



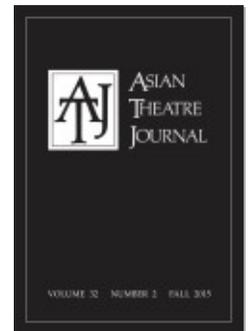
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Kathy Foley

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The Ronggeng, the Wayang, the Wali, and Islam: Female or Transvestite Male Dancers-Singers-Performers and Evolving Islam in West Java

Kathy Foley

This article discusses the relationship of Islam, female performance, wayang/topeng, and transvestite practices in the performing arts of West Java, giving a very brief overview of three periods: the mytho-historic moment of the wali (saints), who used arts, including ronggeng (female-style singing-dancing) as a tool of conversion; the colonial era, when the palaces that were founts of religious wisdom and colonial resistance became major centers that hired and influenced ronggeng arts, which dispersed through the Sundanese area of West Java, further developing genres like tayuban (dance parties of the aristocracy) and ketuk tilu (Sundanese popular dance performance); and the contemporary period, when the art has been devalued, noting that anti-pornography legislation enacted in 2008 is, in part, aimed at eliminating remnants of these long-existing female-singer-dancer and transvestite male performance practices, which are mentioned in literature of the colonial period and linked in oral histories with the advent of Islam. Through changing assumptions about ronggeng and the arts we see shifts in attitudes toward performance, sexuality, and religious discourse in local Islam.

Kathy Foley is a professor of theatre arts at the University of California, Santa Cruz and the editor of Asian Theatre Journal. She is a member of the Research and Publication Commission of UNIMA International and on the committee editing the English edition of the organization's World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts. Research support was provided by the Yale Institute of Sacred Music, a Fulbright Senior Scholar Grant, and the UCSC Committee on Research and Arts Research Institute.

The 19 January 2010 *New York Times* article “Arrest for a Revealing Dance Pit Flesh against Faith” noted that the hauling in of four female dancers, a manager, and event organizer at the Belair Coyote Bar and

Restaurant in Bandung “raised worries that it may be the prelude to the imposition of wider restrictions here and elsewhere in Indonesia” (Onishi 2010). The group could potentially be charged under the 2008 “antipornography law,” which could bring the sentences of ten years for dancers and fifteen years for the others. The author noted that “The law was introduced with the strong backing of the country’s small but influential Islamist political parties. Critics said the parties’ real intention was to use the law to spread orthodox Islam in Indonesia by controlling artistic and cultural expression. The law, critics warned, also threatens the country’s rich pre-Islamic cultures, which have long coexisted with Indonesia’s traditionally moderate brand of Islam” (Onishi 2010).

In response to such events, cleric Hafizh Utsman, age seventy, the leader of the West Java branch of the Indonesian Ulama Council, noted: “We are trying to eliminate the non-Islamic parts of West Java’s traditional culture, to make it more Islamic” and urged that reciting Koranic verses replace dancing at weddings (Onishi). The dance he refers to is often today *jaipongan*, a popular 1980s genre reinvented from the traditional *ketuk tilu* performances of female singer-dancers or *ronggeng*, whom I will discuss below. The reporter went on to discuss the efforts of the two-term mayor to close down the red-light district where *ronggeng* practices (traditionally associated with prostitution) had morphed into “sexy dancing.” Onishi noted the current governor (*bupati*) of West Java had also found *jaipongan*, a dance in which the sexual mores of the dancers are not normally questionable, too sensual.

This is a change from the late 1970s and 1980s, when the then mayor and *bupati* were active sponsors of *jaipongan* (Fig. 1), commissioning performances at local government events and helping artists like singer-dancer superstar Tatih Saleh (1944–2006) on tours across the archipelago, to Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. Dancer-singer Tatih, under choreographer-composer-producer Gugum Gumbira (1945–), and with puppetmaster Dalang Nandang Barmaya (1928–1993), became the triumvirate that reinvented *ronggeng* dance, creating a national craze, and versions of *jaipongan* were part of most traditional theatre performances in West Java in the 1980s. Tatih, a talented graduate of KOKAR (Konservatori Karawitan, Conservatory of Performing Arts) in Bandung became known for her singing and movement, with her troupe being hired at family celebrations, and she herself was noted for a film role in *Nyi Ronggeng* (dir. Alam Rengga Surawijaya, 1970), the story of a courtesan-singer-dancer.

A significant *jaipongan* choreographer of this current generation, Nanu Munajah Dahlan, who did his BA degree at the Indonesian Academy of the Arts (Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesian, STSI) in



FIGURE 1. A 2003 performance with dancers using *jaipongan*-style dance and sleeveless costumes. (Photo: Kathy Foley)

Bandung with a thesis on *ronggeng*-style dance of the Subang region, had, Onishi reported, formed a *jaipong* support group to draw a line on incursions he saw from Muslim fundamentalists, which include the rise of *rebana* (frame drum used in Islamic music), which is replacing gamelan gong chime music, *kecap* zithers, and other older Sundanese instrumentation. Nanu is surely also concerned about the movement toward long-sleeved tops and *hijab* (headscarf) costuming replacing the traditional sleeveless or body-emphasizing tops and *gelung* (bun) hairstyles of the female dancers. Nanu hopes to keep the girls dancing to the tune of “Kembang Gadung” (Flower of the Yam), a song that both has sexual connotations and is considered mystically charged in the *ronggeng* tradition of the Subang region, where the idea of female dance and song is linked with Dewi Sri, the goddess of rice. “I’m Muslim, but I also want to keep our traditional culture,’ Mr. Nanu said. He feared, though, that the arrest for ‘sexy dancing’ under the anti-pornography law could be only the beginning: ‘I’m worried that we [*jaipongan* performers] could be next,’ he said” (Onishi 2010).

I open my discussion of an old tradition of performance in Sunda and Coastal Java, Pasisir (shore) areas around Cirebon, with this more recent episode to show that what might be seen as a scholarly

footnote in the performance history of Java involves issues alive and in struggle in Bandung, West Java, today. While I will discuss the debate in terms of dance and theatre, it is a cultural dialogue that is playing out in many arenas: The batik section that was the norm in department stores of the 1970s has given way to the burgeoning *busana islam* (Muslim dress) sections (though Malaysia's more recent attempt to claim batik has helped with revival). Weddings and circumcisions, which, in the past, might have included *wayang golek purwa* (rod puppet performances) or *kuda renggong* (horse dancing parades) in Sumedang, West Java, started from the late 1980s to often highlight Islamic preachers as the performative feature instead.

As a watcher of Sundanese performance practice for the last thirty years and in reaction to the growing conservatism in arts circles since the 1990s, I would like to check in on how Geertz's *santri* (orthodox) versus localized *abangan* Islam¹ is being played out by considering briefly the background of *ronggeng* (female or, especially in the past, male transvestite singer-dancers, who are often seen as linked with prostitution), noting that the roots of the art have relations to puppetry (*wayang*), masking (*topeng*), and other arts in West Java. I will argue that these ideologically female forms do not fit into a modern reformist style of Islam, which developed in Indonesia in the late nineteenth century and has been propelled by responses to modernism, Islamic globalization, and fiscal and political crises since the 1960s—forces that have accelerated since 2001. However, these female forms reflect long-term Islamic thought of the island. Additionally, I will show that arguments we see in the legislative squabbles of today are also outlined in the myths that surround the arrival of Islam in Java, which involve stories of the *wali*, Islamic saints (Rinkes 2009) who taught, we are told, via the arts. Granting that *wali* hagiographies, as I encountered them in fieldwork in the 1970–1980s, are taken from oral sources in versions of West Java current in the last century and cannot be proven by documents from the fifteenth-century period, I will argue, however, the ideas inset in these stories about the advent of Islam are also present in the literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, which uses an image of pompous and misguided *ulama* in juxtaposition to the true or “perfect man” who engages in the arts of song, dance, and puppetry as tools of Islamic communication and self-realization. Indeed, to become this perfected man, one arguably had to become the dancing-singing woman, as a step toward understanding full reality.

These literary versions represent palace interpretations represented in works like *Serat Cabolek* (Book of Cabolek, late 1700s [Soebardi 1975]) and *Serat Centini* (Book of Centini, 1814 [Soewito 2013]) written in the colonial period, when palaces became the archives of

manuscripts discussing such practices. However, it is likely that such conceptions of Islam as growing from and being supportive of performance enjoyed widespread support even beyond the upper class of that era, especially in the Pasisir region along the north coast of the island and highland West Java, where court sponsorship of the arts has been more minimal (in contrast to Central Java) and artistic practice was largely a family tradition of villagers who believe they are descended from the *wali* saints. The courts in the early colonial period may have actually been active in establishing schools for *ronggeng* (female singer-dancers): Dutch records note approval for *ronggeng* schools in the Cirebon courts, though we admittedly lack records that training actually took place there (Cohen 2014). However, it was dancers, singers, and *dalang* from Cirebon who toured into the highlands of West Java (Sunda), establishing Sunda's classical and *ronggeng* arts with the support of local aristocrats (*bupati* and *wedana*) who hired these artists for their entertainments. *Ronggeng* in the highlands area at least in the late colonial period emulated the mask dance traditions of the *dalang* families, and it is possible that these women studied with these Cirebon-area artists who themselves traveled the post road to Sunda to teach and perform. A number of theatre and dance traditions in West Java (for example, *topeng banyet*, *topeng betawi*, *topeng cisalak*) used variations on Cirebon's north coast-style masks in opening ritual sequences in the early twentieth century (Fig. 2).

By the 1970s, when I interviewed troupes, the masks were no longer used and the opening dances (which corresponded to the semi-refined female [Samba] character, the androgynous pink mask [Rumi-ang], and the aggressive red mask [Kelana/Rawana] of Cirebon mask dance) were adumbrated though still recognizable. Reportedly masks were abandoned because the spectators would rather see the faces of the young female dancers (Foley 1989). However, it also seems likely that some *ronggeng* performers who came to the Sundanese area were women from *dalang* families, trained in *wayang* and *topeng*. At least, the women born in the early decades of the twentieth century to such families would complain that often in their youth, hosts would ask them to put down their masks and perform as *ronggeng* and dance with the male audience members, without the performing objects (mask or puppet) (Sawitri 1988). Matthew Cohen (2014) notes that this social dancing is sometimes still the practice today in mask dance of Cirebon, observing that male dancers also sometimes dance with female patrons, especially at the *ngarot* ceremonies of Lelea, Indramayu—a ceremony in which the virginal youths parade in a village ceremony linked to rain. While the *ronggeng* genres I discuss are indigenous, some martial, trance, and *dikir* (Islamic dance/chant) forms that are found in this area have ana-



FIGURE 2. A dancer from the culture department–supported troupe Pa Dalih recreates the opening mask dance sequence in *topeng cisalak*, a *ronggeng* form of the Jakarta region in August 2003. (Photo: Kathy Foley)

logues in other Islamic cultures (India, Iraq-Iran, Turkey, and Egypt), and use of the arts in the region should not be thought of as purely “Hindu-Buddhist” practices derived from *devadasi* (courtesan temple dancer) traditions of India. At least by the nineteenth century some of the martial arts dances (*pencak silat*, which also has links to *ronggeng* genres) can be traced to Sufi brotherhoods. I therefore maintain that these are Islamic dances and theatres that embody Islamic ideas.

Finally, as I discuss current manifestations of female dance referenced in the arguments that raged as the legislature passed the anti-pornography law in October 2008 and were resurrected by the arrests in 2010, I will note that the pro- and antitheatrical strains represent an ongoing debate in Indonesian Islam, which is presented in the early legends of the *wali* saints, as well as the viewpoints discussed in the

literature of the colonial period. My aim is not, in this iteration, to argue the social history, religious verity, strengths, or detriments of the *ronggeng* institution, but to point out that practices that are being attacked as un-Islamic bear the mark of older Islamic religious thinking. Sexy dancing and salvation are not mutually exclusive, and indeed the *birahi* (passionate) singing and dance of *ronggeng* arts can be argued to be a quick route to Islamic gnosis with Indonesian characteristics. This path, the history tells us, can be dangerous for those who insist on the most direct statement of artistic “truths”: Those who insist on setting aside the veil, literally or metaphorically, face oppositions in the culture wars, past or present. But even those who seem to lose such battles, the mythos tells us, do not die—they *mukswa* (transubstantiate into an alternative dimension), and the ideas live on for as long as music, poetry, and performing bodies exist in the Indonesian landscape.

The Mythic Moment: *Wali* and Performing Arts

The coming of Islam to Java is attributed to the *wali*, saints who are credited by traditional performers with the invention of their arts, and who usually are seen as being nine (*songo*) in number. Genres attributed to the *wali* in the traditions of West Java are *wayang* puppetry, *topeng* mask dance, *barongan* (street parades that include animal body puppets and floats), and *ronggeng* female-style singing-dancing. All these arts—in the interpretation of families of traditional artists with whom I did research beginning in the 1970s—were used as a tool of conversion. The saints themselves are reported to be the first performers of these genres, using them, as my *dalang* teachers put it, as “Juru Penarangan” (Department of Information Officers) of their day. In the case of the *ronggeng*, female or transvestite-male singer-dancer-actress, the *wali* are said to have been the first *ronggeng* and dressed as women to dance and sing their religious songs.²

Though the *wali* are said to traditionally be “nine” saints, there is disagreement among people as to whom exactly to count, for there were ones who were excommunicated, and other lore says when one died, another was elevated. (Such explanations come from the popular hagiographies that I purchased when making pilgrimages to the saints, tomb sites [see, for example, Salam 1960].) The *wali* were considered to be the first Islamic religious council, or so elaborated the *juru kunci* (hereditary keeper) of the grave complex at Cirebon (Astana Gunung Jati on Gunung Sembung) who had me stand in December 2012 in the place on Gunung Jati (Teak Mountain or Mountain of Strength/Truth) where the *wali* are said to have met in conference (Fig. 3).

Of course, regionalism means that the list of *wali* will alter, as inhabitants of one coastal region elevate their local saintly candidate

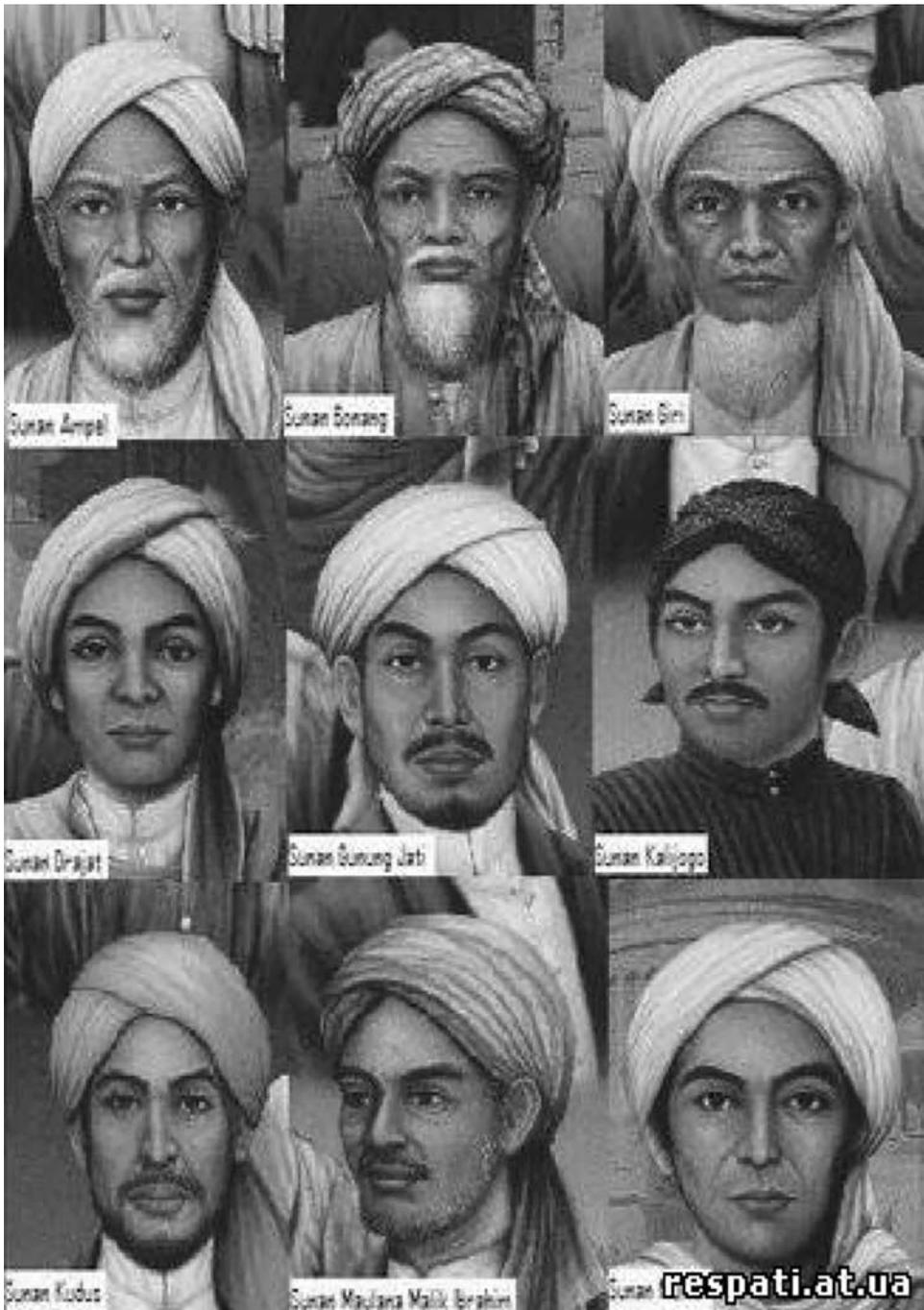


FIGURE 3. The *wali songgo* [nine saints) include Sunan Gunung Jati (center) and Sunan Kalijaga (r. center, in Javanese dress, which contrasts with the Middle Eastern full turbans of the others). (Image: Memento from saints' shrines)

while perhaps discounting a minor saint from farther down the shore (see Muhaimin 1995: 7 for a sample of contrasting listings). For example, Sunan Gunung Jati is more central in West Java and the Cirebon area since he is seen as a descendent of the Hindu-Buddhist monarchs of the inland kingdom of West Java (Pajajaran) and so West Java's own son.

Many *wali* were related. Maulana Malik Ibrahim (Sunan Gresik, who may or may not be counted as a saint) supposedly arrived from Champa (now Vietnam) and settled in Gresik, East Java, in 1404 CE, dying in 1419. His son Sunan Ampel (1401–1481) is central to most lists and was the father of two other *wali* (Sunan Bongang [1465–1525], who is credited with gamelan, and Sunan Drajat [b. 1470], said to be a composer-poet). Ampel's cousin Sunan Giri (b. 1442) of Blambangan, farther east, is another standard saint. Ampel's grandson Sunan Kudus (credited with *wayang golek* rod puppetry) is also usually listed. Sunan Bonang, Ampel's son, is said to have been the teacher of Sunan Kalijaga, who is perhaps the best known *wali* and generally credited with being the first performer of *wayang kulit*, *topeng*, and *ronggeng*. He appears on all lists. Sunan Muria, Kalijaga's son by Soejinah (a sister of Sunan Giri), is also numbered, as is Sunan Gunung Jati, mentioned earlier, and the first sultan of Cirebon (a royal house that continues to the present). Sek Siti Jenar/Lemah Abang, whom I will talk about in greater detail, is counted by some, but dismissed by others for his unorthodox belief.

The important figures for my article here are three. The first is Sunan Gunung Jati (d. 1568), founder of the dynasties of Cirebon and Banten and said to be a son of Rara Santang (daughter of Raja Siliwangi of Pajajaran, last Hindu-Buddhist king of inland West Java) by a prince of Egypt. Gunung Jati is the leader of the *wali* in West Java versions and a proponent of using the arts as a tool of Islamic conversion in such stories. The second is Siti Jenar, who taught mystical knowledge too openly. The third is Sunan Kalijaga, who is (in West Java's versions) implementer of the ideas of Sunan Gunung Jati to use the arts to teach Islam. While Sunan Bonang, Sunan Ampel, and Sunan Kudus are credited with artistic innovations, they will not be dealt with here. Siti Jenar is also known as Sek Lemah Abang (literally, "Sheik of the Red Earth," with "red" perhaps a reference to Sufi tantric traits).³ Lemah Abang was an original *wali* who was said to have been executed for his heretical preaching and then replaced (in the West Java version below) by the pivotal artist Sunan Kalijaga, who himself or via his student/son Sunan Pangung ("Saint of the Stage") propagated the traditional arts.

I will share part of the story of these three *wali* as told in the *lakon* (play) of *wayang golek cepak* of the north coast (other versions can

be found, but the broad lines of the narrative are consistent). This version *Sunan Kalijaga* (1984) was written out for me by Amuddy, a member of a *dalang* family from Slangit who assisted me in working with my teacher, Dalang Ali Wijaya of Cirebon. I did not see Ali Wijaya perform this particular *babad* (chronicle) story, but I requested the outline for a performance I was doing in 1984. For the purposes of teaching, a *dalang* will narrate or write his version of the tale in either a short outline that just gives the characters names, kingdom, and bare bones of the narrative or a somewhat longer narrative version; the latter was the case here. It should be noted that Dalang Ali considered himself to be a lineal descendant of the “*wali*.”

The story, as it was given to me in *wayang cepak* rod puppetry, is as follows. Sunan Kalijaga as a young man was a prince of Tuban who fell in love with the Princess Lara Kidul, goddess of the South Sea (representing the element of water) from a kingdom whose name translates as “Weapon’s Door.” If she married at night, Lara Kidul’s husband would be dead by the morning. If she married in the morning, her husband was dead by night. When Kalijaga (then known as Raden Sahid) married her, rather than going to sleep, he meditated (eyes were not used to see, nose was not used to smell, mouth was not used to taste) as if dead, but in the “death” of meditation (*tapa*), he kept watch. As a *naga* (snake/dragon) emerged from Lara Kidul’s back to kill, Kalijaga grabbed the creature, which thereupon transformed into a *kris* (dagger) and became his protective weapon.

The pair lived happily until Lara Kidul heard the sound of the Islamic *rebana* (frame drum) coming from Cirebon, where Sunan Gunung Jati was teaching the new religion, Islam. She left her husband to study with Gunung Jati. Kalijaga, in anger, began persecuting and robbing everyone, until a wandering Muslim mystic, Sek Bayan Milo, calmed him by recommending a mediation—temporary burial under the ground (representing the element of earth), with only a reed through which to breathe. The mystic went off, and what was supposed to be a short forty days of “cooling down” in the grave turned into many years, before the absent-minded Sek returned. When Kalijaga was dug up, he was ready to accept Islam and went to Cirebon, arriving just as the trial of the soon to be ousted *wali*, Lemah Abang/Siti Jenar, was beginning in the great mosque.

Sunan Giri was castigating Lemah Abang for telling people that there was no need to go to the mosque on Friday by saying “mosque” (meaning sacred space) was already everywhere and “Friday” (meaning time for worship) was already in every hour. While all the *wali* knew that Siti Jenar’s teaching was literally true, they said he was wrong in teaching mystical thought to ordinary people, who could not correctly

understand the meaning of his lessons. Sunan Giri found Siti Jenar guilty of instigating social disorder and condemned him to the flame [the mode of death can vary according to the teller] but the “heretic” walked with impunity through the inferno (representing the element of fire) and *mukswa*-ed (transferred to a spirit plane). Disappearing, Siti Jenar left behind only arts, including *wayang* (puppetry).

Sunan Gunung Jati gave the puppet to Sunan Kalijaga, who understood and also took over the position of *wali* just vacated by Siti Jenar. Kalijaga realized that *wayang* was a tool of Islamic teaching, more effective than other methods because it speaks through symbolic means. Kalijaga became the first puppeteer (*dalang*). He went into the mountains to the Dieng Plateau (representing the element of air) in the center of the island. There he met Yudistira, the eldest of the five Pandawa brothers and the hero of the *Mahabharata*. Unlike his siblings, Yudistira had not been able to die, since he could not yet decipher the writing on his heirloom treasure, *layang jamus kalimasada*. Sunan Kalijaga recognized that the mantra was written in Arabic and explained it was the Kalimat Sahadah (“There is no God but Allah, and Mohamed is his Prophet”). Yudistira, recognizing that Islam was the completion of knowledge, converted, and Kalijaga did a *ruwatan* (exorcism in *wayang* style) to release Yudistira’s soul to eternity, where he reunited with his brothers—Arjuna, Bima, Nakula, and Sadewa.⁴

From this time, *dalang* say, *wayang*, *barongan* parade figures, *topeng*, and *ronggeng* became the tools that the *wali* used to get people to enter the mosque. Payment for coming to a performance was the Kalimat Sahadah, which meant that the viewer professed the faith. Hereby, Sunan Gunung Jati and Sunan Kalijaga brought the Javanese people to Islam via the arts, but avoided Siti Jenar’s problem of being too ecstatically direct in imparting mystical teachings. Performers I worked with during my field research (1978–1979) would frequently remind me that a significant aspect of the art is to *nyinder* (speak indirectly via symbols and stories) to deliver truths, something they felt had saved them during the bloodletting of the 1960s and that allowed them to do their critiques despite the censorship pressures of Suharto’s New Order regime.

This use of indirection, some scholarship has argued, was the failure to offload earlier indigenous and Hindu-Buddhist thought, which figures like Geertz emphasized as at the base of *wayang*. But I would argue that rather than hiding Hinduism, the arts were reformulated with Islamization and seen as the completion/perfection of religious knowledge of the earlier period (hence, Yudistira the Hindu hero is “waiting” for the release of Islam in the story). We see a distinctive redirection of the arts in the coastal areas, which then moves down

to Central Javanese courts and over to Sundanese areas in the Islamization period. New ensembles (gamelan *sekatan*, which plays for Malud, the birthday of the Prophet, SAW) were invented at this time. *Wayang* figures were elongated, and artistic involution in the patterning of images occurred; compare the intricate Islamic Javanese *wayang*, for example, with *wayang*-style figures on Majapahit temples in East Java that show the simpler outline of Balinese Hindu *wayang* to the present. The use of colors and directions philosophically, which I will discuss below, became, certainly by the nineteenth century and probably earlier, formalized and formulaic in the Islamic arts and distinguished from the Hindu-Buddhist ideas carried by the Majapahit refugees credited with founding Balinese arts. The *topeng* dance (Fig. 4) and the song of this Islamic Java became, I argue, more elaborated, circling, indirect, and contemplative as Islamization occurred—following a pattern of abstraction and intricate reworking of movements, music, and themes that we see in other Islamic cultures (India, Persia, and Turkey). As an example I will consider *topeng babakan*, which often uses five masks in performances of Cirebon and, as in the Kalijaga story we just heard, references different directions (north, south, center, east, west) and energies (water, earth, ether, fire, air) that are part of an Islamic religious transformation (for a recent discussion of *topeng babakan* see, for example, Ross [2009]).

The major masks of *topeng* (which are related to the fixed character types in *wayang*) become a lesson in emotional energies. The mask of the refined hero is associated with the color white, the direction north, the emotion of *mutmainah* (patience); the antagonist is associated with the color red, the south, and *amarah* (lust, anger, greed); the minister is associated with the color black, the east, and *luwamah* (determination); the semi-refined mask is associated with the color yellow, the west, *supiyah* (acceptance of god's will). The androgyne/divine is many-colored, the center, the divine (Sulaeman 1982: 113–128).

While correlations of colors and directions are part of Hindu-Buddhist traditions, the movement from a more diverse use of number that can feature three (i.e., representing the gods: Wisnu, Siwa, Brahma), four/five, or nine (*nawangsa*, the eight directions and center), which we find in Bali, becomes a more stable four/five model based on the four directions and center, standardized, I argue, as part of the Islamic *wali* transition.

This four-part structure with the fifth representing absolute union with the divine (center) is a concept of micro/macrocosmic correlations and is well reflected in stories that are part of the heritage of the *wali*. The oral traditions associated with Cirebon, whose rulers are descendants of the *wali* Sunan Gunung Jati, gives us the following



FIGURE 4. Dance in which women danced male and/or female roles, here “Gandamanah,” were part of the dance parties (*tauyban*) held at the regents of Sumedang, which in the 1970s was called Museum Pangeran (Palace of the Princes) and still kept up older palace dance traditions. (Photo: Kathy Foley)

Islamic interpretation of the arts as a path from veiled truth, which is represented by puppetry, toward more naked truth, found in *ronggeng*, the female singer-dancer. The steps as articulated by Siddique (1977) toward mystical union are four progressive ones, leading toward the fifth point, which is absolute union with the divine:

Shari'at-wayang. On the mystical path, the puppet (human) cannot move without the divine (*dalang*). Though the two are really united, the screen veils the truth. We see the shadow, not the divine force behind the screen.

Tarekat-barong. The animal figure (human body) is united with the divine animating force, but we still see only the outside, the figure, and the animating force is still obscure.

Hakekat-topeng. The two forces (human and diving) are more simultaneously apparent, but the essence is still partially behind, masked.

Marifat-ronggeng. The performer is completely visible: human and divine are perfectly united. Our being is the substance of the divine; we can see, in the female/transvestite singer/dancer performance, this unity. We understand eternity and never ending life. (Siddique 1977)⁵

In this schema, the *ronggeng*, with her dance, song, and poetry, is the embodiment of the divine in the human. *Birahi* (love, enchantment), an emotion associated with the female performer, is the last stop before full mystical gnosis.

We are told that the *ronggeng* originally was accompanied by tambourine, drum, and *ketrek/kecrek* (metal plates) and sang *suluk* (Islamic mystical poetry). But what we more normally encounter in literature of the colonial period of West Java is the female singer performing for and dancing with men and associated with sexual promiscuity or prostitution. Lyrics, called *sisinderan* (indirect verses) or *wawagsalan* (riddles), which are part of the *ronggeng* songs, usually are full of sexual innuendos. If the accompaniment is a large gamelan orchestra and the men are high class, the form is called *tayuban*. In folk forms the music more routinely features three gong-chimes (*ketuk tilu*), drum/metal plates, and a melody instrument (*rebab* [two-stringed bowed lute] or blown instrument).⁶ Holt (1967: 113), citing Pleyte's version of the first *ronggeng*, tells the story of a carver who makes a statue of a beautiful woman when ordered by Allah. A tailor dresses it, a goldsmith provides the jewelry, and a *wali* brings it to life. The *wali* sends the *ronggeng* through the country with the sculptor as the *rebab* player, the tailor as the drummer, and the goldsmith as the *ketrek* player. The *ronggeng* belongs to none of the men individually, but enchants all.

Most *ronggeng* genres (dance or theatre) in Indonesia begin with some opening ritual dances and songs that are performed by a solo or group of *ronggeng*. Next there may be a theatre performance or a series of solo dances featuring male dancers (as in *tayuban* or dance party). Finally the evening culminates in social dancing, where a male viewer partners with the *ronggeng* of his choice. Song selections, after the opening sequence, are largely determined by viewers' requests. Payments are made to performers at the time of song requests or at the end of each dance. Drinking is involved. The artists may sleep with patrons after the performance, though this is not a given.

While the tales of *wali* and their arts are largely stories, they give an overview of female dancer-singers as representing an encounter with absolute beauty in an earthly form. "She" allows experience of absolute perfection in a spiritual sense. While we can compare the relationship of *ronggeng* and divine with ideas of the *sakti* (female energy in material form) in relation to Shiva/Siwa (male energy in absolute form) in the tantric practice of Hinduism and paired female/male divinities in tantric Buddhism, the images (i.e., seeing behind the veil/screen and oneness of self and the divine) are more Sufi than Shaivite or Buddhist in Pasisir and Sundanese versions. And, in some *wali* tales, we have an added twist that the eternal "she," the *ronggeng*, is the saint Kalijaga himself, who dresses as a woman to experience and show viewers union with the divine principle.⁷

Colonial Era in West Java

The palaces of Cirebon, inhabited by the descendants of Sunan Gunung Jati, were fonts of religious wisdom⁸ and colonial resistance in the early nineteenth century with revolts against the Dutch or English colonizers in 1806, 1811–1812, 1819, and 1825 (see Paramita 1982: 61). In this same period palaces may also have been the sites of schooling *ronggeng*: dancer-singers who over the next century were dispersed from the north coast through the Sundanese area of West Java. This training of women, be it in the palace or villages, provided performers for court events, but also it is possible *ronggeng* may have been a source of revenue to the palaces. We find such a relationship between the palaces and courtesans in Central Java—a portion of the proceeds went to the ruler, and such practices may have added to court revenues (Sutterheim 1956). *Tayuban* (dance parties of the aristocracy) and *ketuk tilu* (popular dance performance in villages or market sites) for the lower class were the normal *ronggeng* arts in West Java. The drunken groping of the male dancers as they slipped cash into the dancer's bodice or passed coins mouth to mouth are noted in reports of both European

observers and local literature. In *Serat Centini* (ca. 1814), men throw parts of their apparel at the feet of the performer.

Raffles in 1817 wrote:

The common dancing girls of the country . . . are called *rong'geng* and are generally of easy virtue. They make a profession of their art and hire themselves to perform on particular occasions for the amusement of the chiefs and of the public . . . , their performance is most highly esteemed . . . among the rude mountaineers of the Sunda districts. . . . Here they are constantly engaged on every occasion of festivity, and the regents frequently keep the most accomplished in their service for years. Their conduct is generally so incorrect, as to render the title of *rong'geng* and prostitute synonymous. (Raffles 1965 [1817]: 42)

Raffles also notes that though *ronggeng* performers often settle down and marry a petty chief, after a few years of domesticity, they divorce and “repudiating their husbands, return to their former habits” (p. 42).

Serial monogamy seems to have been a regular part of *ronggeng* life. In the first half of the twentieth century dancers said that if they married a husband who was a musician, they might be able to dance and remain married. Otherwise a dancer would have to stop while married and only on divorce dance again—until a new marriage was contracted, which meant giving up dance until the next split (Sawitri 1988). This pattern was reported by elderly former *ronggeng* or female *topeng* dancers that I interviewed in the 1970–1980s: These artists claimed up to an impressive nineteen husbands over the course of a career!

Ronggeng, *taledek*, *tandak*, *ringgit*, *lengger*, *gambyong*, *gandrung*, and *doger* are a few of the varied names for this institution (see Cooper [2004], Edi [1984], Foley [1989], Holt [1967], Hughes-Freeland [2008b], Lysloff [2001], Schrieber [2014], Spiller [2010], Suharto [1979–1980], Sutton [1984], Yulianti [1976], and for further discussion of selected genres, gender implications, and other topics).⁹ We find corresponding arts in other areas of Indonesia—*pajodje* in Makassar and *jogged* (female) or *gandrung* (transvestite male/female) in Bali. Sumatra and Malaysia had related forms. While I could make other points about the art, I wish to make two observations about the genre as it proliferated. First, while the Europeans compared the institution to the *nautch* or *devadasi* of India, the local population saw the form as indigenous and part of local Islamic culture.¹⁰ Second, while the Europeans saw the form in purely sexual terms with the *ronggeng* as a prostitute, local thinking in Sunda at least took on new meanings, which related *ronggeng*, in addition to fertility and fun, to Islamic resistance, martial arts, and anticolonial struggle.

The *ronggeng* genres imported directly from Cirebon to Sunda often began with the display of the *topeng* masks (i.e., *topeng banyet*, *topeng betawi*, *topeng cisalak*) and presumably continued to represent the ideas of colors, directions, and mystical intimations discussed above, but a number of the new forms that developed in the Bandung and Sumedang area in the nineteenth century eschewed the mask and replaced them with dances derived from the martial art *pencak silat* (Fig. 5). While these martial forms maintained a four-dance/movement sequence in which gesture, speed, and accompaniment accelerate (*paleredan*, the opening; *tepak dua*, the second set; *tepak tilu*, the third set; *padungdung*, fighting), the iconography of *topeng* mask types was not referenced. However, these Sundanese genres start to get Mata Hari-like stories about how the forms were created to oppose foreign invasions. For example, the creation tale of *ronggeng gunung* (mountain area *ronggeng*) in south Ciamis, West Java, is that foreigners were invading the country of Pajajaran. The princess disguised herself as a *ronggeng*, and, with her faithful followers of Pajajaran impersonating sailor-dancer-musicians, she was hired to perform for the invader, thus penetrating the opponents' camp. With martial skills, the group saved the kingdom. Such narratives and the adoption of martial dance forms are, I argue, motivated by the anticolonial struggle, which itself has Islamic roots in the *tarekat*, Sufi orders that became significant in Cirebon, Banten, and other areas of West Java in the nineteenth century.

Martin van Bruinessen, discussing Sufi orders in this period, notes the rise of *dikir* (Islamic dance-chanting) and the emergence of *saman*, a *dikir*-related dance and chant that believers thought would make them invulnerable to bullets. Performers would dance and chant into frenzy and then attack the colonial forces.

Tarékat [Sufi]-related rebellions span a period of around one century, from the early 19th to the early 20th century. Some of them were movements resisting the establishment of colonial authority, others revolts against specific government measures or responses to general economic deterioration and oppression. . . . In none of these cases did the initiative for rebellion come from the tarékat; but once the rebellions broke out, the tarékat provided them with supra-local networks of communication and mobilization, besides spiritual techniques believed to provide magical protection and effectiveness. (van Bruinessen 1994)

Literature, too, gives perspectives that inform us of thinking that relates Islam and the performing arts. *Serat Centini* (1814) tells



FIGURE 5. A *rongeng* dances with with a male partner using moves inspired by *pencak silat* (martial arts) in a Banten area *ubrug*. (Photo: Kathy Foley)

us of Ni Ken Tambanraras and her husband, Seh (Sheik) Amonraga, whose death is analogous to Lemah Abang/Siti Jenar, discussed earlier. Amonraga is a Sufi mystic who is condemned—this time to death by water. His wife is seeking reunion with him after this death. *Serat Centini* has been hailed as an encyclopedia of Javanese culture and condemned by the orthodox for its frank discussions of sexuality and *ronggeng*-like behaviors.

A second narrative from this period that casts some light on the performing arts is *Serat Cabolek* (Soebardi 1975), credited to court poet Yasadipura I (1729–1802) of Kartasura. In it the Javanese mystic Sunan Kudus Anom, a *dalang*, is opposed by the eponymous Islamicist Ki Cabolek. Kudus Anom displays his religious superiority by explaining the meaning of the well-known *wayang* story *Bima Suci* (Bima Purified), articulating in the process the meaning of the four colors (white, red, black, yellow) and the directions (north, south, east, west) that we find in the *wali* arts.

Between the macrocosmos
and the microcosmos there is no difference.
It is the origin of north, south, east, west, the zenith and the nadir,
as well as the [four colors]: black, red, yellow and white
and it gives life to the world.
The microcosmos and the macrocosmos
which are identical in every respect
have their counterpart in you. Were the forms
of this world to vanish
then all forms would be non-existent
and be united in one form
which is neither male nor female (Soebardi 1975: 120)

This text uses the image of a doll for this androgynous force representing the *pramana*, the life of the body, which itself is grafted onto the *suksma*, the divine essence, which permeates the universe and each of us (p. 121).

This attention to “four directions and the center” (*juru empat kalima pancer*) is related to imagery of the four major characters of *wayang/topeng* and the four/five dance structure/musical structure that informs arts in West Java. The idea of the center, which is “everything,” and directions, which are linked with different colors or powers, is not confined to Indonesia. It is part of a pattern we find in other religions (i.e., Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and various alchemical traditions) but has been reformulated in the light of Islam.

While the philosophy of colors and direction is not confined to

this area, it certainly has become a recurrent theme, taught obliquely in Sundanese and other Southeast Asian performances. The four plus the center to create a whole occurs in music: The four notes of the typical gamelan music pattern hover around a *pancer* or center note, whose name comes from *panca* or “five.” In martial arts choreography, one does opening moves to the four compass points to highlight the center where one stands. The Pandawa heroes with Arjuna as the center and many other models follow this thinking.

“Suluk Maling Sumirang,” which means something like “Song of Hidden Meanings,” a mystical text included in the *Book of Cabolek*, is supposed to be the song of Sunan Panggung (Saint of the Stage), the mystic who is said to be a son or disciple of Kalijaga (or in some versions Sunan Kalijaga himself). He is said to have taught mystical truth, much as Lemah Abang/Siti Jenar, and so got into trouble with the orthodox. For example, he named his dogs Faith and Belief (*iman* and *tauhid*) and brought them to the mosque. Like Siti Jenar and Seh Amonraga, he is condemned by the *ulama*. The *suluk* critiques the strict constructionists who oppose him, claiming:

They do not know the reality of their own bodies . . .
 They have about two wagon loads of paper,
 and as for ink, they have two jars.
 There is no end to
 their search and investigation . . .
 as they vie with each other seeking interpretations.
 (Soebardi 1975: 150)

The true seer, another part of the *Book of Cabolek* notes, however, is different:

He deviates from the rules of ethics contravening and
 obstructing them,
 and defies danger by composing a work in verse;
 [even as] a young man he has done much evil.
 He spreads false doctrine
 he pays no heed to danger and calamity;
 in his speech he has no regard for good manners . . .
 [his words] are confused and very alarming
 he cannot be restrained . . .
 Disguised as a *dalang* he goes out to perform the *wayang* . . .
 Those who see [him]
 all say that he is the *dalang*.
 They have no idea at all, that he is [Raden] Putra [the Divine]
 from Keliing [India] in disguise as a *dalang*. (pp. 147–148)

The poem continues with the advice:

He should choose to become a heretic
 for heresy is
 indeed the final perfection, . . .
 Your being is that of the Divine Soul
 —this is the basic doctrine
 If you do not yet understand
 your nature and your being, you must study again
 the Perfection of Life. (p. 151)

Knowing the four directions allows one to find the center, where the imperfect world and the perfected universe are one and the same. It makes one “invulnerable,” and the struggle that such an individual undertakes will always be successful. This union with the divine is the aim of the human. It is symbolized by the character types in the *wayang* and *topeng*, symbolized by the union of the animal and the spirit in the *barong* figures. It is shown in the melding of the female and male in the *ronggeng*, and, hence, the transvestite male is apt, since representation of the union of male and female principles is sought. The male performing as a female here makes sense, and this androgynous impulse may explain why in genres such as the female trance genre of the north coast *shintren* the female, as part of her trance sequence, will perform for a while in male attire. This crossing or understanding of the female position is important for the male as well as the female. The male must go through the female position to reach ultimate oneness, which is neither male nor female, but both (Figs. 6 and 7).

Present

With Indonesian independence, *ronggeng* as a social practice was largely criminalized due to its links with prostitution. In Bandung, the dance of *ketuk tilu* was found in the late 1970s in only one dance bar. A limited number of troupes, especially in the Karawang area of West Java or one group of old ladies at the Bandung Zoo, registered at the Department of Culture and performed in limited engagements as “heritage culture,” but youth were dancing to *dangdut* (Indo-pop) beats with its more Bollywood-inflected music. The songs of *ronggeng* had already long become a major repertoire of the *pasinden* (female singer) of the *wayang golek purwa* who was admonished in the 1960s and 1970s by cultural officers in “upgradings” to keep sedately kneeling on the stage and follow the artistic needs of male *dalang*’s performance, no matter how much her songs called for gyrating.¹¹

But, as with the *devadasi* dance of Tamilnadu, the dance of the now scorned female performer was salvaged in the 1970s. Researchers



FIGURE 6. In a performance of *lais* in Surabaya a male dancer, said to be in a trance, dances as a female. The gender transformation, in which the male is “transformed” into a female and dances with other performers or audience members, is considered part of the form’s allure. (Photo: Kathy Foley)



FIGURE 7. Didik Nini Thowok is a noted female impersonator who, in a post-modern way, explores traditions of cross gender impersonation, seeking what he terms “mystical gender.” (Photo: Courtesy of Didik Nini Thowok)

in the name of national heritage guaranteed the status of the dance by changing the class of the dancer. Artist-producer Gugum Gumbira depended on the research of Nandang Barmaya when he developed more complex choreography than was found in traditional *ketuk tilu* and developed new compositions, at the same time he guaranteed the social status of the dance by replacing the courtesan dancer with a more educated female of the elite class. Tatih Saleh was the first star, followed by others. Under the influence of Western art models like ballet and female empowerment, which said it was okay to dance (see Irawati 1989), Gugum's choreography became a local counter to advances in Western-influenced pop music with girl singers doing the twist in go-go boots. The *ketuk tilu* style dance of *ronggeng* was choreographed for a proscenium stage, and the dancer only symbolically at the very end of an evening interacted directly (i.e., danced) with the male audience members. This kept the pleasure ocular and limited audience participation, keeping the women distant from viewers, and the *ronggeng* idea of sexual availability decoupled from the new art.

Gugum's inspiration came largely from *ketuk tilu* by *ronggeng* of the Karawang and Subang regions with a healthy sprinkling of martial moves of the Bandung *ronggeng* style. Sexy, macho women who had nothing to do with *wali* philosophy and more to do with providing a Sundanese alternative to MTV took to the stage by the late 1970s and prevailed into the 1990s as *jaipongan*, which, with elaborate choreography and no physical contact, became the Jazzercise of the everyday housewife.

As Islam taught in the schools and favored by the Department of Religion increasingly portrayed Wahabi models, visions of *sharia* and veils started dancing in people's heads. In this environment the female dancer's *goyang karawang* hip undulations were out of sync with the times. Sexy dancing was invented (we are told) by the *wali* to communicate mystical meanings, and it still gets crowds in Subang's *bajidor* (singing-dancing) frenzied. But the moves, which were secularized and applauded in the 1980s, were growing too "hot" for West Java's politicians to handle. The tunes of the *pasinden* or female singer sound on—but with each arts celebration of 17 August we may see more Islamic drums (*terbang, rebana*) and fewer gamelan. Lyrics are sanitized, the female singer wears her *hijab*, and the body becomes stilled. The indirection of sexual innuendo is replaced with direct reference to Allah (perhaps this replacement is analogous to Western gospel's struggles with pop on the American radio).

Jaipongan masters like Nanu Munajah Dahlan and fundamentalists draw a line in the sand, and we wait to see if the Siti Jenar/Amon-raga/Sunan Pangung tale is going to be replayed. Female dance is

again under assault. Transvestite performers such as the popular TV and live performance artist Didik Nini Thowok in many of his works may hide serious transgender impersonation behind a mask of humor (Hughes-Freeland 2008a; Mrazek 2005; Ross 2005). But I believe Didik himself is in search of the same thing as the dancing *wali: marifat*.¹² Didik is after the moment when the veils fall, when human and divine meet, and he tries to remind modern Indonesian audiences of a legacy in which puppet, mask, and gender/cross-gender display are important. Didik states: “When a woman dances the male mask, she is transformed—it is mystical. And when a man dresses up as a woman, in *bedhaya* [female court dance], we don’t always recognize that the dancer is male—it is mystical. He, too, is transformed” (Ross 2005). He gives the name “mystical gender” to what he strives toward in performance. Herein he is mining an idea that is implicit in *ronggeng* arts—going beyond gender to the essence of reality.

With this thought in mind, we await the next move of the long existing Indonesian female/transvestite-male singer-dancers—performers represented in palace writings and linked with the advent of Islam.

NOTES

1. Geertz (1960) saw the variants of Javanese religion as *santri* (orthodox Muslims) and *abangan/priyayi* (Javacentric Muslims), distinguishing rather sharply in terms of class between *abangan*, which he saw as the folk version, and *priyayi*, which was the aristocratic interpretation. In West Java the *abangan* and *priyayi* versions do not really differ. Where Geertz emphasized animist or Hindu-Buddhist roots for the *abangan-priyayi* version, later scholars have seen the practice as part of Indonesian Islam and related to practices in the wider Islamic world (see, for example, van Bruinessen 1994; Muhaimin 1995). More recent scholars are pointing out the diversity of strains of Islam historically and at present in Indonesia, with recent attention to Shia influences in Sumatra and other areas (for example, Formichi 2014)

2. The relation of the transvestitism and saints is of course strong in northern Indian *bhakti* performances, and some have linked this trope to Krishna cults that prompted saints to take the female role (i.e., Radha or Rukmini) to reflect the relationship with the divine (male is to female as God is to man). Role playing of the female thus became popular in saintly circles to actualize our dependence on a sometimes fickle, albeit all-powerful divinity. A related trope in Islam is the relationship of bondsman (*kaula*) and lord (*gusti*), which is perhaps more common than the female lover-god, though it may also take a gendered form in Persian and Urdu songs. Islamic theatre forms from northern India to Iran traditionally involved female impersonation and, sometimes, homosexual practices. The love themes have links to Sufi singing and dancing.

3. *Tariquats* (Sufi brotherhood) found in Indonesia according to van Bruinessen (1994) cannot be definitely traced to periods prior to the nineteenth century, though Johns and others have argued that Sufism has been with Indonesian Islam from a much earlier period. From whatever period these *wali* narratives come, they do structurally point to a Sufi-like connection. In villages where the performing arts flourish, so does mysticism, and one is also apt to trip on references to Lemah Abang. While some argue that these areas are sites of secret Hindus, this interpretation rises from a diminished view of Islam, a faith that contains enormous diversity over time and geography.

Siti Jenar/Lemah Abang is supposedly buried in Kemlatan. His followers were said to have lived in north coast areas near Cirebon, such as Plumbon, Trusmi, Graksa, and Indramayu. Many of these sites are noted for the arts, from batik to mask dance to *wayang*. I encountered local areas called Lemah Abang rather frequently in West Java, and while I have not researched the topic, it would be interesting to see if these were areas where the clay earth was literally “red earth” or if this name became attached to places where mystically inclined *abangan* and arts groups resided historically.

Though I do not deal with the issue in this essay, Sunan Bonang is often considered to be the mystical teacher of Sunan Kalijaga. Cohen (2012) discusses a 1607 manuscript from the Cirebon area that gives primacy to Bonang over Sunan Kalijaga and the use of performing arts to communicate esoteric knowledge from Sunan Bonang, who exemplified mystical insight, to Sunan Kalijaga, who represents practical knowledge of performance (p. 24). There are also stories that Siti Jenar acquired his mystical knowledge deceptively by overhearing Bonang teach Kalijaga while on a boat (with Siti Jenar as a worm in red clay stuck to the side). I hope at another point to deal with such stories, but here focus on just the *babad* (historical chronicle repertoire) version, a subset of the *wayang golek cepak* (rod puppets in Javanese dress) repertoire of Ali Wijaya collected with the help of Amuddy (*Sunan Kalijaga* 1984).

4. This story is rather typical in that we go through elements (water, earth, fire, air, ether), that there is a correlation of directions (north, south, east, west, center), and so on. While one could read these encounters as related to Balinese rites that see the dead soul as needing to journey through the body washing after death (water), through burial (earth), cremation (burning), and release (air), the narrative puts Kalijaga rather than the dead (Yudistira) at the center, making this a story of individual gnosis rather than communal duty of Hindu-Buddhist descendants to ancestral souls. The story does not represent history, but it does correlate with understandings of Islam as shared in twentieth-century *wayang* as *warisan* (heritage) of the *wali*.

5. These interpretations are listed in *Relics of the Past? A Sociological Study of the Sultanates of Cirebon, West Java* by Sharon Joy Siddique (1977) and correlate with ideas shared by Cirebon’s Bapak Sulendraningrat, whom I consulted at the Kapabonan in Cirebon in 1982. He was an aristocratic descendant of Sunan Gunung Jati. For stories of the early history of Cirebon, see Muhaimin (1995: 162–176), and for discussion of other religious practices,

see Cohen (2005). For religious studies on the *wali* and their veneration see Fox (1991, 1997).

Another potential model for *ronggeng* is *birahi*, a troupe that may include five female singers and four male musicians (Paramita [1982: 127], though Cohen [2011] notes male-led troupes during his research). Other discussions of mystical gnosis are found in Cohen (2012: 14), Weiss (2003), and Zoetmulder (1995 [1935]). M. C. Ricklefs (2007: 32ff) discusses religious sects of the nineteenth century with related practices. He and Cohen (2014) see the current formulation of ideas as relatively recent, and Cohen points out that the four/five numbering or the consolidation of nine as the number of *wali* may be a nineteenth- or early twentieth-century formulation. I acknowledge variations; for example, one of my teachers (Ibu Sawitri of Losari) had no Panji (refined) mask, while various *ronggeng*-style dances in the Sundanese highlands open with three and not five character types. I myself in some lectures of character type cut the mask of Rumiang (who represents the center), since movement, drum patterns, and vocal features are shared with another mask (Samba/Pamindo). However, in this article I choose five as the core number since it represents both a consistent formulation (many dances and ceremonies begin with salutations to the four directions and these movements in turn define the center, where the performer stands), and the idea is one I believe became reified in Java's arts in the Islamic era, as in the four or five *srimpi* (female palace dancers), the four siblings who accompany us in life, and so on.

6. The three gongs in the ensemble are sometimes linked to the instruments used in Indraloka (Heaven of the God Indra) to accompany the dance of the heavenly goddesses (*bidadari*). Other Hindu-Buddhist links can be seen in the traditional lamp, which was set in the center of *ronggeng* performance in Sunda, which had three prongs for illumination to represent, it is said, Siwa, Wisnu, and Brahma. While this article highlights the Islamic aspects of these genres, I do not deny that there are features related to Hindu-Buddhist interpretations.

7. While I will not fully discuss the transvestite aspect of *ronggeng*, it is useful to note that cross-dressing may be more current in areas more affected by Islam, in part because of the concern with mixing of the sexes. Especially in South India, the dancing girl was historically female, and of course had relationships with king, priests, and male patrons. Part of her auspiciousness was her freedom from widowhood—she was married to the temple deity and gods, who, unlike men, live forever. However, if we look at traditions farther north, we can see that areas impacted by Islam (whether Hindu or Islamic) often preferred the male impersonating the female. We also find some correlations in Islamic areas between these male performers and homosexual practices, which are rather widespread (northern India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey). We find some of this male as female, sometimes associated with homosexuality, in Java in forms like some *lais* (acrobatics and trance performance), the Surabaya popular theatre of *ludruk* (Peacock 1968), theatre linked to Panji tales in East Java (*andir*), etc.

We also find variants of major court dances (not necessarily linked with homosexuality) in which males danced the female roles (*Bedhaya Semang* of Yogyakarta is an example). At another time I hope to elaborate more on the male to female transitions in mask or dress that are a standard part of a number of Javanese trance forms (*sintren* and *lais* are examples) and argue that this bisexual potential is perhaps more emphasized in Islamicized Java than in Hindu-Buddhist Bali, perhaps due to the status of women but also perhaps reflecting a Sufi trait. Mystical songs of Rumi, his history with Shams, and Persian arts in general raise themes of same-sex mystical relations (sexual or platonic), which may make male impersonators part of larger patterns we encounter in Islamic cultures even more than Hindu ones.

8. This continues. A younger member of the Kaprabonan princely house in the 1990s was serving as a religious guide to the sultan of Brunei, called, no doubt, because of his impeccable religious lineage. Discussion of *ronggengs* schooled at the palace come from Dutch statutes to form a school for *ronggeng* at Sunyaragi under Cirebon palace supervision. While there is no evidence this training occurred, *ronggeng* forms like *topeng banyet* and *topeng betawi* with performers in their seventies in 2003 claimed that their ancestors and teachers used masks that correspond to Cirebon *topeng* for the more ritual opening section. They stated that this mask use occurred at least by the early twentieth century. The standardization and use of Cirebon *topeng* coming from the academy of the arts in Bandung (STSI) in the 1970s is a later strain with more elaborate movements than those used by artists in the *ronggeng* genres whom I was able to interview and watch in performance and rehearsal.

9. Cooper (2004) discusses *ronggeng* depiction in the context of the novels of Ahmad Tohari (*Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* [Ronggeng of Paruk Village], 1982), who based his work on *ronggeng* of the Banyumas area and the political turmoil of the 1960s.

10. While questioning a purely syncretic argument on Javanese Islam, I am also skeptical about considering Islam in Arabia, Egypt, or elsewhere as the standard by which to judge certain religious practices and traditions as Islamic or not. I agree with Muhaimin that it is necessary to consider practice as Islamic if it is dominated by Islamic norms or spirit, regardless of its origins (Muhaimin 1995:18).

11. The de-elevation of the *pasinden* (female) in Sundanese *wayang golek*, discussed by Weintraub (2004) and by Pak Darya in my conversations with him in 1978, as having been accomplished in the 1960s may have gotten female singers off a raised platform that towered over the puppeteers, but it was not as successful in stopping other behaviors as sources might lead one to believe. I remember my first night of *wayang golek* in 1978. I had spent the afternoon at the cultural office hearing the story of how the battle to “put down the *pasinden* from elevated platforms” had been won in the 1960s. But that evening at a performance of Dalang Abah Sunarya, during the clown scene, the *pasinden* started dancing *goyang karawang* (gyrating hips in the style of Karawang, a stronghold of *ronggeng* arts). I was sitting, furiously taking field

notes, but the *pasinden* pulled me to my feet, insisting I try. The crowd of three thousand pounded hands and feet for me to follow her lead. I thought, *I can't ruin the high arts of Sunda*. The *dalang*, the musicians, and the singers shouted, “*Kaul*” (literally “vow performance,” but here “just do it”). Thousands chanted. I took a deep breath . . . and swung my hips.

Weintraub is right in his discussion of the politics of the *pasinden* controversy. Titim Fatimah (a noted singer) had been so forgotten in the 1970s that I felt she was smeared for PKI (communist) connections: She was definitely a favorite of Sukarno's, and her fall had coincided with his. The second top singer of the 1960s was Upit Sarimanah (1928–1992). In the 1970s she was still working at Radio Republik Indonesia in Jakarta. When I interviewed her, she had gone on *hajj* to Mecca—always a clear way of defining oneself as “not-PKI” but very unusual for a performing artist in that era, as this was felt to limit your subsequent performance behaviors. She wore a veil to the interview, and *hajj* and not *pasinden* was the aura she strove to create. Her efforts in developing Islamic singing were part of the new wave.

12. An example of Didik's work as a contemporary performance artist can be seen in the video *Serat Centini* (2003).

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