THE RISE OF THE TSUNAMI CHILDREN

A day in the life of an Australian volunteer at the Youth Off The Streets-Muhammadiyah Child Care Centre camp at Blang Bintang, Aceh, June 2005 by Kipley Nink, Southeast Asia Centre student 2000-2004

As the soccer ball lands, thud, in the entrance of my tent, it is a sign that the camp’s young inhabitants have decided it’s time the Australian volunteers showed their faces. It is 6 am and I would have liked a more gentle wake-up call, especially considering that the previous night was Thursday, and the chanting in the mosque rings loud and persistently throughout the night, warding off the ghosts that are said to come out in Aceh each Thursday evening.

I sit up on my stretcher bed, supplied courtesy of the Australian army, and momentarily savour the coolest part of the day. Having said good morning to my tent companion, another Canberran, I pull the zipper back from the tent entrance, stick my head out and try to locate the soccer culprit. Alas, he or she has made a quick retreat. I step out, squinting, hoping to make it across the driveway to the main building, a former Telkom office, and guzzle a mug of the sweet tasting kopi Aceh (Acehnese coffee) before having to articulate more than a customary selamat pagi (good morning). In this communal situation, however, such a wish rarely eventuates, especially given that I’m the group’s default interpreter. It is this element that, paradoxically, I will miss the most on my return to the comparative solitude of life in Australia.

As the children gather outside the office, waiting for the Muhammadiyah school bus to take them to their respective schools, my dishevelled appearance does not escape their notice. ‘Kakak Kipley, baru bangun ya?’ (Kipley, you’ve just woken up?) Yes, I acknowledge, all the while trying to negotiate my way into the office before being bombarded with requests such as ‘minta tisu satu’ (can I have a tissue) or ‘balpen satu dulu’ (I need a pen). As the children start to fill the bus, the music blaring, it is a great thing to be allowed to see and hear them singing, word-for-word, a recent lagu pop (pop song). How often is it that busloads of kids sing, with gusto and in unison, on their way to school in Australia? The bus driver puffs away intensely on his cigarette, amazingly tolerant of the arms and screams that fly around his head at this early hour of the day. As the bus departs quiet descends on the camp, a few remaining children — who, for reasons such as illness, have stayed behind for the day — emerge and the business part of the day begins.

The daily meeting for Youth Off The Streets volunteers and Muhammadiyah staff, scheduled for 7.30 am ‘on the dot’, starts anywhere between 7.45 and 8.15 am. This flexibility was at times a blessing, allowing us to have a leisurely shower or breakfast, but also a lesson in patience, as the meeting would happen when all elements were in their right place, the timing of which was anyone’s guess.

I ventured down to the markets

Our hardworking cooks, Ibu Mar, Ibu Efie and Kakak Atun, were the cogs in the wheels of the camp, and they started preparations for breakfast (for 42 children and 10 or so staff) at the crack of dawn. Once the children left for school at 7 a.m., the cooks then went to the market to purchase the ingredients of which was anyone’s guess. As the bus departs quiet descends on the camp, a few remaining children — who, for reasons such as illness, have stayed behind for the day — emerge and the business part of the day begins.

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and only then did I begin to appreciate the mammoth task that they had in simply collecting the items needed to make pecel, sayur-sayuran, ayam goreng, or whatever else was on the menu. This was only the beginning of the laborious process of preparing and cooking the dishes. I hope they realise how crucial they are to the lives of the kids at the camp, supplying them with the energy to get them through their long days.

**A network for children in need**

On occasion I was able to accompany a Muhammadiyah staff member, Ayi (a psychology graduate from Universitas Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta, Java) to some of the various NGO meetings held in and around Banda Aceh. This was our key point of interaction with other orphanages, Poskos (aid centres), and local and international groups working in Aceh. One of the most memorable meetings I took part in was a Child Helpline workshop on the 20th of June, held by Plan, and attended by various stakeholders such as Polda NAD (the provincial police), Dinas Sosial, ILO, UNICEF, and a number of orphanages. Although it was a simple concept, to establish a phone or letter-box network for children in need, the planning and coordination needed to get the program up and running requires an effective public awareness campaign and the active involvement of all people and organisations involved in the post-tsunami recovery process.

Back at the camp, when school finished at around 2 o’clock, the search for activities began in earnest. I discovered that the girls in particular were strong volleyball players. It was great to have this to counter the boys’ passion for football (soccer), as we were fortunate to have a volleyball court at the side of the camp, whereas the boys could only satisfy their football cravings at the local field every 3 or 4 days, depending on the availability of vehicles. Play started at around 4.15, after sholat ashar (the mid-afternoon prayer), and we fought many close games with a view of the mountains as a backdrop. The enthusiasm for volleyball climaxed in a two-day competition held in the third week of our month-long stay at the camp. Four teams were entered, after much squabbling over team composition, and the final play-off was between Team Kashi Deh Lu and Team So What Gitu Lho.

**Kids who imagined the earth moving**

Looking back at that time, it strikes me as being a strange combination of an extraordinary situation on the one hand, ie, of children affected in some way by the destructive tsunami, living together in a makeshift camp, facing diseases such as malaria and typhoid, sleeping in tents that became puddles of water when it rained and stinking hot houses when it didn't, kids who faced a 42 per cent failure rate in national exams, kids who imagined the earth moving long after it has stopped, and a totally normal situation on the other, ie, kids who were competitive at sport, kids who worried about their schoolmates’ impressions if they got dropped off together right in front of their school, marking them as the ‘orphanage’ kids – at least that was the only logical explanation I could think of when they asked to be dropped off 400 metres from the entrance.

The children were understandably not overly keen to wear the second-hand thongs or flip-flops which filled one of our storerooms, I remember a similar reaction to the idea of wearing hand-me-downs when I was 15!

I was privileged to have spent a month at Camp Blang Bintang with a fantastic group of kids. Having done some travelling around Banda Aceh and the surrounding districts, our camp felt like a five-star hotel in comparison to the living conditions found at other Poskos. I worked with a great group of volunteers from Australia, who all cooperated to make life for the children at the camp as comfortable as possible. The time and effort people put in to ensure the kids have clean water, shelter and food, and to make them feel safe, is massive. If our camp is anything to go by, the phrase ‘The Rise of the Tsunami Children’ is very apt indeed.
ANU STUDENT LEADS A SURGE OF INTEREST IN SIDDHAYOGA MUSIC
by McComas Taylor, Instructor in Sanskrit, South & West Asia Centre

Bringing her considerable musical talents and knowledge of Sanskrit together, Natalie has emerged as international expert and teacher of singing in the Siddhayoga tradition. She has just returned from Melbourne where she taught a three-day Siddhayoga Music Workshop, the first ever held in Australia. Following a pilot-workshop which she convened in Oakland California in January, she was ready for this ‘big gig’. The workshop attracted 28 participants from yoga centres all over Australia and New Zealand. Natalie taught vocal warm ups, vocal classes, Sanskrit pronunciation and refinement of Siddhayoga chanting. The workshop also included drumming and harmonium.

Few students could claim to follow a University degree that lies so close to their hearts. Natalie is studying the history and theory of harmony and music in ancient cultures in the School of Music as part of her Arts Degree, and is studying third-year Sanskrit in Asian Studies. Why does she do it?

‘I do it because I love it. It gives me a better understanding of what I am chanting and why.’ But she admits, ‘Sometimes I forget, then I have to say to myself, “Look, you like this stuff!”’

Natalie Carter and McComas Taylor gave a free Living Sanskrit performance in the ANU’s Union Forecourt as part of the ANU Open Day on the afternoon of Saturday 27 August.

BURMESE LANGUAGE STUDIES
by Hazel Lang

The Southeast Asia Centre is again offering students an opportunity to study Burmese, in a second semester course previously offered as a Summer School. The Burmese language course, taught by Ma Khin Mar Mar Kyi (right) provides students with a unique opportunity to study a language offered in very few institutions internationally. The Centre has the privilege of offering a language often viewed as exotic, but which is spoken by up to 50 million people.

The syllabus will encourage students to speak, listen, read and write Burmese using a number of texts (including cartoons, newspapers, songs and magazines).

Burma (or Myanmar) has long been overlooked as a dedicated field of study due to the self-imposed isolation of the country, censorship, civil war, and the difficulty for scholars to undertake field research there. However, in recent years there has been a growing interest in Burma and recognition of its strategic location between China, India and Southeast Asia. A country course, “Burma: A Country in Crisis,” is being run simultaneously by the Centre for Asian Societies and Histories. The country course will give students a sound general introduction to the history, geography, cultures, religions, politics and economy of Burma. Students will also come away with a solid and complex understanding of the everyday life of people in this fascinating country.

Left: Mar Khin with some of her students
Southeast Asia Centre student Tansie Jarrett has been accepted into the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development program (AYAD) and will join AUSTCARE, a leading independent humanitarian aid and development NGO. Tansie will be working in the management of an AUSTCARE Capacity Building Training Project in Timor Leste.

The project aims to address the provision of training to NGOs and East Timorese government departments who are AUSTCARE partners in a range of issues including community participation, gender, environment, financial management, reporting to donors and project monitoring. The component of the project that Tansie will work on is in the Bobonaro District in the hinterland not far from the border with Indonesian West Timor. She will also contribute her expertise to AUSTCARE’s Suai Agricultural Project which provides training and farm inputs to farmers in the Suai region on the south coast.

Among the specific tasks Tansie will undertake are to help with developing a marketing management system for cooperative agriculture at local level, including, training support in developing a pricing concept and the pricing of local agricultural produce for marketing based on assessment of market price, supply and demand. She will also be called on to provide in-class and on-the-job English language training to local staff of AUSTCARE and community development groups.

Tansie remarks that her work “will rely heavily upon my Indonesian language skills, research skills and a cultural awareness of the people and culture of contemporary East Timor.”

The Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development program offers the opportunity for people aged 18 to 30 years of age to actively take part in international development initiatives within the developing nations of the Asia Pacific for periods from 3 to 12 months. The program acts as an avenue for passionate individuals to gain grass-roots experience within various development fields such as health, environment, law and education that aim to assist nations to develop such things as infrastructure, skills, education and the willingness to overcome periods of violence and upheaval. Each program is run by a host-organisation (NGOs, humanitarian groups and agencies) within the country and funded by AusAID who recruit a Youth Ambassador to assist in the implementation of program activities and goals.

Tansie strongly urges young Australians interested in development of the Asia Pacific region “to pursue any avenue of experience available to them whether through volunteering, an internship or academic studies and to investigate further the AYAD program by going to the AusAID website http://www.ausaid.gov.au/youtham/default.cfm.”

Footnote: AUSTCARE is also now recruiting for protection officers and information will soon be available on the AUSTCARE website at http://www.austcare.org.au/index.htm.

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**CALL FOR AUSTRALIAN YOUTH AMBASSADORS**

Would you like to be an Australian Youth Ambassador for Development? Two AYAD assignment positions in Indonesia are available. Details are as follows:

- Two 12 month placements working with the State Islamic Higher Education Institutes (STAIN - Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negri), one in Batu Sangkar, West Sumatra, and the other in Bangka Belitung province.

The position calls for English language development aid for these institutions, focusing on teacher support and English language teaching. The successful applicant will also be required to work with and support English language teachers from surrounding Islamic schools.

Candidates do not require extensive English language teaching experience.

These positions have not been filled, however the intake of assignments for September 2005 has already closed. The assignment advertisements for the March 2006 intake will be posted on the AYAD website from September 16, 2005, along with further information about these positions. Parties interested in one of the 2006 Indonesian Youth Ambassador assignments can visit the AYAD website at www.ayad.com.au and click on the link for Assignment Intakes.
A course in Sundanese, a regional language of Indonesia, has been running in the Southeast Asia Centre since the last week of July 2005. This is the very first attempt to do this at the ANU and, in fact, Sundanese has not often been taught whether in Australia or overseas. Eight people are attending including two teaching members of the academic staff. The course is given in Indonesian because all participants are fluent in Indonesian, and Indonesian as a teaching language is effective to explain Sundanese grammar and make good comparisons. The teaching materials are limited: they are “hand-made” and a good dictionary is difficult to obtain.

However, we have good news that a long awaited Sundanese-English dictionary was published in Indonesia recently. On the second of July I had a wonderful opportunity to interview the compiler of the dictionary, Mr. R. Rabinranat Hardjadibrata in Melbourne. Let me introduce the compiler (pictured right) and his life work briefly.

Pa Rabin, a linguist and a teacher of Indonesian at Monash University

Pa Rabin (in Sundanese without “k” for Mr.) taught and coordinated Indonesian courses in the School of Asian Languages and Studies, Faculty of Arts, Monash University from 1964 to 1996. In 1973 he was asked to teach Sundanese to honours students by Prof. Cyril Skinner. Since then he has undertaken research on the Sundanese language. One result of this work is the book titled Sundanese: a Syntactical Analysis, published in 1985. Pa Rabin taught Sundanese using this book for some time though his classes were small. He started to collect materials for the Sundanese-English dictionary project in 1975. The compilation of the dictionary was completed in 1997, but the publishing was postponed till November 2003 because of Indonesia’s economic crisis.

Pa Rabin spent several years at Dutch schools before the Japanese occupation. At that time he read many books from his father’s lending library. His farther worked at a branch of a well-known publisher, M.I. Prawira-Winata, in Bandung (Moriyama 2005: 202). This publisher/printer seems to have operated a lending library. Pa Rabin’s education was directed to teacher training at the secondary and tertiary levels, in particular English teaching. He told me that his interest in the Sundanese language can be traced back to his stay in London in 1960 as a post-graduate student sponsored by the British Council. In London he spent most of his time for two years in libraries at London University and the British Council. In a cold winter he came across articles written by R.H. Robins, a Professor in the School Oriental and African Studies, on Sundanese when he was preparing his M.A. thesis.

The New Sundanese-English Dictionary

This 896 page dictionary contains 27,127 entry words. As he mentions on the title page, the dictionary is based on the Soendaas-Nederlands Woordenboek compiled by F.S. Eringa in 1984. However, he claimed that he added a number of new words, especially terms from after World War II and loan words which are now recognised as part of the Sundanese lexicon. He carefully checked every lemma and the appropriateness of its description in Eringa’s dictionary. The most remarkable difference is that he gives the proper English translation for the names of plants and animals which are given a Latin scientific name in the Dutch dictionary. Needless to say, the English dictionary can be more widely used than the Dutch one. The price of the dictionary is about AUD$30, but unfortunately its distribution is not good so that students in the ANU’s Sundanese course have had difficulty getting a copy.

References


NEW INTEREST IN SUNDANESE AND A NEW SUNDANESE-ENGLISH DICTIONARY

by Dr Mikihiro Moriyama, Nanzan University, Nagoya, Visiting Fellow, Southeast Asia Centre

New Interest in Sundanese and a New Sundanese-English Dictionary

The New Sundanese-English Dictionary

This 896 page dictionary contains 27,127 entry words. As he mentions on the title page, the dictionary is based on the Soendaas-Nederlands Woordenboek compiled by F.S. Eringa in 1984. However, he claimed that he added a number of new words, especially terms from after World War II and loan words which are now recognised as part of the Sundanese lexicon. He carefully checked every lemma and the appropriateness of its description in Eringa’s dictionary. The most remarkable difference is that he gives the proper English translation for the names of plants and animals which are given a Latin scientific name in the Dutch dictionary. Needless to say, the English dictionary can be more widely used than the Dutch one. The price of the dictionary is about AUD$30, but unfortunately its distribution is not good so that students in the ANU’s Sundanese course have had difficulty getting a copy.

References


The first week of August 2005 was hectic in Semarang – tens of thousands of Indonesians gathered to celebrate the 600th anniversary of the landing of Chinese Admiral Cheng Ho, (also spelled Zheng He) near Semarang. He is significant for Indonesians of Chinese descent and for the Muslims of Indonesia because this great Chinese traveler and envoy was a Chinese loyal to his emperor AND a Muslim. Semarang is making the most of the anniversary and accounts of the Admiral and the celebrations planned for the city through August have been publicized for weeks in national and local media.

Admiral Cheng was sent by his emperor in 1405 to visit the major centres of early 15th century Southeast Asia and the east coast of Africa and spread the news that a new dynasty (the Ming) had replaced the Yuan (1206-1368). The relationship between China and Southeast Asia can be traced through the trade goods unearthed by archaeologists throughout Southeast Asia, including junks whose cargoes have been salvaged by marine archaeologists.

Although there is evidence, especially in Chinese texts, for regular contact between China and the south from at least the 7th century Common Era, it is rare to have a name associated with these contacts. Admiral Cheng therefore represents not only his own achievements but also stands for the many others who made the perilous journey into the southern seas to link the lands ‘below the monsoon winds’ (Southeast Asia and beyond) with those ‘above the monsoon winds’. The chairman of the 600th anniversary celebrations claims that Cheng Ho was even greater than Christopher Columbus because he had more than 27,000 people and a fleet of 200 ships whereas Columbus had only three ships and a few dozen people. A replica of Admiral Cheng’s vessel is being constructed in the river which runs through Semarang and crowds of people visit daily to watch progress, especially now as it nears completion.

The organisers of the month-long celebrations are not shy about stating that one of their purposes is to attract tourists and potential investors to Semarang to boost investment and trade. And the city is being transformed at the margins in anticipation of new growth. While the oldest parts of the city, cramped China-town around the river, ravishing but neglected Dutch colonial warehouses round the harbour, and colonial villas in the encircling hills are falling into disrepair, new buildings have sprung up to the west including a massive Trade and Promotion Centre, a huge Buddhist monastery, and a pretty marina area for recreation. Semarang is also the centre for an extensive complex of military bases and has been chosen as the site for the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation, a facility for Southeast Asian training in counter-terrorism techniques to which Australia has contributed funding and human resources.

With this emphasis on modernity and development, why has the city gone overboard about a 15th century Chinese Muslim admiral? There are many answers at an individual level, but stepping back to view the historical and socio-political context of the celebrations we can offer a few suggestions.

First, Indonesia now has its fourth president since the New Order regime of President Soeharto. The bans on any display of Chinese culture, religion or identity under Soeharto have been lifted. The festivities highlight aspects of Chinese culture: acrobats from China, a special bonsai competition, a lion dance, Chinese lantern festival, the lighting of a giant Chinese temple candle. This is an opportunity for Indonesians of Chinese descent to openly and proudly display their culture and their contribution to cultural life in Indonesia.

Second, since 2001, the new laws on regional autonomy have allowed local expressions of ethnic and cultural identity to flourish. In fact, it can be argued that regional culture is being re-invented. As observers, we can watch and record the shaping of regional identities all over Indonesia. The August events in Semarang provide excellent material for a study of the construction of a regional identity. Semarang is the capital of the province of Central Java but in the eyes of many is overshadowed culturally by the Special region of Yogyakarta in the southern part of the region. The temple complexes of Prambanan and Borobudur are in Central Java, not Yogyakarta and the Semarang festivities will showcase traditional wayang performances, Javanese dances and Buddhism (the religion portrayed so graphically at Borobudur). An analysis of the ways in which expressions of Central Javanese culture are linked with Chinese elements would make an excellent research topic.

Third, religious pluralism is a hot topic in Indonesia right now. The government-backed Council of Islamic Scholars, which provides fatwas (guidance) on issues of concern to many Muslims, recently published a fatwa condemning religious pluralism. This has been deplored by a number of leading Muslims in Indonesia and the fatwa comes precisely at the time that the Semarang festivities are highlighting the inauguration of renovations to a Chinese temple closely linked with Cheng Ho. The official brochure for the festivities describes the Gedong Batu or Sam Poo Kong Temple as ‘a unique place that represents Taoism, Moslem, Budha and Kejawen’ [traditional
Javanese beliefs] and it is indeed a place which many visit to seek blessings, indications of the future, and good luck.

During a recent visit to the temple, I noticed a high ranking Indonesian army officer who had came to seek the advice of one of the temple attendants. This was done by reading omens, burning incense, praying and lighting wads of temple paper money. I do not know whether this person was a Muslim, but he certainly seemed to be a local who came regularly to one of Semarang’s most famous landmarks and was at home in its symbols of religious pluralism.

Finally, Cheng Ho’s 600th anniversary is being billed as a ‘contribution to the inter-racial life and harmony’ of Indonesia.

SEMARANG AND THE CHINESE ADMIRAL (continued)

On August 2, ANU Vice-Chancellor Professor Ian Chubb and Professor Phan Quang Xung, President of Danang University in Vietnam signed a new MOU committing the two institutions to collaboration in teaching and research.

The signing was a follow-up to a visit to Danang made in June by a Faculty of Asian Studies delegation led by Dr George Quinn. The delegation visited six universities in Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia to negotiate venues and conditions for new intensive, in-country language courses for ANU students. Dr Quinn was accompanied by Mr Urip Sutiyono, Ms Chintana Sandilands (in Thailand), and Dr Thai Duy Bao (in Vietnam). Dr Peter van Diermen (Faculty of Science) joined the delegation for the visits made in Danang.

The delegation visited Thammasat University (Bangkok); the University of Social Sciences and Humanities – Hanoi (a campus of Vietnam National University); Danang University (Danang, Central Vietnam); Duy Tan University (Danang, Central Vietnam); the University of Social Sciences and Humanities – Ho Chi Minh City (a campus of Vietnam National University); and Satya Wacana Christian University, Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia.

The delegation also made a courtesy visit to the International Relations Department of the Danang provincial government, and to the headquarters of the Percik NGO in Salatiga, Indonesia.

In addition to identifying venues for in-country language study, the delegation explored ideas for collaboration in other courses.

In particular Dr Peter van Diermen joined the FAS delegation in Danang to negotiate conditions for the course GEOG3015 South East Asia Field School. It is envisaged that this course will be conducted end-on-end with the new in-country course in Vietnamese at Danang University permitting ANU students to combine the Field School with intensive language study if they wish. Mr Urip Sutiyono explored the Percik headquarters in Salatiga as a possible venue for the course ASIA3007 Practical Assignment in Southeast Asia.

There was discussion of ideas for research and teaching collaboration. For example, staff at Satya Wacana University suggested collaboration in investigating the social and environmental aspects of the proposed nuclear power plant in Java. Officers of the provincial government of Danang expressed interest in sending staff to the ANU for training in translation. The University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City suggested joint undergraduate degrees.

The ANU already has MOU agreements with Thammasat and The University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City. The ANU delegation secured agreement on the text of new MOUs with The University of Social Sciences and Humanities Hanoi, Danang University and Satya Wacana University.

ANU AND DANANG UNIVERSITY SIGN MOU

ANU AND DANANG UNIVERSITY SIGN MOU

Dr Bao Duy Thai and Dr George Quinn with Danang University President Professor Phan Quang Xung.

Mr Urip Sutiyono (left) greets staff at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City.
THE GRAND LADY WITH THE DANGLING BREASTS

A Trace of Ancient Buddhism at the “Tomb” of Nyai Ageng Bagelen, Central Java
by Dr George Quinn, Southeast Asia Centre

On a quiet Sunday morning in November 2004 I visited the shrine of Nyai Ageng Bagelen – the Grand Lady of Bagelen – about an hour’s drive west of Jogjakarta, Central Java. Sitting cross-legged in the porch at the entrance to the shrine I fell into conversation with Astuti, a 30 year old mother of two from nearby Purworejo. She had made her first pilgrimage there, she said, when, after four years of marriage, she became concerned that she was still childless. Shortly after making a pilgrimage and paying her respects to the Grand Lady she had fallen pregnant and had given birth to a son. As we talked her four year old son Alfian tumbled about the porch, chattering to visitors and pulling at his bemused-looking father.

Some time after her first visit Astuti had taken the local government’s admission examination for prospective employees. Again she paid her respects to the Grand Lady, pleading for success in the examination. She had passed and now had a good job in a government office in Purworejo.

She told me that this was her fifth visit. That morning she had woken with a powerful feeling that someone was calling her to the shrine. It was a call that could not be ignored, she said, because it came not from herself, but “from somewhere else”, no doubt from the Grand Lady herself. As if summoned by a family matriarch, she had assembled her husband and son and had set off at once by public transport.

Astuti straightened her Islamic headscarf, smoothed down her modestly long-sleeved blouse and lifting the batik curtain that stretched across the ante-chamber she crawled under it into the gloom of shrine’s inner devotions area.

The sacred site popularly known as the “tomb” of Nyai Ageng Bagelen centres on a stone stupa about one and a half metres high and a metre in diameter. At the top of the stupa there is a low-sided, open, box-like impression, suggesting that at one time a pillar, or perhaps an obelisk or small “steeple”, might have fitted into it.

The stupa stands in a devotions chamber in the rear half of a brick-and-plaster room about seven by nine metres square. The front half of the room is an ante-chamber where pilgrims gather before entering the rear devotions area. The two halves of the room are separated by a wide, high batik curtain. Inside the devotions area it is dark, the only illumination coming from chinks in the tiled roof and the flickering of burning incense. Iron chimney pipes rise from four points around the stupa taking incense smoke out through the roof.

It is here, so local people believe, that Nyai Ageng Bagelen (pronounced /baːˈɡɛLN/, the ancestral matriarch of the region, miraculously vanished. Many stories – clearly mythical rather than factually historical – are told about her. It is said that she was a skilled weaver. It is also said that she had very long pendulous breasts. To keep her breasts from becoming entangled in her weaving she would flip them back over her shoulders. Her children, two daughters and a son, were able to suckle while standing behind her.

One day as she was absorbed in weaving she sensed that one of her children was suckling from behind. Looking around she was startled to find that a black calf was drinking from her breast and her children were nowhere to be seen. Grabbing the wooden shuttle from her loom she sluged the calf, killing it instantly. She then stormed off in search of her husband Awu-Awu Langit. The unlucky man was at work pounding black soy beans and raw grains of sticky rice in a big stone mortar.

"Where are our children?” the Grand Lady demanded to know.

"I've no idea," he replied, evidently not noticing that his wife was in a rage. “They must be around somewhere playing."
As always, there is a story...

Stories of Nyai Ageng Bagelen have their origins deep in the pre-Islamic past of the region. According to the Babad Tanah Jawi the ancient rulers of Bagelen were descendants of King Kandiawan who ruled Java from a legendary place called Purwacarita – literally “the beginning of the story”. Other genealogies claim that Nyai Ageng Bagelen’s lineage extended back to Dewatacengkar, the man-eating ruler of Java’s legendary ur-kingdom Medangkamulan.

The stupa that marks her vanishing place is evidence of a connection with Buddhism. In the garden around the stupa’s house there are the remains of nine more tiny stupas. It is possible that the site was once a Buddhist place of devotion.

Although we cannot know for sure whether Nyai Ageng Bagelen was herself a Buddhist, stories about her tell us that she did not die but, in Buddhist fashion, meditated until she achieved release from her suffering and vanished into another existence, or perhaps into non-existence.

It is surprising then that today the site is frequented with such fervour by Muslims. How do they reconcile the Buddhist character of the site with their Islamic faith? As always, there is a story.

In 1832 the Dutch appointed one of their Javanese allies, Raden Tunenggun Cakranegara I, as the first Bupati or district governor, of Purworejo – the region that embraces Bagelen. One day, as Cakranegara was meditating in a mosque in Purworejo, he fell asleep. His nodding head came to rest against the stone block (umpak) at the base of one of the mosque’s wooden pillars. As he snored he dreamed that a woman of commanding and haughty appearance came to him instructing him to remove the stone block, take it to Bagelen and build a house around it. It was to be, she said, a place of pilgrimage for her descendants.

It seems unlikely that the stupa in Nyai Ageng Bagelen’s shrine is in fact the base-stone from a pillar in the mosque at Purworejo. Most likely the story evolved as a means of making the veneration of the Grand Lady acceptable to Muslims. As Cakranegara rested his head against the stone base of the pillar, Nyai Ageng Bagelen came into his dreams. It is as if she emerged from the foundation stone of the pillar – metaphorically a “pillar” of Islam. By redefining the stupa at her shrine as an artifact from a mosque, Muslims are able to exert a symbolic hold over the shrine and see it in more user-friendly Islamic terms.

The shrine of Nyai Ageng Bagelen is 55 km from Jogjakarta on the main road west. It is not far from the Bogowonto River about 10 km short of Purworejo. The entrance to the site is straight off the highway on the righthand (north) side and is marked by a modest roadside sign reading Pesarean Bagelen. The complex lies about 100 metres down a path beautifully shaded by tall trees. It is immaculately maintained in a spacious, neatly swept yard surrounded by trees and a garden. An open-sided rest pavilion – divided into “male” and “female” halves – faces the entrance to the shrine, with a roofed walkway.
THE GRAND LADY WITH THE DANGLING BREASTS (continued)

The most auspicious times to visit the shrine are on the evenings before Tuesday Klwon and Friday Klwon. On the evening before the first of Sura (also called the first of Muharram) the site is packed, and in the course of Sura many thousands come to pay their respects. People (mostly farmers, market traders and civil servants) seek the Grand Lady's help on matters relating to marriage, promotion, business, in fact, according to the juru kunci, "on anything that is worrying them".

Today the distinct local identity claimed by the people of Bagelen–Purworejo finds its mythic rationale in the story of the region's ancestral matriarch. She is also seen as a supernatural associate of the first Bupati, Cakranegara I, thereby finding a place at the very top of the roll-call of local officials – the "genealogy" that still provides a powerful symbolic underpinning for local government in the region.

Sources consulted:

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Course Information
Time: 10 am to 5 pm Monday to Saturday   Dates: Sunday 5 – Sunday 19 February 2006   Location: Faculty of Asian Studies, ANU, Canberra
Students are requested to arrive in Canberra on Sunday 5 February. There will be an informal gathering on Sunday evening. Classes will commence on Monday 6 February.
Class size: min. 10, max. 15
Cost: $500 (tuition only)
Closing date for application: Friday 11 November 2005
Closing date for payment: Friday 16 December 2005
Accommodation

Further information
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