

Reflections on the Governance of Calon Arang Performance: Between Contestation, Commodification, and Religion

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Calon Arang performing arts have been developing very well recently. It is proved by the held of many Calon Arang performances and the hectic news coverage and related social media uploads. In addition to the audience being enthusiastic about the show, the artists also continue to innovate and be creative in presenting interesting performances. However, the existing Calon Arang art is a sacred performance that has undergone many commodifications and deviations. Furthermore, there was a lot of chaos and even death. Therefore, a management system for the Calon Arang performing arts is needed that is in accordance with *tattwa* (philosophy), *susila* (ethics), and *upakara* (rituals), but at the same time, it provides sufficient space for artists to express their creativity, and can still present interesting shows to the public. This research was organized in qualitative descriptive method to formulate what factors need to be used as the basis for the management of Calon Arang performance. The research result shows that the preparation of Calon Arang performance management guidelines was not an easy thing because there were conflicts in mapping out the parameters to be used as the basis for managing the Calon Arang Show, both from an aesthetic and religious point of view. However, it is hoped that with the cooperation of various parties, initial principles can be formulated on how to manage the Calon Arang show.

Keywords: calon arang, performing arts, performing management.

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INTRODUCTION

Calon Arang Performing Art is one of the performing arts that is still very much loved by the Balinese people. The enthusiasm of Balinese people for the Calon Arang Show can be seen from the large number of spectators every time the Calon Arang show is held, even after the show is regularly held, either once every six months or once a year. The same enthusiasm can also be witnessed through the lively spectacle of Calon Arang through various social media channels. Not only in rural areas, but in big cities, lively performances are held. Not limited to old generation, but young people also love it. From interviews conducted by the author, it is common for a group of young people to hunt Calon Arang performance to another district. In addition to the enthusiasm of the audience, the Calon Arang performance practitioners also always maintain the vibrancy of this art in a sustainable manner. There are art groups that perform with great care, minimizing creative leaps and prioritizing religious standards. But there are also groups that continue to innovate with new elements, collaborate with various parties, and various other forms of creativity.

Typically, Balinese dance is classified into three group, that is, *Wali*, *Bebali*, and *Balih-balihan* (Picard, 2006). Dance and performances classified as *Wali* is sacred dance that usually performed in the innermost area of a temple (*uttama mandala*), while the *Bebali* dance is semi sacred and profane, held in the middle area (*madhya mandala*), and lastly, *Balih-balihan* is profane dances and performances that usually not a part of the ritual and held in the outermost of a temple (*nishta-mandala*). Calon Arang is a type of performance that is difficult to be classified with this framework. Although, Calon Arang is often used as a ritual complement, in several temples, the Calon Arang performance is seen as an integral part of the ritual being held. Then, if the classification of the *Wali*, *Bebali*, and *Balih-Balihan* arts is differentiated based on the place where they are held. Even though Calon Arang performances are often held in the Nista Mandala area, what is being danced is the a mask (Rangda and Barong) that considered as the main deity of the temple. From this perspectives, Calon Arang is not a profane performances, and not being held just for entertainment purposes. Thus, the Calon Arang performance rejects the dance

classification, at the same time; Calon Arang can be classified into the three.

If Calon Arang performance is to be classified as a sacred performance and part of a religious ritual, then of course, Calon Arang must follow the basic framework of Hinduism, namely *tattwa* (philosophical-theological foundation), *susila* (ethical foundation), and *upakara* (ritual order). Calon Arang could be seen as a ritual dance (*upakara*), either as a complement or as a core. The question then is, did the Calon Arang performance that was held also carry out the appropriate *tattwa* and *susila* aspects?

In recent years, the development of Calon Arang performances can be seen everywhere. From an artistic point of view, it can be said to be a breath of fresh air, even success in maintaining, preserving and developing this Balinese artistic heritage. As a spectacle, Calon Arang performing arts are lively and loved by the Balinese, but what about from a religious standpoint? Considering that Calon Arang performances are never separated from theological and liturgical contexts; do the two go hand in hand or are they lame? Then, if inequality occurs, how can we anticipate it?

Those questions seek to be examined in this study. However, this research further explores the basic questions that need to be asked regarding the management of the Calon Arang performance so that it can become material for joint reflection on how to promote arts and culture without putting aside existing religious values. To answer those questions, datas from various sources in the internet are drawn. The datas used in this research include news and recording of performances available throughout the internet. Another type of data is interviews and literature study to formulate understanding regarding developments and phenomenon found in the Calon Arang Performances.

METHODOLOGY

This research was compiled based on the Qualitative Descriptive method (Liliweri, 2018) to formulate important factors that need to be considered in the management of Calon Arang performances. The theoretical basis used to describe it is the Aesthetic Theory and Hindu philosophy, because Calon Arang performance is an art related to religious life in Bali.

Data collection techniques in this study include: 1) collecting news related to the Calon Arang show in news and digital media channels; 2) observing the performance of Calon Arang Performing Arts which is considered as the most talked news; 3) formulating important factors in the performance; 4) structured and in-depth interviews, both with the artist and art connoisseurs to get clarification. This research was also supported by data collection from existing documents, both in the form of literature, audio-visual recordings, as well as other relevant sources. The collected data was then presented descriptively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Calon Arang Performing Arts: Progress or Setback?

In the past few years, there has been a lot of news regarding the Calon Arang performing arts. Various digital media are also filled with video uploads of Calon Arang performances and are always busy with spectators. As we will see in the following descriptions, among those news and excitements, there is negative news, and there is also positive news, and there is even news that is congested and invites sorrow.

One of the viral news related to Calon Arang is the performance of Calon Arang with *watangan mependem* (a dead body actor is actually buried) which was held in Getakan Village, Banjarangkan, Klungkung, in 2016 ([Suputra, 2016](#)). According to reports, Calon Arang performances in this village have been regularly held since 11 last year, but it was the first time doing Calon Arang which involved *watangan mependem*. The reason for the staging involving *watangan mependem* is because it is based on the received *pawisik* ("revelations"). It is acknowledged that the show is worrying all parties, but it is still carried out on the basis of belief in kinship. The cast even made a statement that they would not file lawsuits if something unexpected happened during the show. This show can be said to be successful and satisfying without any significant obstacles. The performance of Calon Arang not only attracted the attention of the audience, but also academics, for example research by Paramadhyaksa ([2017](#)).

Some time later, news emerged regarding the Calon Arang performance involving *Watangan Membakar* (Burned Corpse) in Tanguntiti Village,

Selemadeg Timur, Tabanan, Bali, which was held on Tuesday 24 April 2018 ([Admin, 2018](#)). From the news, it was stated that the *watangan* was burned for 5 minutes. This show also performs a new breakthrough that has never existed before. As reported in the news, the reason for this show was because of the saturation with "the performances that seem mediocre," as well as because "they were triggered by the performances in Klungkung [*watangan mependem*]." ([Aryawan, 2018](#)). The latest breakthrough that was recently held was the Calonarang Performance with 108 *watangan* which was staged at the I Ketut Maria Art Building, Tabanan. This show was awarded by the MURI (Indonesian Record Museum) because there had never been a Calon Arang performance that involved such a large number of *watangan* actors. The *watangan* actors range in age from 6 to 60 years, both male and female.

Apart from the *watangan*, another focus that is the main attraction of Calon Arang performance is the contestation of *kerauhan* and *ngunying*. One example is the performance of Calon Arang entitled Ki Gede Granyam which was staged at Agung Gegadon Temple, Banjar Gadon, Kapal Traditional Village, Mengwi, Badung on Friday, December 17th, 2021. It was seen in the performance that a number of young children experienced *kerauhan* (trance), carried *keris* (dagger) and stabbed Rangda dancer. It didn't just stop there, it was also seen that the little boy had gone berserk and stabbed himself. Several other "dancers" also seemed to experience trance, jumped, and stabbed Rangda with various media. The Rangda dancer still looked young. At the end of the performance, the audience applauded, all entered the *Jeroan* area.

The *ngunying* (stabbing himself and Rangda) sessions were the tensest part in the Calon Arang performance and the audience had been waiting for it. In fact, the Calon Arang performance often becomes an arena for stabbing each other to the point that the audience scatters ([Ubud Community, 2019](#)), and at the same time it is also a very tense show, and therefore, it becomes exciting spectacle. It's not only the Rangda dancer and the Kerauhan dancers who are involved in the stabbing scene. In Calon Arang, which was held at Pura Batur Negari Klungkung, the actors of the *watangan* were also stabbed by *keris* (dagger). It appears that after the *watangan* in the cemetery is "turned on" again, then a dagger is thrust into them ([Darma Suwitra, 2022](#)).

It is common for the tense atmosphere in Calon Arang performances to actually turn into chaos which actually hinders the running of the show. For example, the news was related to the chaotic of Calon Arang performance in Taro Kaja Village, Tegalalang District, Gianyar Regency ([Gunarta, 2018](#)). The reason is because the Rangda dancer widen the stage to where the musicians are and *ngunying* in the musicians' area (possibly because they are both in a trance), causing several musicians to suffer injuries and their clothes torn. As a result, the musicians stopped their performance and left the show. The comment section of video doesn't seem happy with how the performance goes and accused it has deviated from the "standard."

An even sadder news, besides the chaos, there are reports often appear that mention the *ngunying* scene cause an accident that lead to the death of Rangda Dancer as a result of being stabbed. According to the Prabu Capung Mas Foundation, up to now there have been 6 incidents of Rangda dancers being stabbed and 3 of them died. The victims died in Karangasem, Jembrana and Denpasar. Various accidents in dancing Rangda [in Calon Arang performance] have attracted the attention of several parties to conduct studies and streamlines related to the standards of Calon Arang performance ([Supartika, 2021](#)).

Implications of the Development of Calon Arang Performance on Religious Life

From the digital data regarding the development of Calon Arang Show over the past few years, it can be seen that the emphasis in innovation at the Calon Arang show is how to present *watangan* and be attractive. Then, another attraction of Calon Arang show is the procession of *ngunying* and *kerauhan* which presents a tense and scary spectacle; the more people who are excited, the more exciting it is. The more *kerauhan* scenes, the tenser the show is ([Asli Bali Channel, 2021](#); [iWagu Production, 2023](#); [Bali Express, 2022](#)).

This report series presents an interesting dichotomy to be studied. On the one hand, the Calon Arang performance as an art form shows progress by continuing to explore the creative dimensions of performers, which is then greeted with enthusiasm from art connoisseurs. On the other hand, comments and questions arose regarding "standard" and "sacredness." Thus, how do the Calon Arang artists, and the Balinese in

general find common ground between creation and essence?

In relation to religious life, the author interviewed a Balinese Hindu religious figure, namely Ida Pandita Mpu Acharya Nanda. His views regarding the role of *watangan* in the Calon Arang Performing Arts are as follows:

"Watangan's involvement in Calon Arang is legitimate. However, if in the Calon Arang performance the rituals of Pitra Yadnya are commodified [*makerik kuku* (nail cleansing), *mersihin sawa* (cleaning the dead body), etc.] then that is an abuse of religious symbols. What is even more unfortunate, according to IPM Acharya Nanda, is that the harassment was carried out by the owner of the symbol itself [Hindu people, *pen*]. And it is even more unfortunate that religious figures such as the priests and *sulinggih* who should play a role in rectifying this matter, are even involved in profane activities."

(Ida Pandita Mpu Acharya Nanda, Private Interviews, 22 February, 2023)

From this statement, another thing that needs to be contemplated is, to what extent can sacred elements (in the form of religious symbols and rituals) be presented in the Calon Arang Performing Arts? After all, is it really necessary to present these various sacred elements more than what is needed? Is this justified by *tattwa* and ethically appropriate?

Ida Pandita Mpu Acharya Nanda also emphasized that, "artists need to be aware that spectacle is a guide" in people's lives. This statement is true when considering how Balinese Performances always bring up discourses and terminologies from sacred scriptures (*lontar*) in their performances. But a deeper inquiry might be needed to be made regarding the mastery of the actors on such topics. The question then is, are the actors of the arts (even though they are already able to provide a satisfying spectacle) also able to provide guidance through their artistic activities?

Implications of the Development of Calon Arang Performance on Artistic Life

Then from the artistic side, there are several interesting things to study related to the parameters of the success and smooth running of a performance, and secondly related to how the

actors of the Calon Arang performing arts package and present their performances.

As can be seen from the presented video sample, several performances experienced "chaotic" when the show was held, due to the phenomenon of *kerauhan* and *ngunying* on the stage. From the author's experience of holding the Calon Arang show, it is common for the boundaries of the dancers and the stage to disappear when they are *kerauhan* and *ngunying*; the audience suddenly becomes the center of attention on stage; actors who step aside into the temple area; the performance center changes and extends from the boundaries of the stage and other phenomena. Can this show be considered a success? Bearing in mind, there are even shows that cannot finish the show due to being sabotaged by the phenomenon of *kerauhan* ([Ubud Community, 2019](#)).

If we look at this phenomenon from the point of view of contemporary performing arts, of course it can be said that the Calon Arang performance, did not run smoothly due to the incomplete storyline and the audience who did not watch with reverence. However, as Walter Spies ([1970](#)) said regarding the performance of traditional arts in Bali, the story line in the performance is not important, so it doesn't matter when someone comes or goes to a Calon Arang performance. The same opinion was also expressed by Collin McPee ([1970](#)). Furthermore, Walter Spies ([1970](#)) also revealed that the Balinese way of enjoying a performance is not just to enjoy the beauty of movement, but by entering the atmosphere conveyed in the spectacle, and remaining there. Spies emphasized again, watching a spectacle is not just about watching but about feeling.

The Balinese who watched the Calon Arang show were carried away by the atmosphere of the show which was full of horror and had a thick mystical feel. This involvement then cause many spectators (especially those from the village) to experience a trance, and precisely the audience has been waiting for this "chaos". From the author's experience in holding Calon Arang Performing Arts, what these two figures said many years ago is still very relevant. When a Calon Arang show is held, usually there are still no spectators. However, towards midnight, when tense scenes such as *watangan*, *Leak's invitation*, and *Rangda napak pertiwi* (Rangda performs in her first part in the show) are being performed, the audience just exploded. *The author* also interviewed some

of Calon Arang viewers, and it was confirmed that many viewers were only looking for those parts when watching Calon Arang. Because these parts are the biggest concern of the audience, it is only natural that the actors of the show will prioritize the performance. In a sense, Calon Arang artistic innovation and creativity was then focused on *watangan* and *kerauhan* parts. However, the religious aspect of Calon Arang performance is one that should not need to be disturbed, because this aspect is the sacred side of Calon Arang performance. Or even if this side is to be explored, then *tattwa* and *susila* (religious ethics) should be mandatory guidelines. Ida Pandita Mpu Acharya Nanda stressed that regarding *watangan*, things related to "*seda raga* (death body) cannot be performed in Calon Arang," with the reason that it is the domain of *sulinggih padiksan* (ritual part in the process of become a saint who presides over a religious ceremony).

However, Calon Arang performance is also a mystical contest. This part is an aspect that the writer also finds as one of the biggest attraction of Calon Arang performing arts. *Watangan* in the context of Calon Arang provides a stage for carrying out this mystical contest. Person acting as a *watangan* is challenging those who are considered to be masters of black magic (*aji wégig*) to harm them. If the actor of *watangan* is not considered to have supernatural abilities, then he usually entrusts his fate to the spiritual figure behind the show.

Ida Pandita Mpu Acharya Nanda said that art is yoga, whose purpose is to erode the ego. However, when viewed from the perspective of this contestation, is art a medium for eroding the ego, or even a stage for nurturing the ego? In yoga philosophy, thoughts like this can be said to be the result of *klesa* (Dasgupta, 2013). However, when viewed from the viewpoint of Tantric philosophy, *kawisesan* (contestation) is actually an effort to sharpen Tantric yoga. Moreover, Tantra is the soul of religious life in Bali ([Yudiantara, 2019](#)). On this side, again we find ambiguity in mapping the common related barometer of the Calon Arang show arrangement. While it may be deemed excessive to standardize an artist's performance based on their spirituality, it remains crucial to ensure that artists receive adequate education on Balinese spiritual values grounded in *tattwa*, *susila*, and *upakara*. Such foundational knowledge enhances not only the quality of the performance but also the integrity and authenticity

with which it is delivered. Furthermore, it may be beneficial to extend this education to the audience as well. A comprehensive understanding of this spiritual framework can equip audiences with the appropriate lens through which to interpret and appreciate the performance, thereby ensuring a more meaningful consumption of the artistic content.

CONCLUSION

From the data and discussion presented above, it can be concluded that managing the Calon Arang show is not an easy thing. The reason is because there are conflicts in mapping the parameters that are used as the basis for managing the Calon Arang Show. From an aesthetic point of view, the Calon Arang performance is enjoyed by the Balinese as a way to find a "mystical feeling" which is actually found from various "chaos" in the Calon Arang performance. In other words, regardless of the story stopping during the show, the stage is overflowing, the dancers leaving the stage because of the loud and noisy atmosphere, the Calon Arang performance is still considered satisfying by the audience because it is considered to present the atmosphere and nuance that are sought after in the show. Of course, the occurrence of conflicts that result in injuries, fights, and moreover risking lives, is as an exception in the show. These elements need to find further solutions because they will be related to the positive law applied in Indonesia.

From a religious standpoint, Calon Arang performance needs to be managed based on *tattwa* (philosophical-theological foundation), *susila* (ethical foundation), and *upakara* (ritual order). From the *tattwa* point of view, it is necessary to have clear standards regarding the theological and philosophical aspects that underlie the Calon Arang Show. Then, from *susila* point of view, it is very necessary to emphasize the limits of decency regarding what is allowed and what is not, regarding the extent to which sacred elements can be involved, and so on. Regarding *upakara* side, it is necessary to emphasize the ritual function of the Calon Arang performance itself. Don't let the Calon Arang show, which is supposed to be a dramaturgy of *pengeruatan* (purification ritual), switch its function to mere commodification and contestation.

The Calon Arang Management System needs the attention of all parties. It needs to hold education

for performers, local village apparatus, and religious figures and institutions. In addition to compiling a kind of management guideline for the Calon Arang show, the author also sees the need for socialization regarding the guidelines (or at least the principles) for holding the Calon Arang show.

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