

## **WLG Reading Group - Session 1: *The Myth of Watugunung* by Dr Jean Couteau**

### **Part 1: Introduction**

Dadang Christanto's *Wuku* exhibition draws from the Javanese Pawukon system. Wuku refers to a cycle that consists of 7 days in the Javanese Pawukon calendar system. A year would consist of 210 days (30 cycles), with each cycle named after a character in the *Jalasanggara* kingdom in Java. The cycle originates from an incest tale about a king named Prabu Watugunung who unknowingly married his mother, Dewi Sinta and his aunt, Dewi Landep. Altogether, they conceived 27 sons and the family gave their names to the 30 wuku. The incest caused chaos in the world so the Gods decided to persecute them. They were then brought to paradise - one by one - over the course of 30 weeks/cycles.

The story shows a condition when the family as an institution is depicted as not yet constructed. After Watugunung's defeat came the creation of the Wuku calendar, which introduced the prohibition of incest. Sinta is placed as the first Wuku while Watugunung as the last, in order to formally separate them and symbolise the prohibition.

### **Part 2:**

Dr Couteau summarises the story for 15-20 mins

**Question 1:** Do you know other folktales of mythologies that tell the story of incest?

- None of the participants knew a similar myth or folktale.

**Question 2:** How is the story of Watugunung related to our "human consciousness"?

- Dr Jean Couteau proceeded to make a comparison between the myth of Watugunung and the story of Oedipus which have a similar narrative structure yet different in meaning.
- It is problematic to compare it to Oedipus or the Freudian Oedipus complex.
- Dr. Couteau states that although the myth of Oedipus symbolises West anthropocentrism with the 'Oedipus' figure as a prototype of West human who is separated from the cosmos, rational, and 'free', he is undermined by blindness/blankness. On the other hand, the myth of Watugunung can be said as one of determiners of Bali/ Java cosmocentrism with the Watugunung figure as a prototype of a human who attempts to live in harmony with the cosmos rhythm. He is not 'free' but he feels enlightened. Thus, 'blindness' and 'enlightenment' presented in the both narratives, are distinct points which differentiate between the perspective on Greek/Western culture and Balinese/Javanese culture.
- What about a structuralist, Saussurean reading of the myth? It isn't enlightenment or blindness, rather human's inability to escape their destiny.

**Question 3:** What do you think is the moral of the story?

- Wasn't a specific moral learned but which came first - Myth or religion?
- The story depicts the construction of foundations of a family as a social organisation where Watugunung's defeat came after the creation of the Wuku calendar.