during the Mataram and Dutch periods. The title may refer to *kraton* officials or local government. Today the term refers to the regent of a *kabupaten*.

*Buroq (Al-Buroq)*: a mask performance tradition from Cirebon with Islamic roots. *Al-Buroq* is the celestial steed that carries the Prophet during his mystical night journey (*Isra*) from Mecca to Jerusalem, followed by his ascent (*Mi'raj*) to the seven heavens.

*Buyut*: lit: ancestor. Ancestral or sacred place, often a graveyard.

*Candi*: An ancient Hindu or Buddhist temple or shrine.

*Cap Go Me*: Chinese New Year.

*Capang*: *topeng* dance movement, meaning we should always give our hand to help those in need.

*Cirebon*: The *pasisir* (northwest coast) region of Java; also known as Cerbon

*Cirebon Javanese*: The language of Cirebon. It combines Javanese and Sundanese, with considerable variation depending on the region.

*Dakwah*: process of Islamic conversions. It was integrated into performance practices to raise awareness of behavior and thought as relates to ideal Islamic standards.

*Dalang*: term used to designate the leader in many forms of art. It often has a spiritual dimension.

*Dalang Topeng*: a master mask (*topeng*) performer of pedigree.

*Dalang Wayang*: puppeteer

*Damar Wulan*: the hero who defeats the attacks of Menak Jingga. He is rewarded by marrying the princess and becoming the ruler of Majapahit.

*Dangdut*: a contemporary Indonesian music genre that incorporates Arab and Indian influences.

*Darul Islam (DI)*: The once prominent separatist Islamic movement in several regions of Indonesia, including West Java. Also referred to as *Darul Islam/Tentara Islam*.

*Debus*: An invulnerability practice that is rooted in the *dzikir* practices of the Sufi *Rifai 'yya*, wherein practitioners pierce their flesh with metal objects without drawing a drop of blood. It continues to be performed as an entertainment in Cirebon and Banten.

*Devadasi* (Sanskrit) female “servants of god” in Hindu temples who sing and dance in temple rituals.

*Doa*: (*do'a*). Prayer seeking a blessing from God.

*Dodoan*: slow, opening section of a musical composition in *topeng*

*Doger*: a form of *ronggeng*. In the past, it was often performed by *dalang topeng*.

*Dukun*: healer, shaman

*Dzikir*: the devotional remembrance of God.

*Dzikir Dhohir*: collective, communal, vocal *dhikr*

*Dzikir Saman* (Cirebon Javanese): spiritual concert

*Dzikir Sirri*: silent *dzikir*

*Elang*: an honorific, mystical title associated with the Cirebon court.

*G30S/PKI*: Also known as: *G30S*, *Gestapu*; *Lubang Buaya*; *PKI Killings*. The Soeharto regimes' version of events, wherein six generals and one military officer were murdered. It ushered in the Soeharto years.

*Gagah*: a strong character type

*Galeong*: (also known as *Gleong*, *doyang*). A *topeng* dance movement. There is variation in how this movement is performed. The arms are often involved, with the left arm bent at the elbow, and the right arm extended. The legs are grounded, with a wide stance; the back is arched while moving in a clockwise, circular motion.

*Gamelan*: the percussive orchestra of Java and Bali

*Gambuh*: see *sobrah*

*Gaya*: a style; often regionally determined

*Gedut*: A *topeng* walking movement for a strong character. It is associated with Tumenggung and Klana. The left arm is curved and the right arm is relatively straight.

*Gestapu*: (Acronym: GERakan SepTember TigA PULuh, September 30<sup>th</sup> Movement). The term generated by the Soeharto regime in reference to the September 30<sup>th</sup> Movement.

*Gestok*: (Acronym: GERakan SaTu Oktober, October 1<sup>st</sup> Movement). The preferred term of the author for the “coups” that occurred in 1965. *Gestapu* is the official New Order term for the killings of the generals that signaled Sukarno’s fall, and Soeharto’s ascendance in the early morning hours of 1 October 1965.

*Golkar*: (Acronym: *Golongan Karya*). The political organization of the New Order.

*Gotong Royang*: mutual cooperation

*Hadit*: (*Hadith*: *Hadis*). The Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad that form the *Sunnah*. *Hadit* are ancillary to the *Quran*.

*Hajat*: (*hajatan*) ceremonial feast

*Haji*: a learned Muslim who has performed the hajj.

*Hajj*: the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. One of the five pillars of Islam.

*Hakekat* (*hakikat*, *haqiqa*): a mystical stage that corresponds to religious truth or essence. It is related to the “reality of realities” (*haqiqat al-haqa'iq*).

*Halus*: refined; often in reference to the character Panji

*Hiburan*: entertainment

*Honocoroko* (a/k/a *hanacaraka*): Javanese alphabet; an elliptical language in which 20 syllables are derived from a linguistic message and used to either conceal its meaning or for comic effect.

*Ibing kursus*: see *Tari Kursus*

*Ikat kepala*: a tied head covering sometimes worn by the *topeng* character Rummyang, *Patih*, or *Tumenggung*

*Ilmu* (*'ilm*): scientific or esoteric knowledge. In the context of *topeng*, it refers to the latter.



*Imam*: community religious leader; honorific for an Islamic scholar

*Imlek*: the two weeks following the Chinese New Year (*Cap Go Me*).

*Islamist*: Muslims who view Islam as a political ideology as well as their religion.

*Izin Pertunjukan*: performance permit.

*Jaipongan*: Modern Sundanese music and dance that corresponds to *ketuk tilu*.

*Jaka Bluwo*: one of the Panji tales

*Jalak pengkor*: “lame bird,” a *topeng* walking movement

*Jampi*: A magic spell that is often written or spoken, but it can also be an action, such as spitting.

*Jangkung Nilo*: (a/k/a Jangkung Ilo): *topeng* dance movement that means we should measure our wishes with our capabilities.

*Jawa Kuno*: Javanese Cirebon term for Old Javanese script, or *Kawi*

*Jilbab*: Muslim women’s head covering.

*Juru kunci*: literally: key keeper. The custodian of a sacred place

*Juru panerangan*: information or propaganda officer

*Kabupaten*: administrative government unit or county headed by a *bupati*

*Kacapi*: a zither instrument associated with Sunda.

*Kalbu*: the heart; the organ of perception in Sufism.

*Kalimat Shahadat*: (*Kalimah Syahadah*): To bear witness. It is the first pillar of Islam, which is said to separate believers from disbelievers: “There is no God but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of God.”

*Kampung*: a rural village.

*Kartu Anggauta Kesenian*: Art Membership Card (a/k/a *kartu kuning*, or “yellow card”).

*Kartu Kuning*: see *Kartu Anggauta Kesenian*

*Kasinoman lalang*: a rite of passage ritual for boys in which a female *ronggeng* performs.

*Kasinoman wadon*: a rite of passage ritual for girls in which a male *dalang topeng* performs.

*Kawi*: Old Javanese script, also *Jawa Kuno*.

*Kayang*: (Cirebon Javanese) a backward arch performed in *ayun-ayunan*.

*Kebatinan*: the inner life; generally, mysticism and spirituality

*Kebaya*: a traditional Javanese woman's blouse.

*Kecamatan*: a regional sub-district

*Kecrek*: metal plates attached to the *kotak topeng*.

*Kedok* (Cirebon Javanese): mask (Indonesian: *topeng*)

*Kejawen*: Javanese mysticism

*Kekuatan*: personal power

*Kelenteng*: a Chinese temple

*Kendang Topeng*; The drum set employed for *topeng*. It includes two large double-headed drums (*kendang gede*) and one or two smaller ones (*kendang cilik*). The *kendang cilik* rests above the large ones and are hit either with the drummers' hands and/or drumming sticks.

*Kenyut*: *topeng* dance movement, meaning "enchantment": subtext: we must be enchanted with all that is positive and constructive.

*Kepala Desa*: the head of a village

*Kering*: the medium-fast tempo part of the *topeng* music

*Ketop-ketop gepeng*: *topeng*. Refers to the inner eye of the *sobrah* (see "*picisan*").

*Ketuk Tilu*: lit: three *ketuk* (small bronze gongs). A Sundanese female dance and song genre with courtesan connections. It is related to *tayuban* and accompanied by one or more *ronggeng*.

*Keturunan*: (*katurunan*) The genealogy of *dalang topeng* in which a parent comes from a lineage of performing artists whom they trace to one of the *wali*. *Turunan* refers to the same situation; however, both parents must have this lineage. Today, less distinction is made between the two. Hence *keturunan* is employed in this study.

*Kidung*: a ballad form.

*KODIM*: *Komando District Militer*, or District Military Command

*KOMEN*: *Komando Operasi Mental*. The ideological branch of KOPKAMTIB

*KOPKAMTIB*: *Komando Operasi Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban*. The Operational Command for the Restoration of Security and Order. The Soeharto military police who deal with political dissidence. The New Order version of the Dutch colonial *Rust en Orde* (literally: peace and tranquility).

*Kotak topeng*: a special chest where the masks are stored.

*Kraton*: (*keraton*): palace, court

*Kraton Kacirebonan*: The youngest *kraton* in Cirebon; an active promoter of Cirebonese arts.

*Kraton Kanoman*: One of Cirebon's palaces, built in 1679. They promote Cirebon arts.

*Kraton Kaprabonan*: Founded in 1702, Cirebon's smallest *kraton*. It has a strong *tarekat* orientation.

*Kraton Kasepuhan*: Cirebon's oldest palace and one of the oldest Islamic structures in Java, founded c. 1480.

*Kreasi Baru*: contemporary choreography

*Krismon*: acronym: *Krisis Moneter*: The financial crisis that pervaded Indonesia's economy in 1997.

*Kyai* (*Ki*; *Kiai*): Honorific for a teacher of Islamic theology and jurisprudence. The term often corresponds to a Sufi master, or the head of a *pesantren*

*Lakon*: story, or story outline

*Lebaran* (*Idul Fitri*): the first of *Shawal*. It marks the end of the fasting month, *Ramadan*.

*LEKRA*: *Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat* (People's Cultural League)

*Lokcan*: silk crepe. Part of the *topeng* costume that is worn like a cape.

*Lurah*: village chief who is appointed by the head of the district.

*M'barang*: the verb form of "bebarang"

*Maghrib*: sunset prayer; west

*Majdhūb*: the attracted one, e.g. disciple attraction for his shaykh

*Makam*: grave, tomb.

*Mandikan kembang*: initiatic bath that incorporates flowers and assorted ingredients.

*Manifesto Kebudayaan* (1963-1964): Cultural Manifesto. Also known as *Manikebu* (lit: “buffalo semen”); a derogatory term that was later appropriated by activists connected to the movement.

*Manipol*: Political Manifesto based on Sukarno’s 1959 speech

*Mantera*: Mantra or *jampi*, often performed in conjunction with prayers

*Mapag Sri*: ceremony following the rice harvest

*Marifat* (*Ma’rifat*, *ma’rifa*): Sufi term that corresponds to “eye”; the third ‘inner’ eye; the *picis* in *topeng*. It corresponds to intuitive knowledge; gnosis. *Ronggeng* represents *marifat* in *tasawuf* performance theory.

*Maulud* (*Mulud*, *Maulid*): the Prophet Muhammad's birthday

*Mbah Kuwu*: literally: grand village head. *Dalang* refer to Walangsungsang by this name (see Walangsungsang)

*Mesjid*: mosque

*Muhammadiyah*: Nationally recognized modern Muslim movement founded in 1912 that addresses religious, educational, and public welfare issues in Indonesia.

*Murid*: disciple; student

*Musafir*: (Arabic) Pilgrim, traveler

*Nabi*: (Indonesian) Prophet

*Nafas* (*napas*): breath; an important element of *dzikir*.

*Nahdlatul Ulama* (*NU*). The Association of Muslim Scholars. (literally, “the Awakening of the Muslim Scholars). Founded in 1926, it is a nationally recognized conservative Muslim political party since the 1970s with a mystical orientation (*kaum tua*). It has ties to many *pesantren*.

*Naqshbandiyya*: one of the most widespread of all Sufi orders (*tarekat*). It is a “sober” order and proponents of silent *dzikir*. It is one of the most widely practiced *tarekat* branches in Cirebon.

*Nayaga*: gamelan musicians

*Nenek Moyang*: ancestor

*New Order* (Indonesian: *Orde Baru*). The Soeharto government

*Ngamen*: itinerant art forms. See *bebarang*.

*Ngunjung*: veneration of ancestors at the shrine of a village founder, sometimes accompanied by a *topeng* performance.

*Nopeng*: the verb form of “*topeng*”

*NU*: see *Nahdlatul Ulama*.

*Nindak/Njangka*: *topeng* dance movement meaning to act or carry out. We always must act in a way that we take the right path, a path “*yang diridhoi Allah SWT*” (Allah the Almighty and most worthy of praise.”)

*Nji* (*Nyi, Nyai*): Title of respect for either an older women, the wife of a religious villager, or from a noble family. This term was adopted by *sinden* (female singers) who accompanied *wayang kulit* performances beginning in the 1950s.

*Nyekar*: ritual ceremony at graveside with flowers and water

*Orde Baru*: see: New Order

*Paceklik*: periods of scarcity; often associated with famines or drought.

*Padi*: unhusked rice

*Pamatang*: storyteller in *wayang wong* and *topeng*.

*Panakawan*: royal servant; clown-servant and advisor to the hero in the *wayang*.

*Pancasila*: the five basic principles that form the ideological and political foundation of the Republic of Indonesia: 1) belief in one God; 2) humanity; 3) national unity; 4) democracy; and 5) social justice.

*Pangeran Panggung*: lit: Prince of the Stage. Along with *Seh Siti Jenar*, he was considered a heretic who was condemned to the stake. Many *dalang topeng* and *dalang wayang* trace their lineage to Pangeran Panggung.

*Pangeran Panjunan*: originally called Maulana Abdurrahman, he was a son of the Sultan of Baghdad, and a contemporary of Sunan Gunung Jati who was also pivotal in bringing Islam to Cirebon.

*Panggung*: stage, platform

*Panji tales*: known throughout Java, Sumatra, Cambodia, Thailand, and Malaysia. There are many stories, but they all circulate around the relationship between four kingdoms, and Panji's adventures searching for his lost love.

*Pasisir*: northern coast of Java, including Cirebon

*Patih*: the chief minister or deputy to a *bupati* or governor

*Peci*: Indonesian rimless cap associated with Muslim male attire

*Pelog*: seven-tone tuning system/scale. According to Jaap Kunst, in the early twentieth century, *kraton* musicians linked this system with the *wali* saint, Sunan Bonang.

*Pemimpin*: (*pimpinan*). The leader of a group

*Penca silat*: Indonesian martial arts

*Peranakan*: descendants of Chinese immigrants to Java

*Pesantren*: Islamic boarding school

*Pesinden*: (*pesindhén*) female singer usually accompanied by gamelan

*Picis/Picisan*: Two attached circles, usually constructed from human hair and sewn into the front center of the *sobrah*. It signifies the inner eye.

*Pimpinan*: see *Pemimpin*

*PKI*: *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (Indonesian Communist Party)

*PKI Killings*: see G30S/PKI

*Po Lien*: See *Bian Lian*

*Pondok*: Lit: hut. A *pondok pesantren* is an Islamic boarding school.

*Priangan*: the highland plateau region of West Java

*Priyayi*: Javanese elite society

*Puasa*: fast, fasting

*Puro Mangkunagaran*: (*Mangkunegoro*) Surakarta (Solo) court

*Pusaka*: a spiritually endowed heirloom

*Quran*: (*Al-Qur'an*, Holy *Koran*). The Holy Book of Islam, comprised of the word of God, dictated by Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad who wrote it down word for word.

*Raden* (Javanese): title applied to male royal descendants; prince

*Raja* (Sanskrit): king

*Rasa*: taste, intuition; associated with internal states, body feeling, and consciousness

*Rawis*: see *Sumping*

*Rebab*: a two-string fiddle of Middle-Eastern origin

*Rebana*: traditional Muslim music in which drumming is accompanied with Quranic recitation.

*Roh*: spirit

*Rombongan*: an informal troupe

*Ronggeng*: Courtesan dancer-singers. Today, it is a generic term for professional women who dance and sing.

*Ronggeng Monyet*: itinerant performers comprised of two musicians (*saron* and *kendang*), a *dalang*, and a monkey. It dates back to the 1970s and is similar to *topeng bebarang* in which performers travel far distances and perform acts for money. In *topeng monyet*, the monkey is the star. The *dalang* leads the monkey through a series of physical feats.

*Rust en Ordre* (Dutch: literally: peace and tranquility). A Dutch colonial governmental branch dedicated to arresting those suspected of non-compliance with colonial rule. Soeharto's feared security agency was modeled after it.

*Ruwatan*: ritual purification ceremony

*Sahur*: the meal eaten prior to daybreak during the fasting month of Ramadan

*Salaf*: traditional Muslims corresponding to Sunni beliefs

*Saman*: (Arabic: *al-samâ'*). Literally; "listening," or "spiritual audition." Its focus is the primacy of hearing, which is synthesized with conceptualizations of the Divine. *Sama* usually occurs in conjunction with *dzikir*. There are three ingredients to *saman*: poetry, musical instruments, and (infrequently) dance.

*Sampur (soder)*: the long dance scarf worn in *topeng*.

*Sanggar*: a troupe or studio. The term was formally adopted to include all artist troupes during the New Order.

*Santri*: Traditional Muslims, including students who attend *pesantren*

*Santriwan*: Male students who attend *pesantren*.

*Santriwati*: Female students who attend *pesantren*.

*Saron*: metallophone gamelan instrument

*Sawah*: wet-rice irrigation farming

*Sawer*: donations made during a performance for good luck

*Seh*: see *Shaykh*

*Selamet*: well-being

*Selamatan*: ritual feast

*Sembah / Sembahyang*: (Sanskrit). a gesture of reverence.

*Shahadat (or Syahadat, Shahadah)*: The Muslim profession of faith and the first pillar of Islam: "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger.

*Shalat*: one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Prayer that is incumbent upon all Muslims.

*Shalawat*: blessings or prayers that exalt the Prophet Muhammad, often in musical form.

*Shari'a (shariah)* Islamic law or revelation

*Shaykh*: A spiritual master or guide (also *Shaikh, Seh*)

*Silsilah (Arabic: Silsila)*: A Sufi chain of transmission leading to the Prophet.

*Sintren*: trance dance performed by a young girl.

*Sirih*: betel-nut; chewed by *dalang topeng* in combination with other ingredients prior to performing Panji.

*Siswa-siswi*: secular terms for *pesantren* male and female students. *Siswa-siswi* is often employed at modern *pesantren*, instead of the *santriwan* (males) and *santriwati* (female) designations.

*Slendro*: five-tone music system. Jaap Kunst states that musicians affiliated with Cirebon *kraton* attribute this tonal system to one of the *walisanga*, Sunan Kalijaga.

*Sobrah*: headdress constructed from human hair. Also known as *gambuh* or *tekes*

*Soder*: see *sampur*.



*STSI, Bandung (Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia, Bandung)*. University of Indonesian Art, Bandung. Formerly ASTI.

*Sufi*: a practitioner of mystical Islam

*Sufism*: the inner, esoteric dimension of Islam.

*Suling*: bamboo flute

*Suluk*: Javanese mystical poem/chant in conjunction with journeying; in the mystic sense, of being on the path.

*Sumping*: (*rawis*) long strands of beads interspersed with yarn balls that dangle from the left and right side of the *sobrah*.

*Sunah* (Arabic: *sunnah*): the Way of the Prophet. A form of revelation. It is not situated in the *Quran* but authenticated with *Quranic* verses.

*Sunan*: honorific for an Islamic king, abbreviated from *susuhunan* (the venerated one). The title is also associated with the *wali*.

*Sunan Gunung Jati*: born Syarif Hidayat. One of the nine Sufi saints thought to have brought Islam to Java. He ruled Cirebon in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century.

*Sunan Kalijaga*: one of the nine Sufi saints, whom many Indonesians say created *wayang kulit* and *topeng* to proselytize Islam in Java.

*Sunda*: The western geographic part of Java known as the Priangan

*Sundanese*: the people and language of Sunda. Cirebon regionally belongs to this group, although the Cirebonese people self-identify as Javanese.

*Sunatan*: circumcision ritual

*Susuhunan*: The title of the sovereign of Mataram. “Sultan” is the designated term at the Cirebon and Yogyakarta courts.

*Susuk*: alchemical use of diamonds, gold, silver, and other metals implanted subcutaneously.

*Syrik*: (Arabic: *sirik*) polytheism and polytheistic practices not subject to Allah’s will

*Talaf*: reformed Muslims

*Talèdhèk*: see *ronggeng*

*Tanda Kenjataan*: “Certificate of Proof.” Anti-communist clearance card granted to artists in 1966.

*Tarekat (Tariqat, tariqa)*: the internal path leading to truth. It also connotes a Sufi order.

*Tari*: dance

*Tari Kursus (a/k/a ibing kursus)*. A genre of solo presentational dance based on *topeng* characterization and dance structure related to *tayuban* or classical dance.

*Tarling*: a Cirebonese hybrid musical style featuring *guiTAR* and *suLING* (flute).

*Tasawuf*: mystical Islam in Java. It is synonymous with “Sufism,” a term that is neither widely known nor used in Cirebon.

*Tasbih*: a rosary in which the formula “*Subhan Allah*” (literally: “Praise God”) is repeated. *Dalang topeng* often incorporate *tasbih* into their prayers.

*Tawajjuh*: Arabic: *tawajjuh*. Lit: to face Allah and meditate on Him. It corresponds to *tasawuf* or Sufism and the direct point of contact between a guide and disciple.

*Tawur*: a spontaneous response to a performer, usually in the form of small change.

*Tayub, tari tayub*: Aristocratic men’s dance that corresponds to *ketuk tilu*, but is more developed and with a full gamelan. It may have developed from *ronggeng gunung*.

*Tekes*: a term for headdress, more commonly referred to as *sobrah* or *gambuh*; sometimes referred to as *tekes Panji* or *Sobrah Panji*.

*Tirakat-puasa*: Intensive meditation and fasting done by *dalang topeng* to promote their strength/power.

*TNI: Tentara Nasional Indonesia*. Indonesia’s military branch

*Topeng*: a mask or mask performance

*Topeng Babakan*: Coined “*topeng kecil*” or “small *topeng*” by Dutch scholar, Th. Pigeaud. It comprises one or more characters or “acts.” Uses *pelog* or *prawa (slendro)* tuning.

*Topeng Dinaan*: an all-day *topeng* performance.

*Topeng Hajatan*: *topeng* performed in accordance with a ritual (*hajatan*) such as a wedding, circumcision, or seven-month pregnancy.

*Turunan*: a *dalang topeng*’s lineage wherein both parents are *dalang topeng* or puppeteers who trace their genealogy to the *wali*. See *Keturunan*.

*Ulama*: an Islamic scholar or teacher with jurisdiction over legal and social matters.

*Ules*: the small cloth that protects the mask when stored.

*VOC*: [*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*]. The Dutch East Indies Company

*Wahyu*: divine radiance, Javanese concept of power

*Wajd*: emotion, mystic ecstasy

*Walangsungsang*: The important religious teacher, elder, and son of Prabu Siliwangi, the last king of Pajajaran. Many Cirebonese consider him the founder of Cirebon. Although Sunan Kalijaga is best known for developing art strategies in the region, Walangsungsang (who predated the *wali*) was interested in combining religion with Cirebonese performance. *Dalang topeng* refer to him as *Mbah Kuwu*.

*Wali*: Muslim saint, friend, or ally of God

*Walisanga* (Indonesian): (Javanese: *Wali songgo*; Sundanese: *Wali Salapan*) The nine Sufi saints believed to have introduced Islam to the people of Java.

*Wayang Golek Cepak*: the wooden rod puppet theatre of Cirebon, thematically constellated around the *menak* stories of Amir Hamza, the uncle of Muhammad.

*Wayang Kulit*: leather-puppet shadow form and/or theatre. *Wayang kulit* is found throughout Java, including Cirebon.

*Wayang Wong*: coined *grote topengspel* (large *topeng* plays) by Pigeaud (Indonesian: *topeng besar*). A masked performance with several performers telling a story (*lakon*) from the *Mahabharata* or Panji tales.

*Zahir* (Arabic): Exotericism, or the external elements of Islam, such as *shari'a* and the *Quran*.

*Zakat*: almsgiving; one of the five pillars of Islam.

*Ziarah* [Arabic: *Ziyara*]: a devotional pilgrimage, usually to the tomb of the *wali* saints or a sacred ancestor.

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