
WHAT LIES BEHIND THE VEILS OF *SEMU*?

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Nancy K. Florida. *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future. History as Prophecy in Colonial Java*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995. 449 pages.

As for the *priyayi* [the bureaucratic elite], they are only interested in the story without troubling themselves with what the words mean. For most of the commoners, [reading] is just a prop to keep awake so robbers won't come. . . So all that singing ringing out in the night is nothing more than the night guard or maybe somebody showing off his voice to the neighbors . . .¹

In three and a half centuries of colonization, my ethnic group's power never once prevailed against European power, not in any field, but especially not militarily. The poets and writers of Java, being some of those who think and imagine within the framework of "*kampung*" civilization and culture, flaunt the superiority of Java: that in facing the Dutch and Europe, Java never lost. The masturbatory stories that are staged, and written, and even the stories spread by word of mouth, constitute one of the reasons I always ask: why does my ethnic group not want to face reality?²

And not only C. F. Winter and Pramoedya, but also Ben Anderson ("black hole," "invisible presence") and John Pemberton ("Java") have characterized the object of Nancy Florida's passionately engaged and engaging investigations in her 1997 Benda Prize-winning study in such a way that it would be astonishing, one might almost

¹ C. F. Winter, Sr., *Javaansche Zamenspraken*, 3d ed., volume 1 (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1882), p. 58, quoted and translated by Florida, *Writing the Past*, p. 16.

² Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "My Apologies, in the Name of Experience," translated by Alex G. Bardsley, *Indonesia* 61, April 1996, pp. 3-4.

think, if she managed to salvage anything from the black hole of nineteenth-century Javanese literature and culture that is worth the effort Duke University Press put into the production of this attractive and well-edited volume!

Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future contains the text and analysis of a Javanese poem which was written by someone in the entourage of Pakubuwana VI (r. 1823–30) during the latter's exile in Ambon. To this island the Surakarta king was sent by the Dutch at the end of the Dipanegara rebellion, and there he died in 1849. Florida discovered the *Babad Jaka Tingkir* in a volume of the exiled ruler's correspondence, one of the hundreds of manuscripts held in the Kraton Surakarta which she catalogued and filmed, with the help of Alan Feinstein, during the early 1980s.³ Begun on August 23, 1829, almost a year before the expulsion of the king who would come to be known euphemistically and wistfully as the "his highness who meditates" (*Sunan Bangun Tapa*), the text presents a series of unconnected episodes arranged chronologically, beginning with two stories from the time of the last ruler of Majapahit, known in the text as Brawijaya V, followed by several tales from the time of Demak and ending abruptly in the middle of a verse. Florida reads these stories against the grain of the mainstream, early nineteenth-century Surakarta court historiographic tradition to argue that the text is not only historically revisionary, it is also visionary, foreshadowing new cultural and social possibilities, as yet unrealized, for the Javanese people of today. The fact that the narrative never reaches the story about the mythical character after whom the text is named, Jaka Tingkir, is itself a characteristically elliptical and intentionally prophetic enunciation of its central message.

Florida builds her argument by means of a powerful, well-annotated translation of the entire poem and through successive chapters of clearly written analysis for each episode, in which she also dispenses much general information about Javanese literary and cultural history to the reader entirely new to the subject. Unlike nearly all English translators of traditional Javanese writing in sung poetic meters, Florida opted to spend time developing an English version which would bring out the text's "pseudo-archaic" and frequently obscure language. The estranging effect of the translation which she composed and revised over several years counteracts a tendency in ourselves which must be similar to the one which the Indo-European, native Javanese speaker, and colonial *filoloog*, C. F. Winter, noticed in his Javanese contemporaries in Surakarta in the 1840s: the desire to be lulled into forgetfulness by the effects of a gracefully told and entertaining tale. Awake, disoriented, and intrigued, we are ready for instruction.

In her discussion of the opening, invocational section of the poem, Florida establishes the genre, overall intention, and significance of the work. As a genre, *Babad Jaka Tingkir* hovers between history (*babad*), mystical, Islamic treatise (*suluk*), and prophecy (*jangka*). Its intention is to convey knowledge and to inspire action. Its significance is that it claims to be a *pusaka*, "a manifest thing endowed with supernatural powers" (p. 255) which is to be kept as a family heirloom with a view to bringing good fortune to its possessor(s) in the future. Expressive of all three characteristics is the way in which both the episodes and the poetry play with "the

³ See her *Javanese Literature in Surakarta Manuscripts*, volume I (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1993).

subtle interplay between concealment and revelation," a quality for which the Javanese word is *semu*. Florida explains:

Semu is a subtle sign which points to something other than what it is—but not necessarily to something else. . . . A person may be said to "have *semu*" (*asemu*); that is, her countenance radiates a "subtle aura" (*semu*) which indicates hidden profundity—she is more than she seems. . . .

The ability to produce these signs that *at the same time* conceal and reveal meaning is a learned skill from a shared body of knowledge, or science. One's discourse is valued as sophisticated and refined precisely for the extent to which it (apparently) masks meaning. To speak well, therefore, is expressly *not* to say what one means. For it is only the fool or the ignorant who speaks or understands directly. (pp. 275–276)

And, Florida continues, "the author of the *Babad Jaka Tingkir* was a master of *semu*." Let us see how she pulls back the veils.

The themes which all of the episodes explore and in veiled ways expound are those of marginality, subversion of authority, and "prophetic" undecidability. The very episodic nature of the poetic structure, this "tissue of fragments" (p. 270), states all three themes, since it foregrounds "historical" figures who are either barely mentioned elsewhere or who rebel against authority, while the unfinished character of the stories themselves and their lack of connectedness to one another serve to challenge the linearity and closure of the dominant historical-genealogical tradition of the Central Javanese extended ruling family.

In the first episode, the painter Jaka Prabangkara, son of Brawijaya V and a daughter of the royal butcher, is exiled to China because he inadvertently paints the Queen's very private beauty-spot in his portrait of her. Landing in China, his royal origins are recognized by the Emperor (a master of *semu* himself, the Emperor muses: "There is no disguising the difference/ Between noble and commoner" [VIII, v. 19, p. 131]) and he soon builds a successful career as a painter-in-exile. This episode, says Florida, is a "critique of representation as mimesis" (p.290); by the time the episode ends, Prabangkara has acquired various kinds of "mastery," as his father predicted, through the testing experiences of exile in which he has learned how to conceal his talents through the artful practice of *semu*. "Prabangkara now understands the secret essential for any writer's survival at court: perfect representation is not transparent mimesis; instead, to re-present perfectly in writing means to produce 'truth' through the shimmer of *semu*." (p. 298) In this sense, the Prabangkara episode offers a cautionary tale to later Javanese writers like Pramoedya Ananta Toer, whose stubborn commitment to 'visibility' has led to a lifetime of imprisonment and exile: ". . . I like things that are lucid," Pramoedya wrote to his daughter Nen from Buru. "Whenever anything remains hidden, human misery springs out of that place."⁴

In the second episode, it is not too much visibility, but too little, which gets the hero Jaka Karèwèd into trouble. Karèwèd is also Brawijaya's son by another butcher's child and grows up tending buffaloes, goats, and cows, aloof from, yet part of, the village world. One day he finds a miniature banyan tree (symbol of an all-too-visible

⁴ Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *Lied van een Stomme: Brieven van Buru* (Houten: Manus Amici, 1991), p. 310, quoted and translated in Rudolf Mrázek, "Only the Deaf Hear Well," *Indonesia* 61, April 1996, p. 91.

absolutist power in Golkar-ruled Indonesia today) which makes him invisible, a veil of *semu* which he draws around himself in order to penetrate into the living quarters of Brawijaya's palace, where he eats, drinks, and spies on women. His penetrations are eventually discovered, his identity revealed, his princely tomfoolery admonished, his repentance rewarded, but

Karèwèd, the herd-boy . . . dared to lay bare the fiction of difference. He eyed the royal women, touched the royal regalia, ate the royal food, and drank the royal liquor—not in an attitude of servitude, invisible in the shadow of his royal masters as did the other commoners-at-court, but invisible in a way that affirmed his presence, acting to satisfy *his own* natural desires. (p. 314)

Karèwèd's story, thinks Florida, is "a history of the underclass, a history that has yet to be written." (p. 318)

In the next episode which details the building of the mosque of Demak, Florida shows how "the contestation" of hierarchy" (p. 332) is built into the detailed description of the physical structure of the mosque, which in turn becomes an agent of what, borrowing the concept developed by O. W. Wolters, she terms the "localization of authority." The "mosque as hero" resists alignment with Mecca until the holy city is miniaturized by Sunan Kalijaga's magic and transported to Java in a flash. Now only three miles apart, Ka'bah and the Demak mosque become aligned in a manner which enshrines the latter as "a center in a world of Islam that recognizes no single absolute temporal authority. This double gesture, which opens to a dissemination of centers, works by contesting the very 'marginality' of the marginal." (p. 336)

In the remaining episodes of the poem the dissemination of political and gnostic authority which Florida argues has been built into the very structure of the Demak mosque, that "'*Pusaka* of the Land of Java,'" as the dominant Central Javanese historical tradition calls it (p. 322), continues to sow spores of rebellion as well-known stories of Islamic conversion or apostasy are retold. Sunan Bayat, Ki Ageng Pengging, Sèh Siti Jenar, and Sèh Malang Sumirang are all representations of anti-order, and of a kind of "knowledge" which defies control if not clear definition. As Siti Jenar puts it ecstatically:

"For he who has grasped the ultimate of *rasa*⁵
Rasa that is Reality
 the reality of *rasa*
 Is surely not *rerasan* [discourse] voiced in speech
 Nor the six *rasa* flavors
 Nor again the *rasa*
 Which is *rasa*—ed [tasted] by the lips." (p.361)

In a final chapter Florida reaches some general conclusions about the significance of the kind of "Javanese" notion of "history" which she has patiently uncovered, veil by concealing veil, in the *Babad Jaka Tingkir*. I quote the following passage in full:

⁵ "There is no translating the polysemic *rasa*, a word whose excess of sense escapes definition. *Rasa* evokes (often at the same time) a range of senses: 'essence, meaning, feeling, taste, sense, secret, speech.'" (p. 176, note 182).

The writing releases the event forward in time into the heterogeneous universe of Javanese (con)-textuality, a world of *semu*, to be read and realized. This release of the event produces a notion of history quite different from that in the dominant discourses of the post-Enlightenment West. The foundational projects of history engendered by the post-Enlightenment reign of reason have conventionally strived for the scientific recovery or recuperation of the past (what really happened) in transparent, representational language. These projects unselfconsciously imagine an authentic originary fit between language and its referent in which the reality of the event may be recovered under the transparent sign that the well-informed historian supplies. In traditional Javanese historical writing, however, the relations among the past event, historian, and the language through which the historian writes the past are appreciated as more ambiguous. Rather than attempt to recover a “really real” event in transparent language, these Javanese texts offer glimpses of events, of the past, among veils of *semu*. (p. 398)

There is no space here to take issue with the spunky reductionism of this characterization of the post-Enlightenment and the now already pluralized, postmodern historical enterprise in the West or to question the cheeky blind-eye which it turns in the direction of historians living and working in Java who have been influenced and/or inspired by the Enlightenment “reign of reason” (the authors of the *Serat Centhini*,⁶ Hoesein Djajadiningrat, Sartono Kartodirdjo, Onghokham, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, amongst others, spring to mind).⁷ Notwithstanding the saucy insouciance with which Florida has applied herself to an unveiling of textual *semu* as if it were an unzippable uniform of all-conquering Javaneseness rather than a blood-soaked bandage of historical contingency—a “*semu*” to conceal the colonized from the colonizer, one colonized from another⁸—this passage from Florida’s conclusion also entices us to dare to penetrate the veil of *semu* for ourselves, in memory of Jaka Karèwèd. Are there other readings of the poem which the *Babad Jaka Tingkir* may allow us to conjure forth and feast our eyes upon? We won’t know unless we seize the banyan tree and take a look! The thoughts which are offered below reveal a colonial, “reactionary” veil still lurking behind the “revolutionary” ones which Florida has so ably described and let fall from the body of the text.

For my own talisman of invisibility I rely on two mantra of Western Javanology: an essay that I published nearly twenty years ago about another poem which was written in Ambon during Bangun Tapa’s imprisonment there and an excellent, recent PhD dissertation by the philologist E. P. Wieringa.⁹ The *Babad Bangun Tapa* which is the

⁶ See Tony Day and Craig J. Reynolds, “Cosmologies, Truth Regimes, and the State in Southeast Asia,” *Modern Asian Studies* (forthcoming).

⁷ And while we’re at it, let’s remind ourselves that in 1837, almost the same time as the *Babad Jaka Tingkir* was written, Munshi Abdullah sailed up the east coast of the Malay Peninsula and produced his Enlightenment travelogue and critique of the Malay *ancien régime*, the *Voyage of Abdullah*. See Anthony Milner, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya: Contesting Nationalism and the Expansion of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 10–30.

⁸ For a discussion of *semu* in which the contingent meanings of “allusion” in situations of contemporary political oppression in Java are explored, see Goenawan Mohamad, “Kesusastraan, *Pasemon*,” in *Kesusastraan dan Kekuasaan* (Jakarta: PT Pustaka Firdaus, 1993).

⁹ See my “The Drama of Bangun Tapa’s Exile in Ambon, the Poetry of Kingship in Surakarta, 1830–58,” in Lorraine Gesick, ed., *Centers, Symbols, and Hierarchies: Essays on the Classical States of Southeast Asia* (New

subject of both studies is possibly the only Javanese text of relevance for the interpretation of the *Babad Jaka Tingkir* that Florida passes over in silence.

Written in 1838–39 to commemorate a wedding between Bangun Tapa and the daughter of a local Chinese merchant named Nonah Kuwi,¹⁰ the *Babad Bangun Tapa* is remarkable for the naked literalness of its representation of the sorrows and ignominies of deposition and exile, for the apparent absence of shame-concealing *semu*. The poetic narrative seems merely to document Bangun Tapa's exile, pseudo-restoration, courtship and marriage, ornamented here and there with allusions to wayang conventions and characters. The additions of further embellishment taken from wayang and other literary texts to the c. 1887 and 1917 versions,¹¹ as well as the insertion in these texts of the pre-Ambon adventures of Pakubuwana VI as he desperately searches for a way of impregnating his favorite queen, Ratu Anom, with a son and heir, aided by a Sunan Kalijaga-like mystical advisor, Ki Thuthuk,¹² create the strong impression that, as Wieringa implies, the earliest version of the *babad* is more "historical" in a post-Enlightenment than in a "Javanese" sense. But Florida has taught us to look for veils of *semu* even when we can't at first see where they are.

One of the features of the *Babad Bangun Tapa* which continues to hold my interest is the play on apparent difference and identity, between Dutch officials and various Javanese princes, including the sunan himself, between the *kraton* which is designed and built for the king by his uncle Cakradipura and the governor's residence, between "it" (which?) and the distant *kraton* of Surakarta, between all the Ambonese palaces and the both more distant and yet proximate mythic home of the first king to appear on the screen at a Central Javanese wayang performance endlessly reproducible through performance. It seemed to me when I wrote my essay that in the Ambonese world of "Surakarta-in-exile" the kind of microcosmic-macrocosmic game of state-founding imitation which Clifford Geertz had examined in his work on the "theater state" was problematized by colonial uncertainties, since in the poeticized-Dutch-Javanese-Chinese-Ambonized realm of *Babad Bangun Tapa*, "equivalences are multiple and in flux, constantly evoking and replacing each other" rather than providing exemplary, essential centeredness for any of the characters represented there.¹³

Notwithstanding the seeming post-Enlightenment realism of the poem's historical account of Bangun Tapa's marriage to Nonah Kuwi, I still feel that "mimicry" is one of the central tropes and problematic themes of the poem. I can now think about this

Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, Monograph Series No. 26, 1983), pp. 125-193. A fully annotated text and more accurate translation of the *Babad Bangun Tapa* which I excerpt and discuss in my essay is now available in E. P. Wieringa's *Babad Bangun Tapa: De Ballingschap van Pakubuwana VI op Ambon 1830-1849*, 2 vols. (PhD dissertation, University of Leiden, 1994). Wieringa also proposes a better dating for the poem, in addition to summarizing and extensively discussing the other and later versions of the *babad*.

¹⁰ Wieringa, *Babad Bangun Tapa*, vol. 1, p. 158.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 176 and *passim*.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 178–184. The plan misfires and the Ratu Emas, who refuses to follow Bangun Tapa into exile, becomes pregnant with the son who later reigns as Pakubuwana IX (r. 1861-93). Ki Thuthuk prophecies not only the king's exile but also, in the 1917 version, the political turmoil resulting from the founding of Sarekat Islam; see *ibid.*, p. 127 and *passim*.

¹³ Day, "The Drama," p. 152 and *passim*.

process more clearly thanks to the work of John Pemberton,¹⁴ Homi Bhabha,¹⁵ and Nancy Florida.

As Pemberton explains in his study of “Javanese” rituals and weddings, while the defeat of Dipanagara in 1830 “appears to signal new-found success for the Dutch in domesticating Central Javanese rulers, it discloses as well a significant point in what was . . . a far more powerful form of domestication” by which “Dutch intruders” were themselves ritually tamed and turned into guests “who might *then* be respected” at “Javanese” rituals.¹⁶ This form of Central Javanese ritual domestication became so powerful and entrenched, Pemberton argues, that it continues to tame Indonesians in Soeharto’s “Javanese” New Order state today.

But we need to turn to Bhabha to be confronted by the thought that in the game of nineteenth-century colonial mimicry in which Central-Javanized “Dutchmen”¹⁷ and Dutchified (de)Central(ized) “Javanese” both strove to “reform,” “regulate,” and “discipline” each other, the Other became “almost the same, *but not quite*.”¹⁸ It follows, I think, in the logic of mimicry as analyzed by Bhabha, that not just Dutch versions of Javanese reconstituted as colonial subjects, but also “Javanese” constructions of themselves in the colonial Surakarta/Ambonese situation, would have reproduced this quality of sameness-*but-not-quite*. This, I take it, is the fun and terror of Ranggawarsita’s naughty fashion parade of imaginary selves in his ca. 1830 poem *Serat Jayèngbaya*, excerpted, translated, and discussed with such verve by Florida in the opening section of her book (pp. 40–48). The poet can imagine himself disguised as any one of a large number of colonial Surakarta impostors, *but not quite!* And it is this “not quite,” this “ambivalence” characteristic of the mimicry enacted by participants in the early nineteenth-century Indies colonial encounter which is also examined in the *Babad Bangun Tapa* and which also generates the colonial charade of authority and rebellion, centeredness and marginality, contemporary events and “staged antiquity” (p. 86), literary and literal, sense and nonsense, *rasa* (essence, meaning) and *rahsa* (secret), “realistic” representation and *semu* in the “Javanese,” *but not quite* “historical” world of the *Babad Jaka Tingkir*.

Once we have penetrated the *kraton* walls, our eyes opened wider, our powers of observation sharpened, by the *pitutur* of Florida, Pemberton, and Wieringa, it is fascinating to observe the hijinks of mimicry taking place between and within texts written in Ambon and Surakarta in the 1830s and 1840s. In 1830 Ranggawarsita’s *Jayèngbaya* imagines himself a kingly, strutting puppet-Major General—“All met would fall ‘plunk’ to their knees/ As I’d be taken for high royalty/ Ah! My pleasure would know no bounds/ Like a dashing young *wayang* hero I’d be”¹⁹—and indeed the former Lieutenant-Colonel in the colonial army, Prince Purbaya, elevated to the

¹⁴ John Pemberton, *On the Subject of “Java”* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994).

¹⁵ See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), especially “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” pp. 85–92.

¹⁶ Pemberton, *On the Subject*, pp. 69–70.

¹⁷ Let’s not forget the ethnic heterogeneity and weakly defined national identity of this classifier in the early nineteenth century!

¹⁸ Bhabha, “Of mimicry,” p.86.

¹⁹ Florida, *Writing the Past*, p. 43.

rank of Susuhunan by Dutch generals in 1830 after the deposition of Pakubuwana VI, must have experienced something similar when he became Arjuna in his own lavish wedding to a Madurese princess in 1835.²⁰ In 1838–39, not long after the usurper's marriage, Bangun Tapa staged his own imitation Surakarta-style royal wedding, described, step by costumed step, in the *Babad Bangun Tapa*.²¹ At the wedding feast, the Ambonese monarch wears a *barong parang rusak* batik and, taking a stab at making a powerful Madurese connection of his own, carries the kris Kyai Jaran Panolih, which also happens to be the name of one of Brawijaya V's sons, who is mentioned in the *Babad Jaka Tingkir* (1848-50) as the ruler of Sumenep, Madura.²² A little later in this text, Jaka Karèwèd, it seems, is sent on a secret mission for *kraton* Ambon, invisible with his royal banyan-tree talisman, to spy on and seize (Jav. *ngrebut*) the goodies stored in his master's former palace.

Although the *Babad Jaka Tingkir* does not contain even one mythological wedding, it does display imitations of the colonial pomp and circumstance which were more frequent and possible in Surakarta. The following passage describes Jaka Prabangkara's first appearance before "His Serene Majesty," the Emperor of China:

The Emperor beckoned to Jaka
 Commanding that he draw near
 And Jaka did kowtow and *sembah*
 His performance charming to see

 Crouching low, he did advance
 Like a peacock strutting
 Graceful, elegant, so agile
 Performed with decorum discriminate
 Discriminate of the situation
 Exquisite was the swaying of his neck.

As we know, this enticing "act" of peerless *semu* tells the Emperor that Prabangkara is "a fragrant flower of royalty."²³ Some disguise! Thus "China" is made to kowtow to "Java," with Nonah Kuwi acquiring royal parentage, thereby also fulfilling colonial Dutch criteria for royal marriageability, in the 1917 version of the *Babad Bangun Tapa*.²⁴

Although they were written some ten years apart, reading the *Babad Bangun Tapa* and the *Babad Jaka Tingkir* together causes concealed references to royal Surakarta family matters to come into view in the latter text. Or so it seems. The *Babad Bangun*

²⁰ See Pemberton, *On the Subject*, pp. 72-75 for the "Javanized" version of Pakubuwana VII's kingship, and Vincent J. H. Houben, *Kraton and Kumpeni: Surakarta and Yogyakarta 1830-1870* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1994), pp. 36 ff. for details of the Dutch one.

²¹ See Day, "The Drama" and Wieringa, *Babad Bangun Tapa*.

²² See Wieringa, *Babad Bangun Tapa*, v. 1, p. 73 and Florida, *Writing the Past*, p. 105.

²³ Florida, *Writing the Past*, p. 131, and see the discussion on p. 286 ff.

²⁴ See Wieringa, *Babad Bangun Tapa*, v. 1, p. 69 and *passim*. This version also connects Bangun Tapa's marriage to Nonah Kuwi to Brawijaya's legendary wedding to a Chinese princess; the son of this marriage overthrew Majapahit and founded Demak. See *ibid.*, p. 70. For a discussion of the issue of royal marriages and successions in Surakarta and Yogyakarta between 1830 and 1870, and their implications for understanding messianic rebellions, see Houben, *Kraton and Kumpeni*, pp. 191-255.

Tapa contains clear references to old intra-family feuds,²⁵ but the *Babad Jaka Tingkir* makes more subtle allusions to Bangun Tapa's mother's village origins in the Jaka Prabangkara and Jaka Karèwèd episodes, and the neat coincidence that both lads are sons of butchers' daughters may also allude to the fact that Bangun Tapa's uncle, Cakradipura, is said to have married the daughter of a rich butcher in Ambon.²⁶

The *Babad Jaka Tingkir*, in other words, presents Surakarta exiles, wherever they are, with legendary figures from the early history of Central Java. These characters both mimic and can be mimicked by the exiles themselves. Thus Jaka Prabangkara the painter mimics Cakradipura the architect, and Sunan Bangun Tapa imagines himself in the place of Jaka Karèwèd, while Siti Jenar, Malang Sumirang, and Ki Ageng Pengging both imitate and furnish models of the rural anti-establishment asceticism practiced by "his highness who meditates," otherwise known, at the end of his life, as "I.S.K.S. Sayiddi Maolana Mokahamat Salim," portrayed (? by Cakradipura??) in one of the interpolated drawings bound with the manuscript.²⁷ BUT NOT QUITE! I fancy I also see Bangun Tapa's relative, foster parent, and political mentor, the Surakarta Grand Vizier Sasradiningrat II, making a phantasmagorical cameo appearance in the character of Gajahmada, who counsels Brawijaya on justice in the matter of Prabangkara versus the Majapahit state.²⁸

What I am suggesting, in other words, is that beneath or in addition to Florida's veiled readings of the text there is at least one more veil of *semu* which cloaks a more predictably reactionary Central Javanese aristocratic world, one dominated by family feuds and killings, the fear of public disgrace, and the politics of godlike supremacy.²⁹

²⁵ See Day, "The Drama," p. 150 and especially Wieringa, *Babad Bangun Tapa*, v. 1, p. 190.

²⁶ Wieringa, *Babad Bangun Tapa*, v. 1, p. 64 and passim. It is also interesting to reflect on the fact that in the *Babad Bangun Tapa*, Cakradipura becomes the *kulmak* (Dutch, *volmacht*), overseer (but also "master of ceremonies") and architect of Bangun Tapa's Ambonese *kraton*; see Wieringa, v. 2, pp. 283–284 and p. 453. Wieringa, citing information which Poerbatjaraka heard from his own father, thinks that Cakradipura was the author of the *Babad Bangun Tapa* (v. 1, p. 158). Florida notes the attention to architectural detail in the *Babad Jaka Tingkir*'s description of the building of the Demak mosque (p. 325), a feature which suggests that the architecturally minded Cakradipura may have been on the job in the composition of this poem as well. Florida points out that Pakubuwana VII, in response to Dutch preservationist concerns, restored the Demak mosque in 1842, an event which may be imitated and commemorated in the *Babad Jaka Tingkir*. This possibility would also support Florida's hunch about the 1848-50 dating of the text.

²⁷ For the interpolated drawings see Florida, *Writing the Past*, pp. 72-73. The discussion of Bangun Tapa's other identity as mystic and rural recluse is on pp. 74, 380-381, and 413.

²⁸ Florida, *Writing the Past*, pp. 109-111.

²⁹ For one example of the disturbing family resemblance between some of the ideas enunciated in the *Babad Jaka Tingkir* and those which have a clear genealogical relationship to the ideology of the New Order, compare the lines from Brawijaya's letter to Jaka Prabangkara quoted and discussed by Florida as an example of "mastery of the art of *semu*" (i.e., "*kahananing nata nguni-uni/ uninga wangening/ wawenang winangun*, The Way of the ancient kings/ Was to know the limits of/ Structured authority," Florida, *Writing the Past*, pp. 292-293), with the alliteratively and politically similar Taman Siswa precept of *wengku-winengku* (lit. rule-and-be-ruled), formulated in 1930. As Kenji Tsuchiya explains this concept in his *Democracy and Leadership: The Rise of the Taman Siswa Movement in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), p. 115: "This meant that each branch [of the Taman Siswa movement] must accept the authority of the center and act in accordance with that authority . . . each branch must be bound up in a chain of authority." For a study of the baleful effects of "invisibility" as a mode of colonial rule learned by the Dutch in Java and applied elsewhere, see Geoffrey Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995).

In the representations of these social realities, there is also a “slippage” of the sort which Bhabha says occurs in colonial mimicry,³⁰ but it is different from the one which Florida finds expressed in the resistances, rebellions, and prophecies of the poem. Seen through this veil of interpretation, history can only be read as slipping ever backwards, away from the experiences of exile in Ambon or “Java” to a time when Javanese kingdoms, people, and ideas were already coming apart at the seams.

Possibly the most significant expression of the text’s slippery acquiescence to what Bhabha calls “the authorized versions of otherness” which Bangun Tapa and his entourage, no less than all the king’s courtiers in Surakarta, were constrained to imitate, is its rejection of a mimesis which represents naked reality and of what Ki Sèh Malang Sumirang refers to sneeringly as the “Knowledge of gross numeration,”³¹ in favor of the “Knowledge” supposedly contained in the mantric conundrums concocted by the mystics who are featured in the final episodes of the poem. Prabangkara and the Demak mosque, both heroes of kinds of knowledge which served the Dutch rather well in their conquest of and dominion over the Javanese, are forced to kowtow to the *Rasa* which is Reality. Is this *semu*, a subtle sign of the reconquest of Java by the Javanese, or a soothing, consolatory wank?

³⁰ Bhabha, “Of mimicry,” p. 88 and passim.

³¹ Florida, *Writing the Past*, p. 211. The Javanese is *ngèlmu ukur-ukur*.