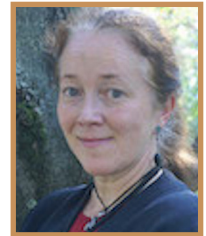




Fig. 1 – Back or “inner face” of Bapang Klono (Dursosono) mask by artist “M. Patawi,” painted wood, Malang, East Java, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Gift of Benedict R. O’G. Anderson (photograph by Ellen Avril).



by Kaja M. McGowan,
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The *House* that SEAP *Built*

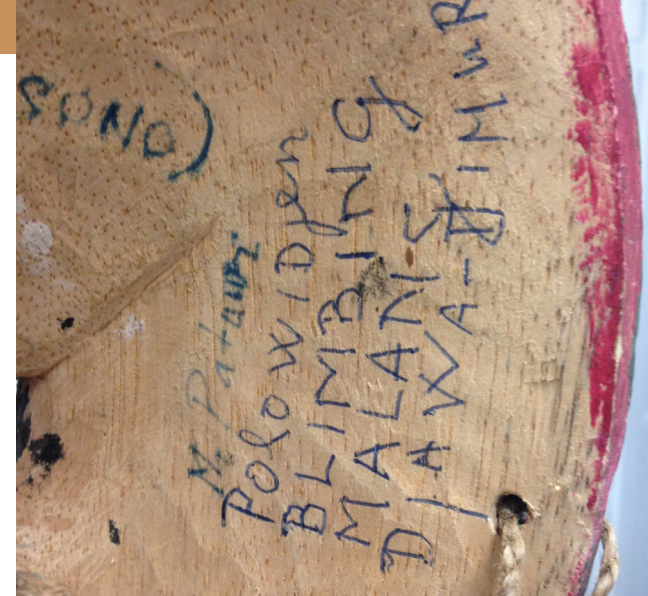
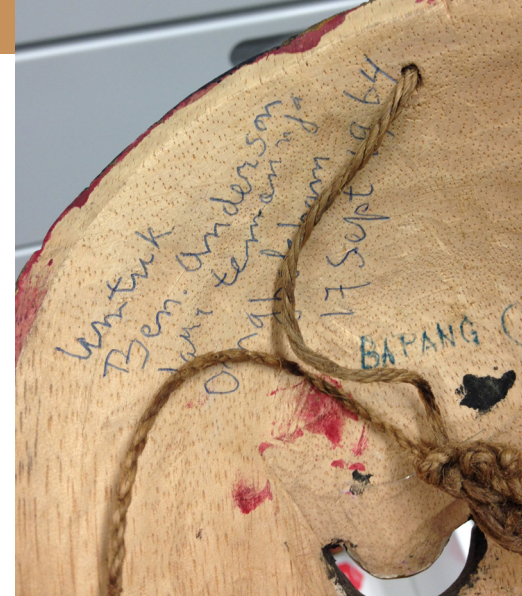
Dancers wearing masks often speak of how limited vision establishes a way to separate from vision’s crucial role and to move towards an understanding of what essential “seeing” really is: the innate ability of the body to know of nearby objects without actually seeing them distinctly, what Merleau-Ponty calls the body-subject.

Most important to notice from the “inner face” of this *Bapang* mask from East Java (Fig. 1) is that it is carved to be worn low on the face, so that for the dancer to be able to see in a limited capacity through the narrowly carved and down-turned eye-slits, he or she must tilt the head back while harnessing all the other senses in the process. Any dancer wearing a mask must be willing to forgo this visual limitation for an enhanced embodied experience. Key to this kinesthetic grasping of the surrounding performance space in Indonesia are makeshift built forms, temporary bamboo constructions that not only “house” the performative event, but that cue the visually constrained dancers’ placement in, and movement through a highly interactive, intimate, and potentially transformative sphere.

As a graduate of Cornell University, a professor in the History of Art and Visual Studies, and a former director of SEAP, I have come to think of space and the shaping of social relations in the Southeast Asia Program over the years as a similar makeshift structure, reminiscent of the popular British nursery rhyme, “This is the House that Jack Built.” Both the rhyme and the program are cumulative narratives that do not always divulge the details of their “houses” per say, or even who the cast of characters might be (Jack for one!) who provide the architectural planning. Instead, both reveal over the *longue durée* how each “house” is indirectly linked to other things and people —i.e. “the horse, the hound and the horn that belonged to the farmer sowing his corn.” Each sentence in the nursery rhyme (or SEAP’s cumulative history) is an example of a deeply nested relative clause that reveals how everything is intimately interlinked.

On the eve of the 70th anniversary of the Southeast Asia Program, I would like to meditate on the house that SEAP built by focusing on two “deeply nested” carved wooden masks from a collection gifted to the Herbert F. Johnson Museum in 1998 by the late Benedict R. O’G. Anderson (1936- 2015), political scientist and historian, perhaps best known for his 1983 book *Imagined Communities*, which explores the origins of nationalism. Anderson was the Aaron L. Binenkorb Professor Emeritus of International Studies, Government & Asian Studies at Cornell University, and a former director of the Southeast Asia Program. One afternoon in the Fall of 1998, Ben confided that while he was pleased to give others (including me) the opportunity to teach with his mask collection in the years to come, he also spoke of his misgivings and the sadness attached to parting with these objects that had become “good friends” over the years, intimate in their interactive potential.

Two “dancer king” *topeng* masks in particular became the focus of our conversation in his home in Freeville that day in 1998, a strong red-faced Bapang (Dursosono) mask from Polowidgen, Blimbing, East Java, gifted to Ben in 1964 by his friend, the historian and public intellectual Ong Hok Ham (1933-2007) (Fig. 2 revealing the recto [“outer face”] of Fig. 1’s verso [“inner face”]); and a refined Dalem mask from Tebesaya, Bali, carved and gifted to Ben in 1967 by the renowned artist, Ida Bagus Made (1915-1999) (Fig. 3). The style of traditional Javanese masks tends to differ significantly from that of Balinese masks. While Javanese masks often display more triangulated faces, tapering toward delicate chins, with sharply ridged and pointed noses, and relatively



Left to right: Fig. 2 – Front or “outer face” of Fig. 1. [Bapang Klono (Dursosono) mask by artist “M. Patawi,” painted wood, Malang, East Java, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Gift of Benedict R. O’G. Anderson (photograph by Tony De Camillo)]. Fig. 3 – Refined Dalem mask by artist Ida Bagus Made, plain wood with mother-of-pearl inlay, Tebesaya, Bali, HFJM, Gift of Benedict R. O’G. Anderson (photograph by Tony De Camillo). Fig. 4 – Back or “inner face,” detail of inscription on left temple of Fig. 2, Bapang Klono (photograph by Ellen Avril).

Fig. 5 – Back or “inner face,” detail of inscription on right temple of Fig. 2, Bapang Klono (photograph by Ellen Avril).

small mouths; Balinese masks reveal rounder faces with broad noses, and full lips.

In the case of the Bapang mask, Ong inscribed the following text in blue ballpoint pen on the left temple of the “inside face” where the rattan cord coils, awaiting to clasp the head of a would-be performer. The inscription on the left reads: “Untuk Ben Anderson dari temannya Onghokham, 17 September 1964” (For Ben Anderson from his friend Onghokham) (Fig. 4). The inscription on the right temple reads: “M. Patawi” (in green ink, and a different hand [possibly Ben’s?]) recording the name of the artist) followed by the place of manufacture written expressively in Ong’s hand (Fig. 5).

Ben disclosed to me that the mask’s name or character BAPANG (DURSOSONO), inscribed in quadrata capitals on the forehead, was something that he vaguely remembered having written soon after he received it in 1964, suggesting that the mask carver’s name may have been inscribed by him as well using the same emerald green ink. He spoke endearingly of Ong and Gus Made who had entrusted him with these masks, “gifts exchanged between friends,” he remarked, “and marvelous eccentrics too,” he added with a somewhat demonic smile. He spoke of each mask as a “continual conversation,” and that he was convinced that, when gifted, these objects were “intended to tell him something.” “What was their message?” I asked, intrigued.

Instead of answering, Ben made it known through a series of convoluted questions that he wanted to discuss instead the rituals required in Bali to bring a mask to life and imbue it with power (*taksu*). It was immediately after this discussion that Ben handed me Gus Made’s mask (Fig. 3), concerned on the eve of its migration to the museum that it had lost some of its *taksu* because soon after its arrival in the U.S., one of its mother-of-pearl inlaid teeth had popped out. “I can fix that,” I offered, describing a collection of square buttons I had at home carved in the 1920s in Muscatine, Iowa, from fresh water mollusks dredged up from the Mississippi River. Later at home on Hanshaw Road, I remember feeling great trepidation when I filed down the button, fitted it into the generous

mouth on Gus Made’s mask, and glued it with epoxy. A few days later, when I returned the mask to Ben, he was pleased to see the transformation. “Muscatine meets Tebesaya,” he wrote in an e-mail exchange a few days later, grateful for the repair, and struck by the confluence of material and geographical forces that could restore a wild man (“all tattered and torn”) to a noble dancer king reborn.

My own associations with Gus Made and Ong engage with an earlier history than that provided by Ben and his mask collection. And it is these prior encounters with the “gift-givers” that shape the way I teach using these objects in the “House that SEAP Built.”

IDA BAGUS MADE’S TOPENG DALEM MASK

I first heard about the artist, Ida Bagus Made in 1980-81 when, as an undergraduate at Wesleyan University, I had the extraordinary opportunity to embark on a junior year abroad in Bali on invitation from Dr. I Made Bandem, then director of ASTI (Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia), the Academy of the Performing Arts in Denpasar, Bali. It was Bandem’s wife Swasthi who first introduced me as a student of dance and music to the legendary Balinese *legong* dancer, Ni Ketut Reneng from Banjar Kedaton.

Because my father is a painter interested in registering sound and motion in his compositions, one day this topic came up with Bu Reneng regarding Balinese painters. Reneng mentioned that there were few painters that she knew of in Bali who could evoke the rhythms of the gamelan instruments in paint, and, fewer still, the movements of the dance. Then Ida Bagus Made’s name surfaced. “When you look at Gus Made’s paintings,” she reflected, “you know the exact moment in the music by the gestures of the musicians and dancers. He even dances while painting,” she added with her own graceful hands in motion.

Ida Bagus Made (1915-1999) was born into an influential brahman family. He was perhaps best known by the Balinese as a ritual specialist for carving sacred masks imbued with magical power for the surrounding temples of Ubud. As a tra-

ditional painter of the Pitamaha generation, he later came to occupy a unique position in the development of Bali’s modern art. Long before turning to paint, however, Gus Made defined himself as a carver of sacred masks, especially Barong, a benevolent leonine creature who represents all that is positive in the universe (Fig. 6). When asked which was easier, carving a mask for the temple or painting a composition for possible sale, Gus Made’s response was immediate. “The mask,” he said, “because it is made for sacred purposes, the soul (*jiwa*) enters easily when it is worshipped; a painting is more difficult because it is not venerated.” Gus Made would often develop performance images in paint of dancers, sometimes masked, utilizing a makeshift bamboo gateway called a *panggung* as an activated frame registering the dancer’s every emotion through the swaying weightlessness of hanging palm offerings. Prior to its actual moment of worship, even the soul of a mask and its wearer can be ritually enlivened by this makeshift ritual space.

Many Balinese mask carvers describe the relationship in mask-making (and the inherent word-play involved) in selecting the plain wood (*kayu*) from the *pule* tree, and the necessary application of thought and embodied desire combined (*kayun*), not only in its carving, but in realizing its performative potential. The Indonesian verb for thinking with the mind alone is *pikir*; while *kayun*, by stark contrast, refers to the act of thinking with desire that calls upon the mind and body combined.

According to Ben, Gus Made’s gift of the refined Dalem mask of the dancer king (Fig. 3) carved in 1967 was never intended to be used in an actual *topeng pajegan* performance. Left unpainted, it was perhaps as Ben suggested intended as an *objet d’art*. I would also like to suggest that it may have been meant as a parting “gift” offering an ongoing alliance of some kind. As such, it might encourage the recipient of the gift to “see” both himself and the artist in the process of a continual farewell, a palpable reminder that a more refined character might indeed be coaxed one day out of the rough and raw grain of the wood.

Minimal and subtle are the movements of the masked Dalem, whose sweet smile and low-slung, side-stepping gait – heel, step and shuffle – with arms slowly sweeping down is compared in one Balinese song that accompanies the dance to “a peacock about to take flight” (*makebeh ida mekeber*), concluding with the plaintive question inspired by mutual friendship and devotion, “how could I ever leave him?” (*kudiang titiang ngelayarin*).¹ According to Ben, Gus Made brought the mask to his hotel in 1967 just a few days before they parted, neither of them knowing that it would be for the last time.

In fact, it was one of Ben’s teachers and mentors at Cornell, the legendary dancer and art historian Claire Holt, who had sent him off to do his fieldwork in Indonesia with letters of introduction in 1962. “Start with Ida Bagus Made,” she had said, but as Ben pointed out, “Ida Bagus Made started with me.” He describes the artist taking him under his wing and teaching him about Balinese art from his extensive collection under the eaves of his own house, and in the homes of contemporary artists and rivals. Ben concludes by wondering:

It is still rather a mystery why he (Gus Made), so to speak, took to me. I watched him several times when “important (or wealthy) visitors” came to his home. He would politely show his work, but courteously refuse to sell them anything on the grounds that he couldn’t part with them, and perhaps one day they would be part of a local museum for his art. But I could tell that he just didn’t like them. Was it because I spoke Indonesian comfortably? Because I was young, insignificant, and a bit gone native? Or because he knew he was the “Only One” in my eyes?²

Whatever the motivation, a similar shared devotion is evident, albeit more subtle (at least on the printed page), when it comes to Ben’s relationship with Ong Hok Ham, whose home in Jakarta was described as a treasure trove of art-collecting, including among other things East Javanese masks. Ong loved food and drink, in large quantities. His unusual house, composed of separate pavilions that wed Balinese and Javanese architectural styles, was home to many a legendary party.³

In his essay “A Language Learned in Java: A Collector’s View of His Masks,” (SEAP Bulletin, Spring 1999: 6-8), Ben, as he did with Gus Made, marshals the trope of linguistic mastery:

Improving my Indonesian was simply a matter of time and immersion in everyday Indonesian society. For Dutch, however, the only solution was to teach myself the language, using a dictionary, some simple knowledge of German, and a really interesting Dutch book. Thanks to the suggestion of an Indonesian friend, I started with *Javaansche Volksvertoningen*, Theodoor Pigeaud’s vast, classic 1930s compendium on the traditional “theatres” of Java. Nothing among the book’s many illustrations so entranced my eyes as the photographs of masks and masked performances.⁴

Though the name of “the Indonesian friend” is never divulged in the essay, certainly the suggested reading of this influential book becomes the catalyst for Ben’s collecting im-



Fig. 6 (left) – Ida Bagus Made, carving a child's barong mask in Tebesaya, Bali (photograph courtesy of Soemantri Widagdo).

Fig. 7 (right) – Ong Hok Ham (photograph courtesy of Ben Anderson).

pulses – the Dutch tome that triggered the trunk filled with masks in his home (“that tossed the dog that worried the cat”) that lived in the House that SEAP Built.

Pigeaud's text also reveals how the author's extensive knowledge is acquired through the power of colonial bureaucracy, the photo credits supplying a nascent collector and a cash-strapped graduate student like Ben with a map to the two largest mask collections in the 1930s: the first, belonging to Mangkunegoro VII in Surakarta, and the second amassed by the major (appointed head of the Sino-Javanese community) of Cirebon, Tan Tjin Kie. In 1963, Ben finds the former court collection largely intact, while the latter, due to the ever-shifting political climate and anti-Chinese sentiment, had all but vanished. Interestingly, one of Anderson's enthusiastic partners in his quest for Javanese masks in 1963-1964 is the *peranakan* historian Ong Hok Ham, himself an avid collector (Fig. 7).⁵

ONG HOK HAM'S BAPANG (DURSOSONO) MASK

It is Ong Hok Ham's insightful essay entitled “The Wayang Topeng World of Malang,” published in 1972 (Indonesia 14: 110-124) that provides the clue to the identity of Ben's “Indonesian friend.” Again, it is my introduction to Ong's remarkable writing that precedes, and helps later to make sense of some of my more puzzling mask-related interactions with Ben. Ong's essay was first introduced to me by the Javanese dance teacher, historian, critic, and performer, Sal Murgianto. Sal was invited to guest teach an intensive summer course on Javanese Dance in 1987 at Cornell University. As a graduate student at the time, I was thrilled to enroll in his seminar. In 1980, Sal had published a book entitled *Topeng Malang*. The book drew inspiration from Ong's essay. When I expressed interest in the subject, Sal assigned the two publications to be read in tandem. In one of Sal's lectures, the strong male East Javanese Topeng Malang character of the Bapang (Fig. 2) was introduced like some wild creature hovering on the verge of extinction. Taking his cues from Ong's text, Sal described the performance by first introducing the importance of the makeshift bamboo structure that simulates a pavilion (*pendopo*), complete with a curtain painted with distant but familiar palaces, mountains, and temples. Then the first dancer emerges:

Formerly the performance was introduced by a Bapang dance, a *kelana* dance of forceful gestures

and postures by a dancer wearing a red mask with an extraordinary long nose. This mask has disappeared from the Malang wayang topeng performance and has not been seen since pre-war days, though there are still some dancers that can do it (Ong Hok Ham, *Indonesia* 14: 114).

Without being able to photograph the actual rhythmic gestures of this defiant and demonic foreign king, swaying from side to side with legs splayed wide, Ong does the next best thing. He turns to his favorite source for visual accuracy, Pigeaud's Dutch classic *Javaansche Volksvertoningen* (1938; plate XIII), the very tome recommended to Ben.

In his article, Ong carefully orchestrates the borrowed image of the *Bapang* dancer from Pigeaud, positioning him lower down on the page to the left so that the masked dancer is forced to look up to the right, his prodigious nose didactically pointing to an adjoining photograph revealing a constellation of nine wayang topeng Malang masks made by the “only topeng carver in Polowidjen, Blimbing” at the time of Ong's fieldwork in 1963, a man by the name of Mas Kastawi. And there, featured on page 116 in the upper right hand corner is a red *Bapang* mask that is the spitting image of the *Bapang* mask gifted to Ben by Ong. Returning to the inscription on the right temple of the “inner face” of Ben's mask (Fig 5), gifted in Java in 1964, it begs the question whether the signature of “M. Patawi” might be a misspelling of the carver's name, Mas Kastawi. Could it be the same mask, or its twin? We will probably never know the answer, but even in 1987, I found myself wondering what it was that predisposed Ong to write so sensitively about the Malang wayang topeng tradition in East Java. A brief introduction to Ong's life is required by way of conclusion, if only to shed light on the possible lessons inherent in Ong's gift to Ben of the red-faced, ferocious-eyed *Bapang* mask (Fig. 2).

Ong Hok Ham was born in 1933 in Surabaya, East Java to Indo-Chinese parents whose families had lived consistently for seven generations in that region (Fig. 7). Well connected, but not well-to-do by any means, the quality of Ong's familial life had been determined in large part by the competitive wrangling for status within Javanese colonial society. Hopes were pinned on the intellectual son, who was originally destined for a career in the colonial bureaucracy and was therefore given a solid Dutch education. But the Japanese Occupation of

1942-45, and the subsequent national revolution would have a disastrous impact on these family aspirations. Instead, Ong enrolled in an Indonesian school, and spent the 1950s exploring his possible vocation as a historian, immersing himself in the study of Javanese art and culture. He started studying law at Universitas Indonesia (UI), but by 1957 had given up on his studies to work as an assistant for then Cornell professor and SEAP alumnus, Bill Skinner, researching the Chinese in Indonesia.

In the 1960s, Ong turned his attention to a period of intense fieldwork in East Java, where he became increasingly enamored with living theatrical forms and culture. Like many Indonesians, he grew increasingly concerned by what he saw as the economic deterioration and political tensions of Guided Democracy (1959-1965). Appalled by the violence in 1965, Ong spoke out, and was imprisoned for his actions. This period of incarceration, however, did not end his career. On the contrary, in September 1968, Ong set out for the United States where he pursued his doctoral studies at Yale University. He returned to Indonesia in 1975, keen to make a career as a public intellectual. He published widely on a variety of topics: colonial history, Javanese art and society, the Indonesian Chinese, and even the social history of Indonesian cuisine. He grew impatient with theory and was remembered for embracing the motto: “concentrate on the person.” After Ong's death in 2007, Ruth McVey shared a moving tribute to Ong, written in his own words.⁶

According to Ruth, “Ong had written his statement in the wake of the disasters of 1965-66, which had brought him imprisonment and then a mental breakdown. His psychiatrist had suggested that he try to reach self-understanding by writing an account of his life that emphasized the things he thought had most influenced his development. He gave a copy to Ben Anderson, who visited Indonesia in 1967, with the request that he pass it on to a few mutual friends.”⁷ It is Ruth's copy that was published in Indonesia by way of a memorial. I am grateful to Ruth for sharing Ong's personal testimony as it helps to shed light on his unique gifts, shaped significantly by his upbringing and the spiritual life of his family. For example, there is the time when, as a boy, Ong becomes ill. It is then that, with the family's unanimous consent, his old servant brings him to a local Hindu stone statue of King Keratanegara. He describes being introduced to the statue by the servant and being urged to shake its stone hand and make an offering. This belief in the healing power of natural materials like wood and stone is also reflected in his essay on wayang topeng Malang. In it, Ong describes an old topeng dancer from Tumpang:

In his youth he danced the now vanished Bapang dance. At present he lives a leisurely life among

his lengkeng (fruit) trees near the ruins of the old Tjandi Djago.⁸

Ever hopeful, Ong concludes: “The Malang wayang topeng tradition is not yet dead. As a topeng dancer from Tumpang said, ‘we do the same things in wood that our ancestors did in stone,’ pointing to the carvings on the ruins of Tjandi Djago Tumpang which represent in stone the rhythm of life.”⁹ Like the wearer of the mask from Tumpang, Ong had faith in the journey, even though he could not always see the path ahead. “Concentrate on the person,” was his motto. In the case of his friend, Ben, this concentration resulted in a shared critique of Indonesia, one that resulted in imprisonment and expulsion. In light of their combined daring, a heroic and demonic mask like the Bapang (Dursosono) with its phallic, in-your-face nose may have signaled a shared “bad boy” view of the world, one honed from the epic Mahabharata. In his 1965 publication on the Javanese shadow theater, Ben describes the character of Dursosono, as one of brotherly devotion to the clan:

Dursosono, the second of the ninety-nine Kurawa brothers, is regarded next to Sangkuni, as the most unpleasant of the left faction. Noisy, boastful, violent and unscrupulous, he is nevertheless devoted to his elder brother, Sujudana, and to the fortunes of his clan. In the field, he is a brave fighter, and only the invincible Wrekudara can destroy him. His role is very important, since at every juncture in the lakons, it is Dursosono and Sangkuni who push the action forward towards a new climax. Each time a settlement appears possible, it is these two who ensure its failure.¹⁰

In hindsight, the gift of the Bapang mask may indeed have served as a premonition of things to come, for while still a graduate student at Cornell, Ben anonymously co-wrote the notorious “Cornell Paper” with Ruth T. McVey and Fred Bunnell that debunked the official Indonesian government accounts of the abortive coup of the 30 September Movement and the subsequent anti-Communist purges of 1965-66. “Pushing the action forward towards a new climax,” resulted in being black-listed. Ben taught at Cornell until his retirement in 2002, when he became a professor emeritus of International Studies. After his retirement, he spent most of his time traveling throughout South East Asia. Ong would probably not have thought it a coincidence at all that Ben died in his sleep on December 13, 2015 in Batu, Malang. It would no doubt have pleased him that Ben, only the day before had visited many of his beloved carvings in stone, that like their masked prototypes in wood, continue to dictate the rhythm of life in the House that SEAP Built. ✨

¹ E. Herbst, *Voices in Bali* (Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 84-85.

² Anderson, McGowan, Vickers & Widagdo, *Ida Bagus Made: The Art of Devotion* (Ratna Wartha Foundation, 2008), 8.

³ For a vivid account of Ong's house, see James T. Siegel, “Ong Hok Ham, A Tribute,” in *Indonesia*, No. 85 (April 2008): 123-124.

⁴ *SEAP Bulletin*, Spring 1999: 6.

⁵ For a more in depth discussion of Ben's ties to Chinese Indonesian mask collectors during the 1960s, see Laurie Margot Ross's extraordinary book, *The Encoded Cirebon Mask* (Brill, 2016), 194.

⁶ Statement by Ong Hok Ham, Djakarta, September 4th, 1967, Authors Ruth McVey & Ong Hok Ham, *Indonesia*, No. 85 (April 2008): 125-136.

⁷ *Ibid*, 125.

⁸ Ong Hok Ham, “The Wayang Topeng World of Malang,” *Indonesia*, No. 14 (October 1972): 120.

⁹ *Ibid*, 124.

¹⁰ Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Mythology and the Tolerance of the Javanese* (Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, [1965] 1996), 59.