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The Indonesian Journal of Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies, published biannually by the Doctoral Program in Islamic Law, Islamic University of Indonesia, serves as a platform for intellectual exchanges and interdisciplinary studies on various aspects of Islam including, but not limited to, theology, law, education, economy and politics and how they are historically and contingently embedded, expressed and articulated in a variety of historical contexts. The journal welcomes contributions from scholars and researchers of various disciplinary backgrounds in the form of original (theoretical or empirical) research articles on various issues related to Islam in both its normative and historical dimensions.

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INDONESIAN JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY ISLAMIC STUDIES (IJIIS)

Demangan Baru No. 24 2nd floor, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Telp./ Fax. +62 274 523637

Email : ijiiismi@gmail.com

Website : <http://journal.uui.ac.id/index.php/IJIIS>

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EDITORIAL

We are very pleased to present the Indonesian Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies (IJIIS) Volume 3, No. 1, 2019. This issue mainly consists of selected papers presented in a special seminar held by the Indonesian Journal of Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies (IJIIS) on “*Fiqh of Culture: Texts, Locality and Globality*” later this year.

The first article by Nur Khaliq Ridwan discusses the Qur’anic perspective on the other culture as the normative foundation for Muslims in dealing with diversity and differences. The second article by Aguk Irawan NM then looks at the historical practice of art in the time of Prophet to show the early empirical Islamic response to literature and fine arts. Following this, Addiarrahman’s article discusses the urgency of new *fiqh* paradigm in supporting sustainable development. This is followed by Widodo Brontowitono’s article on the actualization of the Javanese ecoculture and Islamic eco-theology as one of possible efforts toward sustainable development. In the fifth article, Elizabeth Inandiak reveals some interesting messages in the famous Serat Centhini on green local culture, the duty to remember and recognition of beauty. The last article by Azrial, Pipin Armita and Muh. Rizki then examines the tradition of *Balimau Kasai* in Kampar as an example of integration of Islamic values and local culture.

It is hoped that this publication will encourage further research and discussion on various issues concerning Islam and Muslim societies from various disciplinary backgrounds.

Editor in-Chief

GREEN LOCAL WISDOM, THE DUTY TO REMEMBER, AND RECOGNITION OF BEAUTY IN SERAT CENTHINI

Elizabeth D. Inandiak
Email: elinandiak@gmail.com

Abstract

Serat Centhini is often described as the encyclopedia of Java. The poem was indeed written at the beginning of the 19th century, but the “plot” takes place at the 17th century, a pivotal time in Central Java where Islam spreads and settles, while the older cults are still alive. Serat Centhini acts as a colossal cultural laboratory which tests the ancestral knowledge and traditions in the light of the new science of Islam. Will these knowledge and traditions become obsolete and disappear on their own? Will they persist because of their universal foundations, or because of their deep roots in local wisdom, or their capacity to adjust and embrace a new form? Will they enter into conflict or go underground? The experimentation works two ways: will the new science of Islam be flexible enough to accommodate the ancestral world view in its modernity? This paper seeks to present three brilliant cultural strategies successfully put to test in the Centhini laboratory, in their ability to transcend time, and embrace social and religious transformations: green local wisdom, the duty to remember, and recognition of Beauty.

In this paper, SC refers to the twelve volumes of *Serat Centhini* in Javanese, that is namely the complete work, transcribed into Latin

characters by Kamajaya.¹ Cantos with no SC mention are quotations from *Centhini, Forty Nights and One of Rain*, a free interpretation of *Serat Centhini* by Elizabeth D. Inandiak published in Indonesian.²

In 1956, at the Sorbonne University in Paris, Prof. Dr. H. M. Rasjidi, former Minister for Religious Affairs under President Sukarno (January-October 1946), had submitted his PhD dissertation written in French and entitled.³ One introductory paragraph reads:

*“The science that bloomed in Java is the science of perfection, known also as the science of happiness. It is a science sought by scholars and writers, be they practicing believers or those repelled by rites. Pious people prefer to keep silent about this science and will only mention it cautiously for often the details of the subject do not fully conform to the dogmas of Islam. So I wanted to know more...”*⁴

In 1989, on my first visit to Indonesia, I was fortunate to meet Prof. Dr. H. M. Rasjidi at his home, in Jakarta, just two years before he passed away. The elderly scholar offered me a pamphlet he had written and published in English on *Kebatinan*, Javanese mysticism, in which he severely criticized an anonymous work written in the early 19th century entitled *Suluk Gatoloco*, from the hero's name meaning “walking penis”. A mystical provocateur and an opium addict, Gatoloco spends his time challenging ulama in verbal jousts. A few years later, I came across H. M. Rasjidi's fascinating PhD at the Sorbonne University. The “*Centhini's* Javanese-French connection” had been reactivated. I too wanted to know more...

And so it came about that the Crown Prince of the Sultanate of Surakarta Adiningrat, commissioned the three court poets, Sastranagara, Ranggasutrasna and Sastradipura, to compose an ancient tale encompassing all the natural and supernatural sciences of Java, as far as

1 Kamajaya, *Serat Centhini Latin* (Yogyakarta, Yayasan Centhini, 12 Vol., 1986 -1991

2 Elizabeth D. Inandiak, *Centhini, Kekasih yang Tersembunyi* (Gramedia, 2015).

3 H. M. Rasjidi, *Considérations critiques du Livre Tjentini (Critical Thoughts on The Book of Centhini)*

4 Documents pour servir à l'histoire de l'Islam à Java Penerbit Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient tahun 1977 penulis H.M Rasjidi

*the science of happiness, and to do so in sung verses in order to entrance its audience and to awaken it to its folly.*⁵

In the first Canto, SC mentions only one poet appointed by the crown prince to compose the work: Sutrasna. In accordance with the subsequent research of several scholars, I restored the three probable names of these poets, the main authors of SC.⁶

Whatever, the writing of *Serat Centhini* started on the 26th of the month of *Muharam*, in the year 1742 of the Javanese calendar (1809 of the Gregorian calendar). Its original title is *Suluk Tambangraras*. *Tambangraras* is the name of the heroine or more precisely the wife of the hero. *Suluk* is a Javanese word derived from Arabic and among other things, refers to the incantatory songs of the shadow master striving, all night long, to inscribe particular moods while unfolding the play. The word is also used to denote all Sufi literature in Java. In Sufi terminology, *suluk* means “walking on The Way”. Yet the work is popularly known under the title *Serat Centhini*, from the name of *Tambangraras*’s maidservant.

The result is an epic narrative spread over twelve volumes, four thousand two hundred pages, seven hundred and twenty-two Cantos, and more than two hundred thousand verses. It follows the extravagant wanderings of two young princes and one young princess forced to flee the holy Islamic kingdom of Giri besieged by the armies of Sultan Agung who, at the beginning of the 17th century, conquered almost all the territories of the island of Java. In the confusion of the siege, the eldest son Amongraga (originally called Jayengresmi), loses his two younger siblings. As they search each other, the two princes and the princess of Giri sample all the sciences and sensations that Java nurtures in its deserted temples, in the most intense moments of its luxurious festivities, in its lush forests inhabited by rebellious genii, in the deepest of its caves, in the hot and eroticized dormitories of its religious

5 Elizabeth D Inandiak, *Centhini, Kekasih yang Tersembunyi* (Gramedia, 2015), p. 16-17

6 “See Homage to a few *Centhini* Pioneers” at the end of the paper

schools, and in the illuminated abysses of its oceans. On the way, they enrol people they meet in the confusion of their own wanderings: musicians, tumblers, transvestites, Sufi scholars, prostitutes, hermits, blacksmiths, medicine men, ulama women, martial artists, robbers, a whole collection of free minds, runaways and outcasts who tinker unceasingly at the periphery of power and weave the hallucinating sensual and spiritual yarn of Java. The heroes keep losing and finding one another under other names and latitudes, and even sometimes under new appearances. Their vagrancy soon overtakes the known borders of geography and metamorphoses into a utopian constellation called the Upside-Down World.

Serat Centhini is often described as the encyclopedia of Java. The bewildering accumulation of the most diverse kinds of knowledge is what most fascinates the Western and Eastern academics who have studied it : universal classifications of flowers and batik patterns, complete panoramas of bird songs and their omen, detailed galleries of crystals and keris's blades, anthologies of religious rituals, music instruments and masques, surveys of great battles, extensive description of wooden architectural skills, medical tomes, alchemical recipes, numerology, meditation and sexual techniques, mathematical theorems, antique poems and so forth..

But this whole field of Javanese knowledge is not listed according to the rigid alphabetical treatment of the French "Encyclopedists" from the Age of Enlightenment. It unfolds freely within the fabulous narrative. Every time a character stops his or her wanderings for a moment, be it inside a Qur'anic school, at a busy market place, in the ruins of a temple, at a shadow theater performance or inside the safety of a cave, it is an occasion to inform the reader, in an exhaustive way, about a particular subject. The encyclopedic knowledge of *Serat Centhini* is not static. It's a vivid and dynamic culture to be experienced, tasted and transformed according to the new challenges the Javanese society is facing at the time.

The poem was indeed written at the beginning of the 19th century, but the “plot” takes place at the 17th century, a pivotal time in Central Java where Islam spreads and settles, while the older cults are still alive. *Serat Centhini* acts as a colossal cultural laboratory which tests the ancestral knowledge and traditions in the light of the new science of Islam. Will these knowledge and traditions become obsolete and disappear on their own? Will they persist because of their universal foundations, or because of their deep roots in local wisdom, or their capacity to adjust and embrace a new form? Will they enter into conflict or go underground? The experimentation works two ways: will the new science of Islam be flexible enough to accommodate the ancestral world view in its modernity?

What is striking is the missing component: the Dutch. Throughout the 4000 pages of the vagrancy of the heroes of *Serat Centhini*, not a single mention is made to the presence of the colonial forces. Their total absence is a powerful and very clever act of cultural resistance on the part of the authors of the poem: the best way to defeat one’s enemies is to ignore them.

I would like to present three brilliant cultural strategies successfully put to test in the *Centhini* laboratory, in their ability to transcend time, and embrace social and religious transformations: green local wisdom, the duty to remember, and recognition of Beauty.

Green local wisdom

In SC, what I label “green local wisdom” covers cantos 222-231. It recounts Cebolang’s stay at Ki Dikara’s hut, Master of the Woods. Cebolang is a teenager and one of the main characters of *Serat Centhini*. He had fled from the home of his pious parents on the last night of the fasting month without even taking leave of them. He had committed such a shameful act that he despaired that it would ever be forgiven and forgotten, except by wandering with four other naughty boys, searching for his inner self. His vagrancy - which covers four of the twelve books of the original work – leads him one night in the depths

of a forest to the hut of the Master of the Woods.

His abode was perched on four posts, and from the top of the ladder, Ki Dikara, holding a burning torch, welcomed the visitors of the night. They all hastened to climb up. Ki Dikara piled up, in front of them, five banana clusters, pineapples, mangos, durians, mangosteens, guavas, dukus : “The forest is your host. Please honor its bounty while I go down for a moment to cut up the two muntjacs I hunted earlier.”

Ki Dikara soon came back up with the sliced meat and the skin which he tightened between two beams. Then he started a fire and spread out around it some spices, salt, tamarind, vinegar and fragrant palm sugar. He served his visitors coconut flower water clarified in a young bamboo stalk, then inquired about Cebolang’s intentions.⁷

“O Master of these woods, I am only a poor apprentice of the science of happiness. I am of low birth, I have a delicate nature, and I rove the world under the sole law of pleasure and providence.”

Ki Dikara appreciated the frank insolence of Cebolang because it was a rare thing in this world:

“I am erroneously called ‘Master of the Woods’, whereas in fact I am their servant. My duty is to inform the loggers about the trees that are made to be cut down and about those which, should only one of their branches be severed, would bring down tragedy on the doer of the misdeed and on his surrounding world. I advise on the art of choosing teak trees appropriate for the construction of a house or a mosque, and on the advisable season and hour to cut them down.”

In SC, Ki Dikara speaks extensively about the four shapes of Javanese houses, and for each one the architecture of its roof. But being a wise man, he realizes that Cebolang, as a teenager, is far more interested in music than in architecture. So he changes the subject of conversation and talks about drums. In doing so, Ki Dikara channels the boy’s wild rebellion and makes him aware of the munificence of the

⁷ Elizabeth D Inandiak, *Centhini, Kekasih yang Tersembunyi.*, p. 120-122

forest which provides all the raw materials to make the tambourines for free.

“My dear lad, I have here two chests made of jackfruit wood, one small, one large. They can be used as tambourines, I just have to stretch and tighten over them the skins of the muntjac. Since the rainy season is over, the skins will be dry in four days at the most. I will then offer you the two tambourines. May they assist you in your long wanderings, in your desire to enchant the world. Thus, you and your accomplices will never have to worry about lodging and food.”⁸

“O Master Dikara! You have preceded my desire! Allah willing, I will carry these two tambourines on the path of the science of happiness.”

Cebolang and his companions stayed five days in the elevated hut of the Master of the Woods. On the fifth day, the skins of muntjac were stretched over the two tambourines and Ki Dikara invited Cebolang to try them that same evening.

Soon the tambourines resounded, the vibrating skins set forth wild scents, it seemed that innumerable goblins, elves, imps, tuyuls, potchols and other genii of the night came out of the forest full of game, and took human form by climbing the ladder leading to the hut of the Master of the woods. Some brought fruit, others a flow of palm juice or a chunk of dry stag meat. Cebolang struck the large drum. Thus he sang:

“Every day I contemplate the terrible flavor of love in my body.

Nothing interests me if not crying and thinking about myself.

I calculate every one of my acts,

Why am I such in the world?

My thoughts are like a dream.

My sight has disappeared at your sight.

My gestures are yours, I cannot escape them,

Even if they blend us in the fire that spares no one.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 125-128

*As a bag of trash floating on the surface of the water,
My movements are only those of its flow.
The wave drowns in the sea,
No two creatures are left, there is only the sea.”⁹*

*Cebolang and his companions played the tambourine all night long.
May the forest be blessed for its munificence and its trees and wildlife
protected so the music can go on.*

The duty to remember

Again, in SC, what I label “the duty to remember” is part of Cebolang’s vagrancy, and covers Cantos 132-134. The teenager had arrived in the Kingdom of Mataram. He entered the Kauman district through the northern door, stopped in front of a humble house and asked hospitality for the day. It was the residence of Amat Tenggara, the disciple of the commander of the Kauman’s muezzins. Still a bachelor, he lived with his mother.

That same evening, Tenggara took along his friend to visit a numerology expert, Kyai Juru Pujankara. He was planning to build a new house and wanted help in choosing an auspicious day. Master Pujankara was also entertaining that evening a butcher who gave them a masterly lecture on the art of preparing buffalo meat.

A woman selling fabrics with floral motifs explained to them the science of flowers intended for offerings. While she spoke, Master Pujankara noticed that under the arrogant manners of Cebolang stood a firm substratum of goodness. He spoke to him gently:

“My boy, in the kingdom of Mataram you are already known by many aristocrats and it must be providence that which has led you this evening to my residence. I can see you are not a city boy, so tell me, are you not rather the son of a holy man? Please answer me truthfully.”

9 *Ibid.*, p. 128

Cebolang thought deeply about the answer he should give: was it preferable to be sincere or construct an elaborate lie? All things considered, he bowed to the man and said:

“My name is Cebolang, Master. I come from Sokayasa. I am the son of Seh Akadiyat and Siti Wuryan. I have neither brother nor sister. I have broken the rules of good conduct. I have followed my coarse inclinations, indulged in anger, and behaved so stupidly that my exhausted and broken heart has been scattered like dust in the wind. In brief, I have lost any sense of excellence.

Scorning the advice of my father, I have scorched my flesh in the fires of the night. I have wandered like a poor wretch and my errors have brought me to the country of Mataram. Sweet Tenggara here welcomed me in his home, adopted me like his blood brother, and introduced me to the noble families of the district.”

Master Pujankara shook his head and said: “Such is very often the behavior of young people, but Allah closes his hand or opens it to whom He wishes. The destiny of men is unfathomable. Some start most excellently and end up basely. Others show a coarse nature at the beginning, then rise up to the elegance of the soul. So do not concern yourself too much with your vices, Allah is more powerful.”¹⁰

Then, Master Pujankara told Cebolang the story of the encounter of Sunan Kalijaga with Yudhistira, the older of the five Pandavas brothers in the Mahabharata Indian epic. But in the process of interpreting *Serat Centhini*, I moved this story to a hermitage at the western tip of Java, perched on a rocky peak overhanging the straits. I felt that this essential teaching about the duty to remember deserved a higher status, so it could better capture the attention of modern readers.

Amongraga, the older son of Sunan Giri and the main character of the poem, has been staying weeks in this hermitage, receiving spiritual teachings from a holy man named Ki Karang. Ki Karang

10 *Ibid.*, p. 94-95

had introduced him to the essential treatises: *The Niche for Lights* by Al-Ghazzali, *The Sufi Teachings* by Abd Al-Qadir Al-Jailani, *Universal Man* by Abd Al-Karîm Al-Jili, *Al-Tamhid fi Bayan Al-Tawhid* by Abu Syukur Al-Kasyi Al-Salimi. Then he had taken away all these erudite works, and had sung this quatrain to him:

*“If you study the science of the books
Pleasure will stop at your tongue.
If you taste the science of flavors
It will submerge your being in its splendors.”*¹¹

At the hour when the poem caught them under the veranda of the mosque, Ki Karang was relating to Jayengresmi “The Ascension of Yudhistira to Paradise”.

Having entrusted his kingdom to the son of a low-caste maidservant, Yudhistira performed the rituals. Then he set off on the road to paradise with his four brothers, and the wife they shared.

After crossing an endless desert of stones, the Pandhawas arrived at the foot of Mount Meru whose spray broke against its peaks like the undertow of a celestial ocean, and veiled to mere mortals the magnitude of Dewapura, the City of the Gods.

While they climbed, four of the Pandhawas were swallowed one after the other in the glorious mountainsides, as well as Drupadi, their beloved wife. Yudhistira, the eldest, continued alone the ascent to paradise.

In front of the city gates, Hyang Pramesthi, lord of the gods, awaited him in his chariot of light: ‘Whoa! Yudhistira! Here you are, back at the Eternal Kingdom. But how is it that you still inhabit your body? Your brothers and Drupadi knew how to surrender their flesh to the earth before ascending here. Such is the Law of Paradise, no creature may enter it with his carnal body, which must be discarded to let the subtle body shine forth. It is this radiance that makes up my chariot, and the whole

11 *Ibid.*, p. 184

paradise. Yudhistira, you may be a king, but you are not above the law. And you are herewith condemned to go back down to earth until your body is totally consumed.”

Thus Yudhistira regained willy-nilly the lower world. He went northwards with the intention of killing himself. He dove into the sea, sank to the bottom, and awaited his death. But death did not come. Six hundred years had passed when he received from the Lord of the gods the instruction to go meditate in the area of Majapahit, in the middle of the forest of Glagahwangi. For this was the common way to leave life while fully alive.

Yudhistira obeyed. He left for the forest of Glagahwangi, and sat down calmly under a banyan tree. His meditation soon gained such a magnitude that the forest became enchanted. Men and animals who ventured in the woods came out struck with madness. Each day the grove was covered by fog, while a vermilion radiance sprang from the undergrowth.

At the time, the Islamic kingdom of Demak undertook to build a palace on the site of Glagahwangi. Thousands of workers were hired to clear the forest that they proceeded to cut down in one morning. But in the afternoon of the same day, it grew denser than before. The same evening it was cleared again, and even the trunks were ripped out and burnt. However, the following day at dawn the forest had grown back in higher and thicker groves.

Baffled and dismayed, the master-loggers went in person to report the matter to Sunan Giri whose spiritual authority extended then over all the island of Java. When Sunan Giri heard the account of the master-loggers, he summoned Sunan Kalijaga, and entrusted him with the mission to go and verify these statements on the spot.

As soon as he arrived at the edge of the woods, Kalijaga presented his homage to the forest: “May peace be with you!” Instantly the fogs dissipated, a clear light shone, and Kalijaga penetrated the enchanted

forest. He first walked all around it to measure its extent. Then he went to the central clearing where he saw a giant human being radiating a twilight glow. This creature was at least three times larger and stronger than most men. His body was covered by extremely thick and long hair.

He sat on a very smooth stone under a banyan tree, and close to him lay a wooden box. His left leg was folded on his thigh, his right leg stretched in front of him, his left hand rested on his right shoulder, and his right hand was closed above his temple.

Kalijaga approached him with infinite courtesy, and greeted him with the ritual prayer of Islam: 'May peace be upon you'. He received no answer. Yudhistira just sat there, observing him. This attitude eventually irritated Kalijaga who, wondering silently, came to the conclusion that this most unusual being was perhaps a Buddhist. So he renewed his greetings in the language of Lord Buddha:

'Praise be to Vairocana! Praise be to the body, to the spirit, to the word of the lord of all the Buddhas of the three ages! O Master whom I do not yet have the honor to know. I am most worried, seeing you all alone in the middle of this forest with no other friend than your deeply saddened face, that you perhaps suffer from a deep sorrow.'

Yudhistira also answered in the language of Lord Buddha: 'My brother, it seems that you know already the motions of my heart covered by darkness. My name is Yudhistira. I was the king of the great kingdom of Indraprastha, but that is a long story. And who might you be, you who were able to reach me without losing your mind?'

'O King Yudhistira! My name is Kalijaga. I am one of the nine saints whose mission is to propagate the Islamic faith in Java. I was sent to this forest by Sunan Giri, the Raja of the Ulamas, who ordered me to inquire into the phenomenon that opposes the clearing of the forest. However, I have walked through this forest to its very ends without meeting any such phenomenon. I have found only you.'

'O Holy Kalijaga! Do not hasten to accuse me unduly. If the forest

of Glagahwangi can withstand and undo the repeated clearing of several thousands of men, examine rather the cause in the revealed books. The furry and hairy creature you see in front of you is only a wretched ascetic, who has been seeking the road leading to death for man for more than six hundred years.'

'Majesty, why are you not able to die?'

'A long long time ago, on the day of my enthronement, I received from the Lord of the Worlds a talisman that I have venerated ever since. This talisman is in my right hand, and has been there for so many years that it has finally petrified my hand. I can no longer open my fist.'

Kalijaga glanced at the right hand of Yudhistira whose nails had grown so long, that they had penetrated the flesh of the palm, sealing it more effectively than a double steel lock. The hairs of the phalanxes grew on the peak of the fingers in dark thickets, which tied their disorder to the aerial roots of the banyan tree, so that the man and the tree seemed to nourish one another. Kalijaga asked:

'What does the message locked up in the talisman say?'

'Ah! Sunan Kalijaga. I assure you, in all sincerity, that I have never felt the desire to read it. The very idea frightens me. The divine order made it clear, that I should only worship the talisman, and never question its origin or its destiny.'

'O King Yudhistira. If one day a man capable of opening your fist should present himself, would you allow him to decipher the message?'

'Yes, provided that I would also be informed of its meaning.'

'Then let us try!'

Through the thick forest, Kalijaga sought the direction of Mecca, turned to it, and called upon the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful. He then drew on the ground, in four columns of four rows, the sixteen four-digit numbers of the surah Al-Fatihah that he recited in his heart, and dispersed in his breath.

The numerical incantation triggered an analogous vibratory song in the chest of Yudhistira, whose right hand suddenly opened, and released the talisman. It was a thin rolled-up leaf of pandanus, fastened with a silk thread. Kalijaga untied the thread and read: Kalimasada.

Yudhistira was perplexed: ‘This is the name of the magical book that has the power to resuscitate heroes, whose death was premature. But my death, on the contrary, has been delayed. Perhaps one should rather read Kelima Usaada, the five remedies prescribed by the Lord Buddha to go through life without too many difficulties.’

Kalijaga spoke carefully, but fervently: ‘O King Yudhistira! Each man reads with the eyes of his faith. With the new eyes of Islam, I read Kalimah Syahadat. It is the testimony of the Muslims: there is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Prophet. You cannot find the way to your death because you have remained attached to this talisman, which is simply a symbol of all formal religions, yours, mine and all other religions of whose existence you and I are unaware.

Religion is the necessary guide of humans on this earth. But it becomes an obstacle when the time comes to surrender one’s body for the Union with one’s Lord. To die in this Union, one needs to unlearn the form, and abstain from naming. One must recover the single Intention from which sprang the multiplicity of forms and names. O King Yudhistira. You are now free from all obstacles.’

Yudhistira was filled with joy. He felt that he could finally die. He looked at the banyan tree, at the tall groves, the vertiginous sky, and he perceived his own insignificance. He made the gesture to prostrate himself in front of Kalijaga. His untied right hand followed him in his prostration, but the Muslim saint stopped him with these affectionate words:

‘My brother. I do not deserve such a devotion from you. Your royalty equals my holiness. To greet us mutually, let us rather unite our two hands together.’

Thus, did Yudhistira and Kalijaga join their hands under the banyan

tree of the forest of Glagahwangi. And still nowadays, on new moon nights, these two united hands will appear to whomever can see with the eye of the heart.

As he was preparing to leave his body, the King of the Pandhawa remembered the wooden box lying at his feet: ‘Kalijaga, I cannot carry this box to paradise because its Master would once more refuse to let me in. May I thus ask you to take care of its contents?’

Yudhistira opened the box that enclosed a palm leaf stamped with five silhouettes representing him, and his four Pandhawa brothers. He unfolded the family tree of the Bharatas who originated from the marriage of Shantanu with Goddess Ganga, and recounted the story of Bharatayuda, the great war:

‘Kalijaga, my brother. May you always tell this story like the dream of our duty to remember. To do so, cover some silhouettes with buffalo skin, illuminate them with a colored powder made from its ground bones, and articulate these figures with nimble rods carved out of its refined horns. And to this theater of puppets, give the name “shadow theater”, for its form is hardly suggested, but it shines already in the depths of your heart.’

And then, at once, King Yudhistira died in a corpuscular radiance. He undertook successfully the ascension to paradise. Sunan Kalijaga buried his remains at the foot of the banyan tree, according to Islamic rites. Then he journeyed on the roads of Java to testify to the Mohammedan Light, carrying as sole baggage only the Qur’an and a box of shadow puppets.”¹²

Recognition of Beauty

In SC, what I label “Recognition of Beauty” covers Canto 637.

After more than 3000 pages of wandering, Amongraga was now heading westwards, each day getting closer to the kingdom of Mataram, ruled by the high and mighty Sultan Agung who had decreed

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 185 - 192

his doom. Finally, he settled on the coast, in the Southern Mountains and decided to clear the land of Kanigara to build a mosque. His two servants, Jamal and Jamil, had become masters-in-illusions. Their disciples had since swelled to more than four thousand, and in no time they were able to clear out the jungle. Conjuraton, trance and magical spell (*sulap* in Indonesian) are important elements of the traditional performance arts in Java. They are often regarded by pious people as dangerous and satanic, because of their power to fool, cheat or deceive their audience. But in the case of Jamal and Jamil, their play of illusions can be interpreted as a skillful mean to awaken their audience to the ultimate reality as described by many spiritual teachings: life is like a dream, when you die you wake up. Such is the great insight of Sultan Agung in *Serat Centhini*.

One morning, Jamal and Jamil decided to go to the sea, followed by a great number of men and women. Having reached the edge of the ocean, the two masters-in-illusion constructed a boat out of a freshly-cut yellow coconut leaf, and they climbed aboard, exhorting their disciples to do likewise: "Raise the sails, we're going fishing!"

They all set sail on the sea in a bewildering variety of watercraft, some climbed in a canoe made of erythrina leaves, others on a raft made of banyan roots, others yet in a jackfruit bark craft, and the boldest on a tub made of sugar cane pulp and betel leaves. Soon they all reached the high sea and started to fish.

Although none could swim, everyone dove to the bottom of the ocean and caught fish with their hands, some larger than an elephant, others smaller than a dwarf fly. No one could believe that there was so much life and so many colors in the sea. They were thrilled beyond their expectations, and did not see that in fact they had not even left the shore. Their bodies were going backwards and forwards, but they all remained on the shore, anchored in the sand, eyes glazed like sleeping hens.

So thoroughly did the science of Jamal and Jamil deceive their

disciples' perceptions, that when they returned from the high seas, they ate the harvest of their fishing expedition for three days, without any rice. And they were all satiated.

The two masters-in-illusion then ordered their disciples to ride horses and fly in the air. Some mounted bedsteads and rice mortars, others climbed on sieves, pots and jugs, the boldest rode on long bamboo benches, some even dared to dismantle the doors and beams of a salt factory built on the beach, and when the building collapsed they mounted its debris.

They rose quickly above the ocean and toured the sky. They saw the sun set and the moon rise. They entered a forest buried under the stars, where grew glowing plants and transparent fruit. They believed they were riding an illuminated carriage. The richly harnessed flying horses displayed such brilliant wings, that they blinded the riders who did not see that they were in fact riding a door, or a rice pestle, or a bamboo mat, and that their feet had not even left the ground.

In their flight they heard the prayer call. They landed softly from the dizzying heights, caressed by sensuous clouds. In front of the majestic mosque, they climbed down from their sundry mounts and steeds, and suddenly recovered their vision. The mortar again became a mortar, the salt factory reassembled itself from its ruins on the beach, everything went back to its origin.¹³

Soon false rumors spread to Sultan Agung:

“O Majesty! In the Southern Mountains, this Amongraga teaches the nullity of the rites, he says that he or she who fasts during three days and nights, and eats only manioc leaves on the fourth day, will be exempted from the Ramadan fast. Whoever prays only a single night, a prayer of two rak'a lasting from twilight to dawn, will be released from the duty of prescribed prayer. O Majesty! This Amongraga is acclaimed all along the coast by crowds who have lost any human attribute. His hermitage has

13 *Ibid.*, p. 287-289

become a place of large gatherings, his disciples no longer obey the laws of your kingdom or the Law of Allah. They have stopped paying the tithe and have forsaken the devoted labor.”

As soon as Sultan Agung heard the report, he convened his justice minister, Wiraguna: “O Great Magistrate, I command you to go to the Southern Mountains and observe the situation prevailing in that region. If Amongraga preaches in the manner reported to me, and if he does not repent, do not hesitate to exterminate him in accordance with the law. Lock him up in a bamboo cage and throw him in the Red Lotus Ocean. You will be escorted by forty armed men and twelve ulamas. May Allah alone guide your judgment!”

The great magistrate, Wiraguna, swore obedience and bowed. He left within the hour for the Southern Mountains, followed by the funeral procession of forty warriors and twelve ulamas. They reached the Kanigara hermitage as night was falling. The drum of the majestic mosque punctured the black shell of the night. Jamal and Jamil, who were preparing to lead the sunset prayer, were astonished by this solemn embassy. They ran to inform Amongraga, living alone and silently in the small mosque built on a hill.

Amongraga sat under the veranda to welcome Wiraguna and his escort: “I was expecting your arrival”, he said to the great magistrate. His face shone with such a regal light, that when Wiraguna laid eyes on him, he became dazzled.

“O Amongraga! His Majesty, Sultan Agung, sends you his greetings. He wants to know whether it is true that you disregard the laws of the kingdom and the law of Allah. You have settled here without informing the proper authorities, and you have had the audacity to build two mosques. The foundation of a free and public Qur’anic school, without notifying the Sultan, is an unparalleled act of pride.

Amongraga, sitting cross-legged in front of his judges, bowed politely and answered: “Your Honor, your own words have spoken for me. I shall

not evade the will of the Sultan. Let the zealous law deliver my body to death.”

Wiraguna signaled the armed warriors with a backward glance. They brought up at once the cage and he opened it for Amongraga : “So be it then, step inside this cage, such is the sentence of our beloved Sultan!”

Without a word, Amongraga entered the cage. The royal embassy set off singing the names of Allah, soldiers and ulamas went southwards to the beach of Tunjungbang. They traveled during the night. When they reached the edge of the Red Lotus Ocean, it was morning. A thick gray fog filled the sky, the weather was cold, the sun was sad, all creatures kept silent. Even the impetuous sea, now hushed and still, did not stir. Offering its blackish waters as a hazy floating mirror to the sky, the sea was already mourning the man who was going to be thrown in its bosom.

The cage was laid down on the beach. Wiraguna said: “Amongraga, be grateful that the sentence of our beloved Sultan has put an end to your rebellion.” The waves rushed forward like a mountain, echoing the words spoken on the beach. The cage sank in the sea and disappeared without a trace. Those who witnessed the event were astounded and amazed.

However, a benevolent voice came of the ocean: “May peace be on you!” Wiraguna, terrified, answered according to the custom: “And peace on you also!” The voice from the depth of the ocean went on: “O Wiraguna, convey my respectful greetings to his Majesty Sultan Agung. Thanks to his disgrace, I do not have to carry my body any longer. I have finally reached the abode of my desires.”

Soldiers and ulama felt a column of ice impale their torsos. They wanted to leave the beach as fast as possible, but already a wave had thrown the cage up on the sand. It was still sealed. But empty.

At twilight, Wiraguna and his escort returned to the palace of Mataram. They brought back with them the empty cage as proof of the miracle. They were requested to appear before Sultan Agung during the daily audience. Soldiers and ulamas squeezed their way through the three

circles of servants squatting in the dust, chests bare, their long ponytails untied on their backs, eyes staring at the ground.

Sultan Agung listened to his great magistrate deliver a complete account of his mission, up until the extinction of Amongraga's body inside the cage sunk in the ocean. Then, drawing three times on his silver pipe, Sultan Agung smiled and said:

“Let me tell you that if I had been there, I would not have condemned him. All of you, ulama and soldiers, and you, Great Magistrate, you were sent into the crucible of Beauty, but you did not recognize it. Now, disband and scatter. May your blindness disappear forever from my sight! Judgment belongs only to Allah!”¹⁴

May the green local wisdom, the duty to remember and the recognition of Beauty continue to pervade the Javanese culture in the 21st century as they did at the time of Serat Centhini.

HOMAGE TO A FEW CENTHINI PIONEERS

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