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The drum in the mosque

A modern short story by Djajus Pete

GEORGE QUINN

ABSTRACT

The short story “*Bedhug*” (The drum in the mosque) by Djajus Pete (born 1948) was first published in the Javanese-language magazine *Panjebar Semangat* in 1997. It describes what happens in a small village when well-intentioned local people unsuccessfully attempt to replace an old mosque drum with a bigger, more resonant one. In many Muslim communities, the call to prayer is made by beating a drum in the mosque’s vestibule. The story gives a glimpse of how Islam is changing, and not changing, in Java. It is critical of village institutions and functionaries, but also humorous and deeply affectionate.

KEYWORDS

Islam; Indonesia; Java; Javanese; short story; mosque; call to prayer; religion; village society.

INTRODUCTION

The short story “*Bedhug*”¹ (The drum in the mosque) by Djajus Pete (pronounced /jye.yoos.pay.tay/) first appeared in the Javanese-language weekly magazine *Panjebar Semangat* in the issue dated 10 May 1997 (Illustration 1). It was later reprinted in *Kreteg emas jurang Gupit* (A bridge of gold over Gupit ravine), an anthology of Djajus’ short stories published in 2001. In 2002 the anthology won the Rancage Award for fiction in Javanese. The Rancage Award is Indonesia’s premier annual prize for new writing in regional languages. On 24 March

¹ The spelling of Javanese words in this article will follow conventions for modern Javanese in contemporary publications.

GEORGE QUINN is an honorary professor in the College of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University. Between 2002 and retirement in 2008 he was Head of the ANU’s Southeast Asia Centre where he taught Indonesian and Javanese. His main publications are *The novel in Javanese; Aspects of its social and literary character* (Leiden, KITLV Press, 1992), *The learner’s dictionary of today’s Indonesian* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2001), *The Indonesian way* (in collaboration with Ulrich Kozok, 2012), and *Bandit Saints of Java; How Java’s eccentric saints are challenging fundamentalist Islam in modern Indonesia* (Leicestershire: Monsoon Books, 2019). For a selection of his shorter studies go to: <https://anu-au.academia.edu/GeorgeQuinn>. George Quinn may be contacted at: George.Quinn@anu.edu.au.

2012, the story was posted on the website *Sastra Bojonegoro* (see <http://sastra-bojonegoro.blogspot.com/2012/03/cerkak.html>).

Crita Cekak



BEDHUG

Dening : Djaja Peto.

BEDHUG masjidu swarane kepleg. Pangraku, clebe kepleg kuwi marga kayu klonthonge bedhug kang gedhe. Garis tengaha klonthonge 70 sentimeter, dawane ora ana semeter. Keling an yen ing kuburan ana wit jati gedhe, aku banjur rerasan karo lurah Bakir. Wo se setengah usul yen dianggep prayoga, apa jati gedhe ing kuburan iku kena diang go ngganti bedhug?

Lurah wangsulan yen arep ngrungok ngrungokake luwih dihisik awit siag duwe jati iku masyarakat. Yen masyarakat aa rujak lan takmir masjid mathuk, Lurah lagi arep nganakake musyawarah antara na LKMD, tokoh masyarakat, takmir masjid lan alim ulama.

Saka senengku duwe gagasan digatek ake, gage takkajahake marang lik merbot Khomad. Lik Khomad sing omah cilik cedhak masjid iku isih pakiliku per. Wiwit taun 1960 lik Khomad enggone dadi merbot. Ayabane merbot kajaba kuwajib

an nabuh bedhug minangka tandha takane wanci sholat, uga resesik njeron masjid tekan sakupenge pekarangan. Mbrukak natup masjid lan ngaji kolah.

Mesthine lik merbot seneng duwe po nakan kaya aku sing gelem mikir kanggo spike masjid. Nanging sajrono aku kojah ngethupras, lik Merbot kaya ora butuh nyelani. Aku mung diingeti was. Seram panggo kojahku, lik Merbot lagi kumecap.

"Cik, ora usah diganti. Bedhug iku wis apik," wangsulane tanpa gregat.

"Kepleg ngotan kok sae".

"Ckck, iku rak kupingmu sing ndleya"

Mangkai aku, malah kupingku sing di luputake. Aja ora sungkan, aku kepingin balik nuduh ngangggo nalar sing penah. Apa ora lik Merbot dhewe sing wis suda pangrungone? Nalare maton, pstut saupa ma wis suda krugon, awit kajaba umare wis 50 taun manggah, dhasare kllina bre bogan bedhug kang ditabuh esuwene da di Merbot 30 taun lawase.

Mangkai aku, kupingku waras-wiras di clokake ndleya. Nanging marga aku isih bisa ngormati wong tuwa, mula tembung ku isih bisa takgawe saeh. "Sing masta ni kepleg niku sanes kula dhewe, Lik. Kathah tiyang celak-celak mikli sing mas tani ngoten"

"Wiwit madega masjid iki, bedhuga ya kuwi. Rung tau ganti. Yen bedhug kuwi ora apik, mesthine wis ditolohake".

"Sampeyan wastani sae rak megi sam peyan dhewe sing nabuh. Nggih banter ta, wong mireng sampeyan king celakan. Cobi sampeyan mirengake king tebihan. King kidul ra mikli maron-lah, mboten sah tebih-tebih, mangke rak" durung tuag rambuku, lik Merbot terus nglungani, ninggal aku ijen ing buk tegol ing pekarangan masjid.

Lik Merbot nguripake mesin Sony, nyedhot banyu saka sumur ditetake me nyang kolah. Mesin Sony iku tukon saka dhawit bantuwane pemerintah. Masjidku antuk bantawan dhuwit palihan yuta eng ga gelace masjidku malih gedhe ngengkeng.

Jobin sing masine bata warasan, dipan ti tegel traso gilap, dipelari karpet go. Serambine nggatheng dibangun tingkat. Khubah makuthane masjid saka semen kang kukuh, digempur, diganti khubah aluminium gedhe mlendhak.

Samsabrange wis dibangun. Emane isih ana kang kecingal, prakara bedhug ci lik kang swarane kepleg kuwi. Geneya ora ana sing ada-ada ngajak ngganti be dhug gedhe kareban swarane ulom ngu mandhang?

Karepku apik, uras pikiran, ngamal gegasan. Lha kok malah ditanggapi nyle kir dening lik Merbot. Nanging lik Merbot ora mbantah oca malik nalika katut diun dang musyawarah. Wangsune lik Merbot wis bisa nggagapi yen kabeh bakal sarujuk bedhug diganti.

"Leresipun sampun dangu anggen kula kepingin nawaraken jatos menika kanggo sarana tempat ibadah. Soal bagaimana bedhug menika dibikin, kula sumanggak aken dhateng pihak takmir masjid ing kang langkung mangertis. Biaya negoc sampai mengeluarkan kayu dari kuburan saya tanggung," tembungne lurah Bekir sepek mngokog.

Gela atiku krungu tambange Bakir kang ora jujur iku. Kuduna Bakir pratela yen gagasan ngganti bedhug kuwi saka usulku. Ide gagasanku malah dirampas tanpa rihuk pakewuh. Saka gelaku, aku kebacut wegah mala caturan. Sekides Da siran sing keprungu semaut, kandha nyam bang seket ewu kanggo ongkos takang.

"Wauculipun kula tanggel," semawite

Illustration 1. The first page of "Bedhug" as it appeared in *Panjeban Semangat*, 10 May 1997, pp. 38-40.

A *bedhug* is a large drum usually mounted in the vestibule of a mosque (Illustration 2). It is beaten to accompany the call to prayer. Although common in the mosques of Java, it tends to be absent from modern Middle-Eastern style mosques, perhaps because it is associated with old-style devotional practices. In many mosques the *bedhug* is sounded prior to every one of the five *ṣalat* prayer times, but today it is often sounded only on special devotional or celebratory occasions. Nevertheless, its deep, rumbling thumps are a well-loved presence in the rhythm of daily life in thousands of villages.



Illustration 2. A typical *bedhug* drum in a village mosque. (Courtesy of Ronit Ricci).

Beginning in the 1980s, Islam in Java underwent momentous changes. There was a pronounced shift away from syncretic diversity towards a more standardised purist fundamentalism. A large number of new mosques were built. Substantial investment was poured into scripturalist Islamic education. Islam assumed a more assertive profile in Indonesia's social and political life. How did these developments play out among ordinary people in Java's villages?

The short story "*Bedhug*" gives us one very local and very telling glimpse of this. With a few deft narrative strokes Djajus draws a rich and humorous portrait of attempts by villagers to reinvigorate the resonance of Islam in their village by replacing the old mosque drum. But the new drum fails to resound with the message of the new Islam. The wry, emotional conclusion of the story alerts us to the enduring resonance of the old ways.

Bedhug

Djajus Pete

Bedhug masjidku swarane kepleg. Pangiraku, olehe kepleg kuwi merga klonthongane bedhug kurang gedhe. Garis tengaha klonthongan 70 sentimeter, dawane ora ana semeter.

Kelingan yen ing kuburan ana wit jati gedhe, aku banjur rerasan karo Lurah Bakir. Wose setengah usul yen dianggep prayoga, apa jati gedhe ing kuburan iku kena dianggo ngganti bedhug?

Lurah wangsulan yen arep ngrungok-ngrungokake luwih dhisik awit sing duwe jati iku masyarakat. Yen masyarakat sarujuk lan takmir masjid mathuk, Lurah lagi arep nganakake musyawarah antarane LKMD, tokoh masyarakat, takmir masjid lan alim ulama.

Saka senengku duwe gagasan digatekake, gage takkojahake marang Lik Merbot Khomad. Lik Khomad sing omahe cilik cedhak masjid iku paklikku cer, kepernah adhine ibuku. Wiwit taun 1960 Lik Khomad enggone dadi merbot. Ayahane merbot, kejaba kuwajiban nabuh bedhug minangka tandha wancine sholat, uga resesik njeron masjid tekan sakupenge pekarangan, mbukak nutup masjid lan ngisi kolah.

Mesthine Lik Merbot seneng duwe ponakan kaya aku sing gelem mikir kanggo apike bedhug. Nanging sajrone aku kojah ngethuprus, Lik Merbot kaya ora butuh nyelani. Aku mung diingeti wae. Sarampunge kojahku, Lik Merbot lagi kumecap.

The drum in the mosque

Djajus Pete

The mosque drum sounded flat. Lifeless. I thought the cylindrical shell probably wasn't big enough. It was, after all, only seventy centimetres across and less than a metre long, so its thud had no resonance.

There was a big teak tree in the graveyard and it gave me an idea. I had a word with Pak Bakir the village head. I sort of suggested that maybe the tree could be used to replace the drum (only if he thought it appropriate, of course).

He said he would consult with the local community first, because they owned the tree. If people agreed and the mosque manager had no objections, he would convene a formal meeting to discuss the matter. It would have to involve the Village Resilience Council, community leaders, mosque management staff, and religious clerics.

I was very pleased... someone was taking notice of my ideas... So I went at once to Khomad, the mosque caretaker – we call him *Lik Merbot* – and told him all about it. He lived in a small house near the mosque. He was in fact my uncle, my mother's younger brother. He had been the mosque caretaker since 1960. As caretaker it was his job to beat the drum at *sholat* prayer times. He also opened and closed the mosque and kept it clean inside and out, including the entry yard. And he kept the wash tank filled with water.

He should have been pleased to have a nephew like me who was willing to think about what was best for the mosque drum. But while I was holding forth at great length, he showed no inclination to respond. He didn't seem interested at all. He just stared at me. He waited until I had finished before he said anything.

"Ckk, ora usah diganti. Bedhug iku wis apik", wangsulane tanpa greget.

"Tsk, just leave it alone. It's a good drum."

"Kepleg ngoten kok sae."

"It's got no resonance and you say that's good!?"

"Ckk, iku rak kupingmu sing ndleya."

"Tsk, it's just you. Your hearing's gone off."

Mangkel aku, malah kupingku sing diluputake. Ajaa ora sungkan, aku kepengin balik nudhuh nganggo nalar sing genah. Apa ora Lik Merbot dhewe sing wis suda pangrungone? Nalare maton, patut saumpama wis suda krungon, awit kejaba umure wis 50 taun munggah, dhasare kulina brebegan bedhug kang ditabuh sasuwene dadi merbot 30 taun lawase.

That annoyed me. So the problem was my hearing, was it? If I hadn't been so polite and deferential I would have answered back. I would have pointed out a few facts using evidence and logic. Wasn't it *his* hearing that was in decline? I mean, the facts were clear. It was only to be expected at his age his hearing would be defective. He was over fifty years old. For the last thirty years he'd been making a deafening din whenever he hammered on the drum.

Mangkel aku, kupingku waras-wiris dielokake ndleya. Nanging merga aku isih bisa ngormati wong tuwa, mula tembungku isih bisa takgawe sareh.

Yes, I was annoyed. There was nothing wrong with my hearing, but he said it had gone off! But... I still had some respect for my elders, so I tried to soften my response.

"Sing mastani kepleg niku sanes kula dhewe, Lik. Kathah tiyang celak-celak mriki sing mastani ngoten."

"I'm not the only one who says the drum sounds flat, Uncle. Lots of people around here think the same."

"Wiwit madege masjid iki, bedhug ya kuwi. Rung tau ganti. Yen bedhug kuwi ora apik, mesthine wis diselehake."

"The drum has been in the mosque since it was built. It has never been replaced. If there was anything wrong with the drum it would have been retired long ago."

"Sampeyan wastani sae rak mergi sampeyan dhewe sing nabuh. Nggih banter ta, wong mireng sampeyan king celakan. Cobi sampeyan mirengke king tebihan. King kidul ril mriku mawonlah..., mboten sah tebih-tebih, mengke rak..."

"You think it sounds OK because you're the one who bangs on it. It sounds loud to you because you're right beside it. Try to listen to it from a distance. Just down there on the south side of the railway line should be far enough... you don't need to go too far, and you'll..."

... durung tutug rembugku Lik Merbot terus nglungani, ninggal aku ijen ing buk regoling pekarangan masjid.

I hadn't finished, but Uncle Caretaker just upped and walked off, leaving me there on the culvert bridge in the entrance to the mosque yard. Just standing there.

Lik Merbot nguripake mesin Sanyo, nyedhot banyu saka sumur diisekake menyang kolah. Mesin Sanyo iku tukon saka dhuwit bantuwane pemerintah. Masjidku antuk bantuwan dhuwit puluhan yuta engga gelare masjidku malih gedhe njenggarang.

Jobin sing maune bata warasan, diganti tegel traso gilap, digelari karpet ijo. Serambine nggantheng dibangun tingkat. Khubah makuthane masjid saka semen kang kukuh, digempur, diganti khubah alumunium gedhe mblendhuk.

Samubarange wis dibangun. Emane isih ana sing kesingsal, perkara bedhug cilik kang swarane kepleg kuwi. Geneya ora ana sing ada-ada ngajak ngganti bedhug gedhe kareben swarane ulem ngumandhang?

Karepku apik, urun pikiran, ngamal gagasan. Lha kok malah ditanggapi nylekit dening Lik Merbot.

Nanging Lik Merbot ora mbantah ora nulak nalika katut diundang musyawarah. Wangune Lik Merbot wis bisa nggagapi yen kabeh bakal sarujuk bedhug diganti.

“Leresipun sampun dangu anggen kula kepengin nawaraken jatos menika kangge sarana tempat ibadah. Soal bagaimana bedhug menika dibikin, kula sumanggakaken dhateng pihak takmir masjid ingkang langkung mangertos. Biaya negor sampai mengeluarkan kayu dari kuburan saya tanggung”, tembunge lurah Bakir sajak mongkog.

Gela atiku krungu tembunge Bakir kang ora jujur iku. Kudune Bakir pratela yen gagasan ngganti bedhug kuwi saka idheku.

He started up the Sanyo pump, sucking water from the mosque well and delivering it into the wash tanks. The pump had been bought with government assistance. In fact, the mosque had received tens of millions in government money. It allowed us to add extensions that had transformed the building into its current monstrous size. The floor used to be bare bricks, but they had been replaced with gleaming ceramic tiles covered with a green carpet. We got a handsome front portico too, with two levels. The old dome, built of strong cement, had been blown apart and replaced with a big fat aluminium dome.

Everything had been rebuilt. Unfortunately, something had been overlooked: that little drum that sounded flat. Why hadn't anyone taken the initiative to get it replaced with something big and sonorous that would resound through the village?

My intentions were good. I had come up with an idea. I was making a contribution to the public good. So why had Uncle Caretaker been so hostile?

Anyway, when the meeting took place he was invited and he didn't decline or refuse to come. Everyone agreed that the drum needed to be replaced. He seemed to see the light and accept the decision.

Village Head Bakir looked quite proud of himself.

“Actually, it's been my intention for some time to offer the teak tree as raw material to be put to the service of religious devotions. I'll leave it to the mosque manager to work out how the drum can be fashioned from the tree. He knows better than me how to do it. But the cost of chopping down the tree and removing it from the graveyard, I'll take care of that.”

I was disappointed to hear these dishonest words. Bakir should have said that the idea of replacing the drum came from me.

Idhe gagasanku malah dirampas tanpa rikuh pakewuh. Saka gelaku, aku kebacut wegah melu caturan.

Sekdes Dasiran sing keprungu semaut, kandha nyumbang seket ewu rupiyah kanggo ongkos tukang.

"Wacucalipun kula tanggel", semaute Haji Mas'ud pedhagang palawija.

"Alhamdulillah... Jaza kumullohu. Mugi amal panjenengan sedaya pikantuk piwales langkung kathah saking Pangeran", puji dongane Akmal Sholeh, ketua takmir masjid.

"Lajeng, ingkang sae kadamel bedhug menika wacucal menapa Pak Merbot?" pitakone Haji Mas'ud mengo menyang pernahe Lik Merbot kang lungguh mencil ing larikan kursi mburi dhewe.

"Ah, kula menika namung sadermi nabuh."

"Ya aja njur ngono. Iki ngono musyawarah kanggo mufakat. Golek giliging rembug, gathuke panemu", tumanggape Akmal Sholeh.

"Kula kuwatos, badhe mungel wacucal anu menika sae. Kadhung digega, mengke nyatanipun gek mboten sae. Ungelipun gek awon, gek mboten saged banter ngumandhang. Lha pripun... rak kula mengke ingkang dipunpaido tiyang kathah", sumambung Lik Merbot.

"Umumipun ingkang dipundamel bedhug menika wacucal lembu. Sae, ungelipun saged bening. Menawi saking wacucal maesa, awon, ungelipun sok kebluk", urun rembuge Anwar Ali, guru Agama SD sing dadi sekretaris takmir masjid.

But he had taken the credit for my idea. With no qualms at all, without a hint of shame. I was so upset I opted out of the discussion.

Village Secretary Dasiran declared he would chip in fifty thousand rupiah towards the cost of a tradesman.

"And I'll take care of the cowhide," said Haji Mas'ud who made a living selling home-grown fruit and vegetables.

Akmal Sholeh, head of the mosque management team, added a pious invocation. "Alhamdulillah... Jaza kumullohu, Allah be praised... and may He heap His blessings on all of you."

"So... Pak Caretaker", said Haji Mas'ud turning towards my uncle who was sitting by himself in the back row of chairs, "what kind of leather would be best for the new drum?"

"How would I know... all I do is beat the drum."

"Come on... don't be like that", said Akmal Sholeh. "This is a public meeting. We want to hear all opinions. We want to reach a consensus."

"If I say that such-and-such a choice of hide is good and everyone accepts what I say, what happens if it turns out no good? That's what worries me. What if it sounds awful, what if it lacks resonance, it isn't loud enough. People will say I don't know what I'm talking about."

"Usually it's cowhide that's used to make a mosque drum", said Anwar Ali, secretary of the mosque management team. He taught religion in the primary school. "It's the best kind of leather for this. It gives a good clear sound. If you use buffalo hide the drum won't be any good. It'll sound flat."

“Bedhug ingkang wonten menika nggih saking wacucal lembu niku, Nak Guru. Ning nyatanipun kok nggih kathah tiyang mriki ingkang mastani swantenipun kepleg”, aloke Lik Merbot.

“Jangan-jangan lulange gek kendhor niku. Saka nggonku kene ya blas gandhas ndhak jelas ki, swarane. Bleg, bleg, ngono. Kadhang krungu, kadhang ora”, semaute Lurah Bakir kang mimpin musyawarah ing pendhapaning omahe, wayah bubar Isya.

Dohe omahe Lurah Bakir saka masjid watara 300 meter. Isih cedhak omahku saka masjid, kurang saka 200 meter. Merga omahku cedhak masjid, aku kerep ndeleng panggarape bedhug anyar kang digarap tukang ing ngiringan masjid.

Tukange loro. Siji nggarap klonthongan, sijine nggarap jlagrag tumpangane bedhug. Putusaning musyawarah, bedhug ora dipapanake gumandhul kaya bedhug lawas, nanging ditumpangake kaya sumelehe kendhang gamelan.

Lulang sapi bakal raining bedhug sumbangane Haji Mas’ud wis cumepak. Kuciwane panggarape bedhug kurang rancang awit tukange kerep ora menyang. Malah antarane lurah Bakir lan Anwar Ali kedadeyan kemreseg. Karepe Anwar Ali nembung sisa kayu arep dienggo sulam blandar payon kolah.

“Kok tekan blandar kolah barang. Itu kan tidak katut diprogram”, wangsulane lurah Bakir ditirokake Anwar Ali marang aku.

Uncle Caretaker was ready with a response. “The present drum is made from cowhide, Teacher. Yet a lot of people are saying it sounds flat.”

“Maybe the leather has just gone flabby”, said Village Head Bakir who was chairing the confab in the front verandah of his house. It was just after mid-afternoon prayers. “From where I am here it doesn’t sound clear, it’s not sharp. Bump, bump, that’s what it sounds like. Sometimes you can hear it, sometimes you can’t.”

Bakir’s house was about three hundred metres from the mosque. My place was closer – about two hundred metres. Because I was so close, I was often able to see the tradesmen working on the new drum beside the mosque.

Two men were working on it. One was shaping the cylinder and the other was working on the wooden supports that would go under it. The meeting had decided the drum would not hang from a frame like the old one but would rest on feet like the drum in a gamelan ensemble.

Haji Mas’ud’s contribution – the cowhide that would form the face of the drum – was ready. But unfortunately the job didn’t proceed smoothly. The tradesmen kept taking time off. And what’s worse, ill feeling blew up between Village Head Bakir and Anwar Ali. Anwar Ali wanted to ask for the left-over wood. He said it could be used to patch up some of the rafters in the roof of the wash room.

Anwar Ali parroted the village head’s response: “How come we’re talking about rafters in the roof of the washroom... that wasn’t in the plan!”

"Blandar sepinten, wong mung alit mawon kok. Wit jatos semanten agengipun, mongsok sisanipun sampun mboten wonten. Taktakoni ngono ki, ndadak mak pendelik..., prempeng, nesu-nesu. Lho, bicaramu kok seperti ngoreksi saya. Aku dielokake ngono."

"Takonmu ngono, ya makcos! Wong sisane kayu sing keru ing kuburan wis embuh parane diangkut pedhagang kayu."

"Aku ki ra krungu maune. Karo isih prempal-prempul, njur kandha yen sisane kayu wis diedol atas musyawarah LKMD kanggo kebutuhan desa."

"Iku rak unine. Kepala SD-ku rak ya pengurus LKMD. Nyatane kok ya kresah-kresuh ora ngerti playune kayu", tembungku."

"Karepku ki rak mumpung isih ana tukang. Kena diselag ngganti blandar payon kolah sing dipangan rongos. Saiki tukange malah kerep lowok. Ning ya ora nyalahake tukange, wong olehe nukang iku kanggo ngingoni anak-bojone. Yen ana sing nganggakake baune, sing kene ya ditinggal."

Tukange sing suwe ora ngaton, ditemoni Akmal Sholeh lan lurah Bakir. Malah saka karepe Lurah, ditambah tukang ukir. Anane Bakir gedandapan nyengkakake tukang jalaran ana sambunge karo enggone mentas dipriksa Sospol lan Irwilkab."

"It's just a few beams for rafters", Anwar Ali went on, and they're tiny spars of wood anyway. The teak tree was huge. Do you expect me to believe there was no wood left over? When I asked the village head about it his eyes popped. His face went red and he got angry. 'It sounds like you're correcting me... how dare you?!' That's what he said to me."

"Timber dealers have made off with the wood that was left-over in the cemetery", I said, "so your question was spot-on. Who knows where it is now."

"Oh, I hadn't heard that. So that's why Bakir was frothing at the mouth. He said the Village Resilience Council had agreed the left-over wood was to be sold and the money put to good use in the village."

I was sceptical. "That's what he said! But my school principal is on the board of the Resilience Council, and the fact is, they've been quietly complaining, they've no idea where the wood has gone."

"I thought, as long as the tradesmen are here we might as well borrow them for a short time and get them to replace those rafters in the wash house. They're getting chewed up by woodworms. But now the tradies often fail to turn up for work. I mean... I'm not blaming them. They've got to support their families, and if someone else needs their services, well they drop their job here for a while."

Akmal Sholeh and Village Head Bakir had a meeting with the two tradesmen, neither of whom had put in an appearance for a while. The village head said he'd hire a wood carver as well. Actually, Bakir was under investigation by the Social and Political Affairs Directorate and the Local District Inspector too.

Pancen ana sing kirim surat kaleng marang Bupati, prakara sisa kayu kuburan seprapat kibig.

Someone had sent an anonymous letter to the District Head on the issue of the left-over wood... a quarter of a cubic metre. That's why Bakir was falling over himself to get the tradesmen back to work.

Sing nyurat kaleng iku Kepala SD-ku. Ukarane disusun bareng karo aku ing tengah wengi.

Actually, the letter had been authored by the headmaster of my school, and I had worked with him to put it together. We did it in the middle of the night.

Anwar Ali sing ora ngerti kenthang-kimpule, misuh-misuh ketiban awu anget. Kandha marang aku yen dheweke diambu-ambu Bakir. Dirasani sing akal-akal ngaleng mendhuwur.

Anwar Ali – who didn't know about the letter and had nothing to do with it – was cursing and swearing because it was he who had copped the consequences of the letter. He told me Bakir suspected him of sending it. Bakir was telling people it was Anwar Ali's idea to send an anonymous note up the hierarchy.

"Ngawur tenan. Kok njur digothak-gathukake karo enggone mentas kemreseg karo aku. Bakir rak mentas didhuni Sospol, dipriksa ing kantor kecamatan."

"What total nonsense. He thinks he sees a connection between the letter and his run-in with me over the left-over wood. Now the Social and Political Affairs Directorate have come down on him like a ton of bricks. He's been called in to the Sub-District office for interrogation."

"O..., ya, ya, piye, piye", panyelaku manthuk-manthuk kaya lagi krungu kasuse Bakir dipriksa.

"Oh dear... well... who would have thought it..." I said nodding sagely, as if it was the first I had heard of Bakir getting grilled.

"Jare wong kecamatan, Bakir ditekan supaya mbantu bisane bedhug iku enggal dadi."

"The people at the Sub-District office told me Bakir is now under pressure to get the new drum finished quickly."

"Lho, lho! Menggoke kok nyeklek menyang perkara bedhug. Kasuse rak penggelapan kayu jati."

"Eh!? This is a new twist. It's the pilfering of the wood that's the issue, isn't it? How come it's now caught up in the matter of the drum?"

"Jare, merga bedhug ukuran raksasa, ngiras kena dipamerake Bupati sing arep Jum'atan kliling mrene."

"Well, what they're saying is, because the drum is jumbo-size they'd like to show it off to the District Head when he comes here on his regular round of visits for Friday prayers."

*Panggarape bedhug disengkut, dilembur-
lembur. Eling-eling asale saka idheku,
mareming atiku ora kayaa weruh dadine
bedhug.*

*Garis tengahé 120 sentimeter. Dadi bedhug
gedhe bregas. Klonthongan lan jlegrage
diukir ngrawit, diplitur meleng-meleng.
Wiwite arep digunakake, kanthi ngadhani
tumpengan panggang bucing telung
ambeng. Dikepung ing serambi masjid.
Tumpengan diangkah rampung wayah
tabuh Magrib kanthi nganyari swarane
bedhug gedhe iku.*

*Bedhug anyar klakon ditabuh Akmal
Sholeh. Aku njomblak krungu swarane
sing mleset saka pangangenku. Lurah Bakir
uga katon mlenggong. Sawetara perangkat
desa lan tokoh masyarakat kang diundang
uga mlengak gumun.*

*“Weh, lha kok gini swarane. Bedhug
gedhene sahoah kok ya nggedablug. Iki
apane sing kurang sip. Padahal sesuk kuwi
Pak Bupati arep Jum’atan kliling mrene”,
guneme Bakir karo ndemak-ndemek bedhug
gedhe.*

*“Napa angsale Jum’atan kliling Pak Bupati
niku kalih mriksani bedhug-bedhug ta,
Pak?” ana swara nyangkal njalari polatane
Bakir malih rengu.*

*Bakir nyawang mider menyang pernahe
santri-santri enom kaya nggoleki asaling
swara. Nanging Bakir ora bisa ndumuk
sapa sing mentas clebung mengkono mau.*

*Sateruse Bakir grenengan, “Iki ing njero
masjid lho. Yen guneman sing apik. Aja
sengak-sengak. Dosa.”*

Work on the drum was speeded up. The tradesmen were given overtime. I was so happy – delighted in fact – to see the finished product. After all, it had been my idea.

The drum was a full 120 centimetres across. Big and impressive. The cylinder and supports had been beautifully carved and coated in shiny varnish. The plan was to mark the first use of the drum with a ritual meal. There would be three big platters each with a cone of rice on it. The meal would be held in the portico of the mosque, and people would finish eating at sundown to the accompaniment of the new drum beating out the sundown call to prayer.

It was Akmal Sholeh who got the honour of being the first to beat the new drum. I sat up startled when I heard it. It was totally different from what I imagined it would be. Village Head Bakir was sitting with his mouth hanging open. Some of the village worthies and community leaders were also looking around in surprise.

“Whoa... how come it sounds like this!?” said Bakir running his hands over the drum. “It’s a giant size drum but it still sounds flat. Something’s gone wrong here. And tomorrow the District Head is coming on his regular round of visits for Friday prayers.”

A voice piped up in the crowd of youthful students looking on.

“Oh I get it... the District Head goes around inspecting drums as well as doing his Friday prayers.” Bakir’s face darkened.

He looked around, searching the crowd for the source of the comment. But he couldn’t quite put his finger on the one who had spoken out of turn.

“You’re in a mosque!” he snarled under his breath. “Try to talk nice. No need to say nasty things like that. That’s a sin.”

Saweneh pengurus takmir masjid ana sing banjur cluluk, supaya swarane luwih apik, njero klonthongan dipasang benthangan pir loro utawa telu kanggo getaran suara. Pire bisa digawe saka kawat biyasa, diluker-luker kaya pir.

Saka anane gunem sing dianggep ngerti marang akal carane gawe bedhug, njalari Bakir adreng prentah marang Akmal Sholeh supaya bedhug iku dibongkar.

"Rumangsaku wis apik swarane", ujare Akmal Sholeh.

Eh, apik piye. Gung marem. Apike dibongkar saiki wae. Ora nubyak-nubyak. Sempit wektune yen sesuk lagi dibenahi", wangsulane Bakir.

Akmal Sholeh sing kulina grudag-grudug karo Bakir wekasane manut. Pantek kayu nyrangap kang maku ngencengi ubenge lulang dicabuti santri enom. Rai bedhug dicopot sasisih. Bakir cucul dhuwit kanggo tuku kawat menyang toko ngarep pasar.

Prakara oleh brekat, akeh sing terus mulih. Mengkono uga aku. Mula aku ora ngerti ing sateruse, dilembur tekan jam pira bedhug anyar kuwi.

Sing tak rungung ing sabanjure, atiku kaget ngungun krungu kumandhange bedhug Subuh saka masjidku. Dhenge swara bedhug banter ngongang kuwawa nggeterake atiku. Sarandhuning awakku kaya mrinding.

Swarane empuk, ulem kaya ndudut, kaya nggeret-nggeret atiku. Notolku kepengin mara ora kena takcandhet. Ora sabar aku metu kemulan sarung, tanpa srandhal.

One of the mosque staff had a suggestion. To make the drum sound better, he said, it might be an idea to fix two or three spring coils inside it. They would resonate when the drum was hit. You could make them from ordinary wire wound into a coil like a spring. Bakir thought this sounded like expert advice from someone who knew all about drums, so eagerly he ordered Akmal Sholeh to take the drum apart.

"I think the drum sounds fine", said Akmal Sholeh.

"What do you mean 'fine'?" Bakir shot back. "I'm not happy with it. We can make it 'fine' by taking it apart. Right now. No messing around. It'll be too late if we leave it till tomorrow."

Wherever Bakir went Akmal Sholeh usually tagged along, so in the end he agreed. Some of the young students got to work pulling out the wooden pegs that held the skin of the drum tight over the cylinder, and they lifted the face off. Bakir produced money to buy wire at a shop in the front of the market.

Having eaten their fill, many of the guests had already headed home. I did too. So I don't know what happened next, or how many hours of extra work it took to fix the drum.

The next thing I heard was the thump of the drum announcing the dawn prayer. I was astonished. It was loud and resonant. It sent its vibrations right through me. It made every hair stand on end.

It sounded so soft and sweet. It was truly a stirring sound. I couldn't help myself, I just had to go to the mosque and see it for myself. I went straight out, bare foot, with my sarong gathered around my shoulders.

Lurung dalanku peteng, jemek cemer mentas udan. Lakuku kepleset-pleset. Cenunukan. Mendhunge isih nggameng. Hawane atis kemrenyenes. Lambeku cethathuken.

The alley was dark, it had been raining and the ground was slippery with mud. I kept slipping and sliding as I walked. I groped my way forward. Dark clouds still hung low in the sky. There was a biting chill in the pre-dawn air. My lips began to quiver.

*Masjid sepi.
Sikilku gembel blethok.
Aku ngadeg ing ngarep serambi masjid.*

The mosque was deserted. I stood before the portico, my feet covered in mud.

Weruh Lik Merbot mentas wudu, aku aruh-aruh, " Lik...,Lik Merbot?"

My uncle the caretaker appeared. He had just finished his pre-prayer wash. I called out to him: "Uncle! Uncle!"

Lik Merbot nyawang pernahku ngadeg. Epek-epeke ditungkulake ndhuwur mripate, kaya ulap kena sunaring lampu.

He looked over to where I was standing. He lifted his hand to shade his eyes as if a bright light was dazzling him.

"Kula mireng swanten bedhug ulem ngumandhang, Lik. Swantene bedhug enggal ta niku wau?"

"I heard the drum, Uncle", I said. "It sounded wonderful, so sonorous and resonant. It was the new drum, wasn't it?"

"Bedhug lawas sing taktabuh."

"No. It was the old drum. It was me that was beating it."

Ya Allah...!" panguwuhku kaget. Bedhug anyar takweruhi isih njegadhah ing ngisor kaya nalika diudhunake sore mau. Gedhe ngedhangkrang, mlompong tanpa rai. Raining bedhug kang dicopot sasisih durung dibenakake.

"Oh Allah!" I was shocked. Then I saw the new drum still lying on the floor where it had been the previous evening after being lifted off its stand. It was huge with a gaping hole where its face had been. The leather that had been removed to be tightened hadn't yet been put back.

Sikilku gemeter.

I felt my legs trembling.

Mripatku kekembang.

My eyes filled with tears.

Atiku nangis, nangisi awakku, nangisi uripku kang isih uncla-unclu ing umur 40 taun.

Inwardly I was crying. I was crying for myself, crying for my wasted life. Here I was, aged forty, still living an aimless life.

"Mlebua. Wisuhana sikilmu kang rusuh kuwi. Paklik melu bungah kuping atimu wis bolong. Kowe wis bisa sengsem marang swara bedhug", tembungé lik Merbot njalari atiku saya ngondhok-ondhok.

"Come on in, wash those muddy feet", said Uncle. "I'm happy your hearing has recovered... your heart's hearing, that is. It's good you can now take pleasure in the sound of the drum." His words sent a flood of emotion through me.

*Ya Alloh, ya Robbi.
Mripatku saya kekembeng.
Eluhku ora kena takampet.*

Oh Allah, Oh Lord.
My eyes were overflowing.
I couldn't hold back my tears.

*Aku menyang kolah karo ngeling-eling
urutane wudu lan dongane wudu. Ana
kopiya nganggur cemanthel cagak. Lik
Merbot ngulungake kopiya iku marang
aku.*

I went to the wash tub trying to remember
the right order for the ritual wash and the
prayers that went with it. A fez-cap was
hanging on a pillar. Uncle handed it to me.

Jama'ah Subuh, Lik Merbot sing ngimami.

In the mosque he led the dawn prayer.

Maknume ora akeh, mung wong wolu.

There weren't many worshippers. Just eight.

(Panjebar Semangat, 10 May 1997)

COMMENTARY

Djajus Pete was born near Ngawi, East Jawa, in 1948. After completing elementary and high school education in Bojonegoro, he undertook a teacher training program and qualified as an elementary school teacher. From 1988 until his retirement in 2003, he lived near Bojonegoro teaching in a school with special remedial programs for elementary school dropouts. He married in 1967 and has four children. He continues to live simply in the countryside outside Bojonegoro.

Djajus began his writing career in his early twenties, publishing free-form poems (*guritan*), short stories (*crita cekak* commonly abbreviated *cerkak*), and feature articles in Javanese-language magazines. Occasionally he wrote features in Indonesian, but his fiction has always been entirely in Javanese. A talented illustrator, he often prepares line drawings to accompany his stories.

Djajus is proud of his Javanese-ness. In 2019, he offered this poetic view of himself:

Wong Jawa asli, basa Jawa ora tau keru.

'I'm a genuine Javanese, never forsaking the Javanese language.'

Wong Jawa tulen, basa Jawa ora tau leren.

'A true Javanese, always using the Javanese language.'

Wong Jawa tus, basa Jawa terus.

'One hundred percent a Javanese, always speaking Javanese.'

Wong Jawa deles, basa Jawa mentes.

'A real Javanese, fully dedicated to the Javanese language.'

(Djajus Pete Facebook, 7 March 2019)

To this he added a verbal selfie. “Sure I’m old and dodderly, but at the age of seventy-one I never feel my age. I always think positive. I’m patient, accepting, steady, not easily upset. Inwardly I’m cool and calm. Provided I have a cup of ginger-flavoured coffee before me, and I’m smoking a spicy cigarette wrapped in a corn-cob leaf (Oeloeng is the brand for me) I’m content. And I write and write and write.”



Illustration 3. Djajus Pete in a typical pose, with a *klobot* cigarette between his fingers (Djajus Pete Facebook, 7 March 2019)

Djajus is famed for his painstaking dedication to his craft. Many of his stories have been revised and polished over several years prior to publication. He sums up his approach to writing as follows:

After nine years as a realist writer (1971-1980) I turned to writing that was symbolic-surrealist. Here I found my destiny. With this style my imagination was able to break out and rove far beyond what was previously possible. I was free to go forward, to squeeze into fissures and break through barriers, to push aside undergrowth in the world of ideas. And I discovered ideas that were unique and original. Through symbol, I was able to give form to the impediments and opportunities of life. In works of art, symbols are used for communication. Authors, artists, indeed all people, use symbols to formulate and convey implied meanings. Artistic media don’t just report events as they happen, or surface facts alone. They are concerned with inner realities, transcendent realities, realities beyond human perception that are difficult to grasp, that are supernatural, spiritual. So for me, writing (*real* writing, that is) is difficult and complex because it places on the writer the burden of always producing new creations, of grappling with processes that lead to new ideas. (Djajus 2001)

Djajus' body of writing is diverse, but it is characterised by four main ingredients that combine to give it a unique flavour. First, his stories deal almost wholly with the everyday lives and dreams of ordinary people – especially poor people – in Java's rural areas. Second, there is a thematic emphasis on the confounding of these dreams by corruption and the intrusion of self-serving autocratic power. Third, most stories are built around a central metaphor – an allegorical "conceit" if you like – that is often surreal or fantastic or cartoon-like. This encapsulates a key social or psychological state. And fourth, the writing style is not florid. Rather, it is spare but marked by irony, down-to-earth humour, and a good sprinkling of dialect words, especially pithy expressions drawn from the local idiom of the Bojonegoro region.

This amalgam is apparent in the short story "Bedhug". Set in a small village, probably in the vicinity of Bojonegoro, the story is peopled with characters of no special distinction or class status: elementary school teachers, a mosque caretaker, a village head, a small-time trader in fruit and vegetables, carpenters, and village-level functionaries. (In this story women don't get a look in, though in other stories by Djajus they do play a significant role.)

Islam projects a very characteristic aural ambience into the community. Five times a day, the call to prayer summons the faithful to the local mosque, or reminds them it is time to perform the *ṣalat* prayer wherever they may be. The beautiful, musical call to prayer, is an indelible aural symbol, summing up in its message and in its melody all that is reassuring and beloved in the Islamic faith. With the call to prayer comes the rolling thud of the *bedhug* drum, its resonance also symbolising the presence of Islam at the centre of village life. But what kind of Islam? Is it the modest, reassuring resonance of a "traditional" Islam, or the louder, more assertive, more "modern" Islam that fits with the brash authority of the newly renovated mosque?

The narrator's simple suggestion that the old drum be replaced with a more resonant new one becomes entangled in the exercise of local power, with hierarchy, corruption, and emotional attachment to the comfort of the old. Ironic humour with a hint of slapstick lards the mix: The village head glares in comic indignation at a crowd of students when one of them dares to make an irreverent remark about a high-ranking official, guests at a ceremonial meal head home as soon as they've eaten their fill, the mosque caretaker sulks in disagreement with a meeting's decision.

The powerful, nostalgic emotions that come with the *bedhug* drum and its resonant call are wrapped in the ambience of a very ordinary village with its dark lanes, its Javanese and Indonesianness, its harried people with their all-too-human hopes and failings. These are at the heart of the story. Humour and a touch of pathos are also important components of its shrewd but subtle, and deeply affectionate, insight.

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