# The Queen of the Sea and the Limits of Religion

*How a Javanese Sea Spirit Forces a Reconceptualization of Religion and Religious Syncretism*

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When you persistently imitate
the example of our lord the Prophet,
oh son, you will have gone too far;
that quality is not able to be sustained, my boy;
because you are Javanese,
just a little is enough.

*Serat Wedhatama*
Mangkunegara IV (1857-1881)

[He] had [...] “grown suspicious of the entire idea of borders,” although he could not yet synthesize “the intensity of this feeling” into a coherent theory.

*Annihilation*
Jeff Vandermeer (2014)

He is tolerant about religious beliefs; he says,
“Many are the ways.”

*The Religion of Java*
Clifford Geertz (1960, 127)

**Acknowledgements**

General language use and the quirks of academic institutions give us the myth of the student as going through *their* studies and producing *their* thesis. Though the student synthesizes the work of others, the process of synthesis is seen as an individual contribution that only they could make; as personal as a fingerprint or a work of art. This is a dream image, an idealized student. This thesis is only possible through the help and support of others. These are some of those others I would like to thank.

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**Abstract**

Javanese religiosity is generally seen as a syncretic/hybrid mix of Islam and pre-Islamic Javanese Hindu-Buddhism. At the ritual site Cepuri Parangkusumo in the Yogyakarta region, petitioners visit daily to bring offerings to the Queen of the South, a non-Islamic sea spirit. These petitioners are almost all Muslim and thus called syncretic. But syncretism is an untenable approach because it forces us to conclude that these Muslims are not fully Muslim, among other reasons. Syncretism's replacements do not solve these issues but obscure them, which is why I collectively call them the syncretic view. This syncretic view fails because it is not an intellectual category but a perceptional one, in which the borders of religions serve as the frame of reference. Solutions must therefore not examine border-crossing, but leave open the possibility that there is no border-crossing and study why. How do local concepts of religion draw borders? We must study the Queen rituals to learn how to approach the Queen rituals. Yet it is not enough to understand a so-called syncretic case; we must allow that understanding to feed back into our paradigm so that this perceptional bias can be alleviated. A rhizomatic perspective of religion could facilitate this. I suggest that the religiosity of the Cepuri practitioners crosses no borders because their concept of religion functions within an ecology of efficacy, and through a mode of knowledge that selects for effective knowledge rather than theoretically correct knowledge. In this frame, the Queen rituals cannot be seen as conflicting with Islam on the basis of theoretical orthodoxy. Rather, they supplement Islamic practices with other effective ways of reaching power or God's blessings (which are themselves a form of efficacy).

**Keywords**: Java, Islam, Ratu Kidul, *agama*, syncretism, religious hybridity, rhizome, efficacy

# Glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| *Abangan* | Social and religious stratum of traditionalist (so-called syncretic) peasant Muslims |
| *Abdi Dalem* | Courtiers or persons in employ of the Kraton |
| *Adat* | Customs; (ethnic-specific) body of traditional knowledge and practices that is not *agama* |
| *Agama* | Supposed cognate of “religion,” see Chapter 5 |
| *Alam* | Nature or the world |
| *Alam Gaib* | “Unseen world,” the abode of spirits and ghosts |
| *Aliran* | Stream; ideological or religious branch |
| *Angker* | Quality of usually a place; comparable to haunted or sacred |
| *Babad* | Court chronicle, more broadly stories about past events |
| *Barakah*<br>*Barokah*<br>*Berkah*<br>*Berkat* | Blessings |
| *Budaya* | Culture |
| *Dewa / Dewi* | Deity |
| *Dukun* | Traditional healer and spirit expert |
| *Dupa* | Incense in stick form |
| *Gaib* | Unseen, also strange and occult |
| *Ilmu Hitam* | “Black knowledge,” evil or uncanny spiritual knowledge, cf. black magic |
| *Ilmu Pengetahuan* | A special type of knowledge; also science. |
| *Juru kunci* | “Keyholder,” ritual expert at *ziarah* sites appointed by the Kraton |
| *Kantil* | (Flower bud of the) white champaca tree |
| *Kasekten* | Power |
| *Kebatinan* | “Mysticism,” inner situation, inner knowledge |
| *Kejawen* | A supposed Javanese mystical tradition, sometimes seen as “syncretic religion,” sometimes seen as a type of Islam (Islam Kejawen); literally a noun formed from “Java” - “Javanism” |
| *Kemenyan* | Incense in crystalline form |
| *Kepercayaan* | Belief |
| *Kerata Basa* | Branch of knowledge production comparable to etymology and logomancy |
| *Kraton* | Palace |
| *Kris* | Dagger with invisible power and agency, often a *pusaka* |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Kesaktian*<br>*Kasekten* | Power |
| *Lantaran* | Intermediary, means of reaching |
| *Mistik*<br>*Mistis* | Mystical, occult |
| *Nyekar* | Ritual sprinkling of flowers, usually on a grave |
| *Pancasila* | “Five Principles,” foundational ideology of the Indonesian state |
| *Patih* | Regent or first minister of the realm |
| *Pendopo* | Pavilion |
| *Pesugihan* | Ritual to secure wealth |
| *Pusaka* | The invisibly powerful heirlooms of past saints and kings, central to a dynasty |
| *Ratu* | Queen |
| *Roh* | Spirit |
| *Sakti* | Power, powerful - see *kesaktian* |
| *Santri* | Lit. “student of religion,” social and religious stratum of reformist orthodox Muslims |
| *Sesajen* | Offerings |
| *Slamet* | A state of harmony, supposedly strived for by the *slametan* rituals |
| *Slametan* | Communal ritual |
| *Sunan* | Short version of Susuhunan, a monarchical title |
| *Sunanate* | Monarchy headed by a Sunan |
| *Syirik* | Violation of *tawhid* - alternatively, engaging in two *agama* |
| *Tapa* | Meditation or ascetic power derived from meditation |
| *Tradisi* | Tradition |
| *Tuhan Yang Maha Esa* | The One and Only God, Almighty God |
| *Tuyul* | Child-like spirit that can be used to steal money |
| *Wali Songo* | “Nine Saints”, the legendary nine saints who brought Islam to Java |
| *Wayang* | Traditional theater, including (shadow) puppet theater and mask theater |
| *Ziarah* | Pilgrimage |

## A Note on Language

The issues of translation will be a common theme in this thesis. For this reason, I will often use original terminology, printed in cursive, in the running text. Although the reader is supplied with a glossary, I will often translate these words between brackets. Unless indicated to be Javanese (J.) or Arabic (A.), these translations are from Indonesian (I.).

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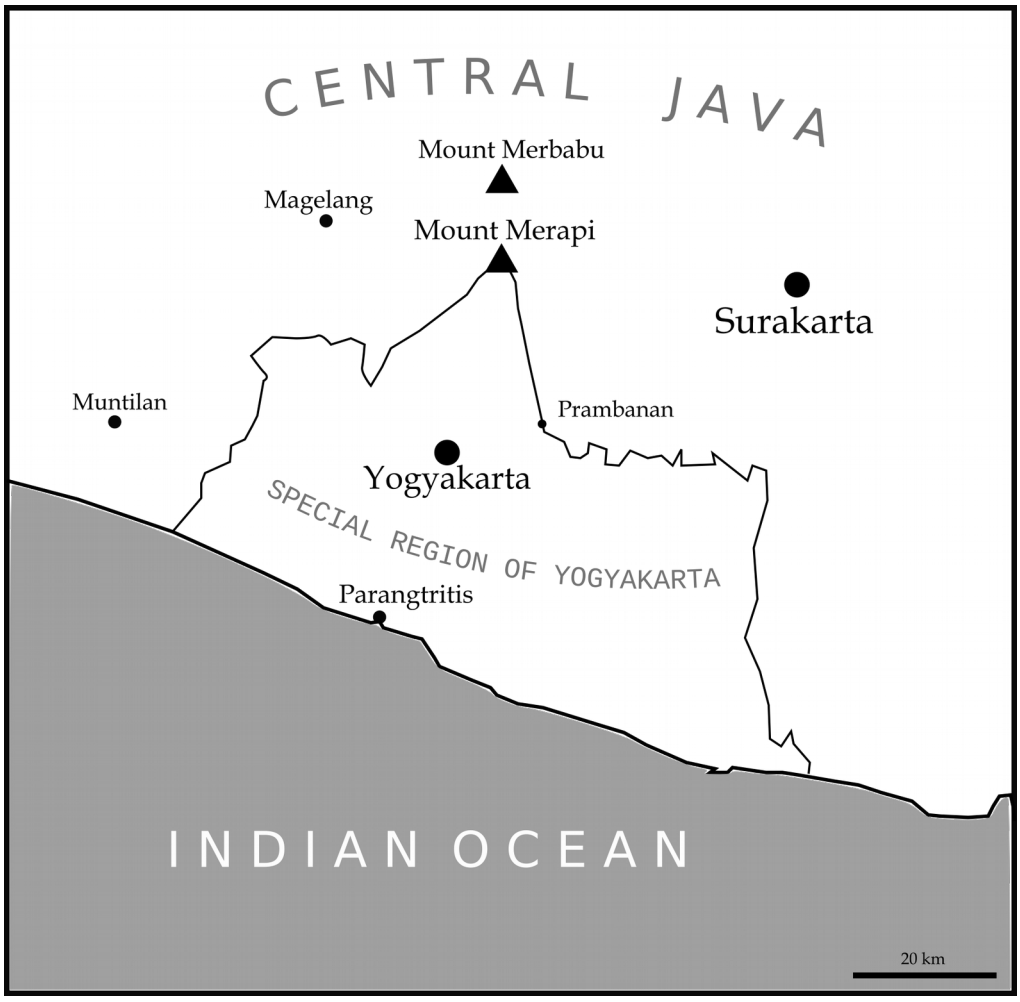


*Map 1: Special Region of Yogyakarta*

# Introduction

It is usually dark when the pilgrims come.

Partly this is because of the day-time heat, partly because of busy work schedules, but partly also because these rituals are meant to be performed at night.

The pilgrims come for two black stones, jutting out from the sand of their enclosure, encircled by white walls and enclosed by a park. The *juru kunci* - caretakers of the shrine - gladly help the pilgrims perform their offerings and pass on their petitions. The pilgrims come to pour rose petals onto these rocks and burn incense before them, to pray and meditate and touch the stones. Woven baskets filled with offerings - rose petals, jasmine, rice, fruit, chicken - all are placed on the rocks for the duration of the prayer, then taken away again.

After the visit to the rocks, the pilgrims pass through the park's wide gate to the beach. The guardian statues flanking the gate do not face outside the park, but inward, menacing those already inside as if they do not guard the park, but the beach beyond. On the auspicious nights when the pilgrims come in great numbers, the boulevard which leads from the park to the beach is occupied by a busy market, where one can buy knives and sickles, household appliances, watches and shoes, traditional medicines and blood drawn from snakes decapitated on the spot.

On the beach beyond it is truly dark. Stars glitter overhead, and as if the stars were mirrored, the beach is pinpricked with orange lights - incense and small fires, a testament to the number of pilgrims present. Meditating or praying by their incense, usually seated, they face the sea for minutes or hours, before walking up to the surf roaring in the darkness and casting their offerings into the water.

The wet sand is draped in pink ribbons of offering flower petals washed back by the waves. Among these ribbons people move, their flashlights shearing through the darkness, as they stoop down to collect the white *kantil* flower-buds, which impart luck to the finder, from the washed-up offerings of others.

Pilgrims wash their faces and necks with the water of the sea, some meditate as the waves wash over their lower bodies. Having delivered their offerings, they take out plastic bottles

and fill them in the surf. The bottles, swaddled in white, perfumed cloth, will be taken home, and poured out on the floors of shops, restaurants, factories, or homes, ensuring well-being and success. The sea here is not mere water, the beach is not merely sand. The sea is the domain of the Queen of the South, who rules the ocean and spirit world. She dwells beneath the waves in her royal palace. The beach, the gateway to her realm, is a charged space, a place of unseen forces one would be wise to respect. The two stones are the seats where the Queen of the South and the founding king of the realm first met. In this sense they are the place where the kingdom of Yogyakarta was founded, because it was with her love and favour that the king triumphed over his enemies, not to mention the support of her spirit armies. With her favour, success and well-being cannot remain distant. This is why most pilgrims come here, and why they bring offerings.

*Figure 1: Practitioners sit behind the juru kunci as he passes on their petitions. The stones are in darkness to the left. 2019*

## The Syncretic View

The pilgrims described above and their practices have often been called "syncretic," due to the perceived intermingling of different religions with an outside deity, the Queen. The pilgrims are for the most part Muslims, with the largest minority being Catholics, and a fraction made up by Hindus and Buddhists. The place where these rituals are performed is Cepuri Parangkusumo, a public park and ritual area in Parangkusumo. This is a village on the southern coast of Java near the tourist hot spot Parangtritis, an hour's drive south from the city of Yogyakarta. The Parangkusumo site[1] is but one of many Javanese phenomena and practices deemed syncretic throughout the years.

The term syncretism has been the subject of strong criticism by scholars and has to a large extent been replaced by other terms, such as "hybridity." Indeed, this thesis began with my desire to examine the lived reality behind the label of "religious hybridity." How do practitioners relate the Queen of the South with their religion (usually Islam)? During the research process, however, it became clear that many of the criticisms one could level against syncretism can be levelled against its replacement concepts. The superficial differences between "syncretism," "hybridity," "creolization," et cetera, conceal a remarkable conceptual overlap, which I call the syncretic view. This syncretic view is fundamentally flawed, and inquiries directed through its lens are hindered in the production of useful or valuable knowledge.

The syncretic view has a long history. Javanese religiosity has been perceived as a mix of disparate elements by Western observers since the beginnings of the colonial era. Only the earliest known Western descriptions of Javanese religiosity describe the Javanese as *either* "Mohammedans" *or* "heathens." The discourse according to which Javanese religiosity was a mixture arose soon after (Van den Boogert 2015, 47-54). This mixture was seen as bizarre, impure, and incompatible. Together with this appraisal, Westerners began to see the Javanese commitment to Islam as half-hearted, hypocritical, or lazy. For example, Dirk van Hogendorp (1800, 4) wrote: "The religion of the Javanese is generally the Mohammedan, though mixed with much superstition, derived from the old heathen religion..."[2] Seventeen years later,

1 Strictly speaking, Parangkusumo and surroundings have many ritual sites. I use "Parangkusumo site" and "Cepuri site" as shorthand for the Cepuri and the beach beyond, which are strictly two sites. More detail will be given in Chapter 4.

2 Translations of Dutch quotes in this segment are mine.

Thomas Raffles (1817, vol. 2: 5), the British governor of the Dutch East Indies, wrote: “The Mohamedan (sic) religion, as it at present exists on Java, seems only to have penetrated the surface, and to have taken but little root in the heart of the Javans.” Some twenty years after Raffles, Johannes Olivier (1838, 174) wrote: “The concepts of the Hindu doctrines remain so deeply rooted with the Javanese that they are only half Mohammedan.”

This perception of Javanese religiosity has not fundamentally changed. It has been called different names, including “syncretism,” “hybridity,” “synthesis,” and it has been framed both in positive and negative lights: as a mark of hypocrisy and indifference as well as the product of cosmopolitanism and creativity. The assumption that it is a mix has rarely been challenged. It is considered a truism, an unquestionable aspect or even the essential nature of Javanese religiosity.

*Figure 2: Ribbons of flowers from offerings, washed back by the waves. 2019*

*The Problem*

This syncretic view of Javanese religiosity has severe theoretical problems and unpleasant implications. If we are to recognize that the religiosity of the Parangkusumo pilgrims is a mix of things that are or ought to be separate - a monotheist religion and offerings to a sea spirit, or Islam with an un-Islamic figure - we cannot escape the conclusion that the pilgrims, who are apparently unbothered by this contradiction, are either ignorant of their own religion, hypocrites, or apathetic. Although contemporary Western scholars would never argue this, these assumptions remain inherent in the syncretic view if one wants to take the concept to its logical conclusion. Sanitized language and a positive reappraisal of syncretism cannot redress the fundamental problem on which the syncretic view rests: the inescapable implication is that the practitioners are - unlike Western observers - either incapable or unwilling to see that their religious practice is contradictory, piecemeal, and incoherent.

Secondly, the syncretic view leaves us conceptualizing Javanese Muslims as being not as fully Muslim as might be possible. Understanding Javanese religiosity as a syncretic mix of two things, one of which is Islam (or Catholicism, etc.) and the other is a hazily defined Javanese Hindu-Buddhist tradition, means that an unmixed, more pure and more fully *Islamic* way of being Muslim is thinkable. This means that scholars can, on a conceptual level, not but agree with reformists that they are more Islamic than adherents to traditionalist "syncretic" forms of Islam.

Both problems lead to an incongruity between analysis and self-description. When practitioners of the Queen of the South rituals identify themselves as Muslim, calling their religiosity syncretic amounts to saying "Well, they say there are Muslim, *but actually*..."

With this in mind, we see that any attempt to study phenomena such as the Queen of the South rituals that proceeds from the syncretic view is built on quicksand. Any attempt to study the processes of harmonization between the Queen of the South and Islam (or other religions) *assumes that there is something to be harmonized*, that there is a contradiction, that there is, in a word, syncretism. As such, knowledge produced by such an approach may be useful in that it answers the questions of the researcher, but is fundamentally flawed in that those questions are guided by concerns that are not important or even intelligible to the practitioners themselves. These questions proceed from perceptions of the situation that do not represent practitioners' understandings. Such knowledge may even be harmful in that it

furthers a discourse that has since the colonial era invalidated practitioners' understanding of their own situation and delegitimized their practices.

There is no easy way out of this problem. How can we study the actual complexities of the Queen of the South and similar phenomena without falling into the syncretic trap, lending weight to reformists who argue that yes, these people's religiosity *is* impure?

We could avoid the syncretic trap by taking self-description as paramount - they are simply Muslims and therefore this is an Islamic practice. But this only postpones a confrontation with syncretism: if there is no syncretism because this is an Islamic practice, the burden of the label syncretism falls onto the Catholics, Hindus, and Buddhists who engage in the Parangkusumo practices.

Similarly, we might argue that the practice is not "religion" but rather folklore, tradition, or something similar, which means we do not have to imply that practitioners violate the coherence of their religion. But this leads us into the well-worn problems of defining religion;[3] even worse, defining religion entirely with the intention to exclude, and worse still, defining religion circularly to suit our agenda. Even if reformists or even practitioners call the practices something like folklore, we must take into account the discursive and political impulses behind such a definition. Relegating the practices to non-religious categories also erases the complexity of the practitioners' lifeworld and ritual life to make it fit with our conceptual paradigm, leaving us as scholars with no way to study the complexities and disagreements involved.

To sum up, the syncretic view is fundamentally flawed and the most straightforward solutions offer no reprieve. If the problem cannot be solved by tinkering within the syncretic view, it seems that the problem must lie outside of the syncretic view. In Chapter 1, I will argue that the problems proceed from the concept of religion, which the syncretic view rests on.

### Questions about Questions

How, then, should we go about studying the phenomenon of the Queen of the South rituals? Any questions proceeding from the syncretic view, as I have written, no matter how well-

3 The enormous amounts of definitions of religion, even multiple categories of defining religion such as monothetic and polythetic definitions, have been examined by Craig Martin (2004, ch. 1).

intentioned, will produce answers that may fundamentally mischaracterize the people and phenomena they want to understand.

This thesis, then, will revolve primarily around this question about questions. While I will spend a lot of time closely analysing the figure of the Queen of the South, how she is mediated and spoken about, as well as a description and analysis of some of the ritual forms practised at the Parangkusumo site, this main concern of thesis is not to answer an empirical question. Rather, it attempts to answer a theoretical question by confronting it with empirical data. It strives to perform conceptual work relevant to all fields of religious studies and Islamic studies by attempting to reach an alternative to a flawed but entrenched truism. The Queen of the South and the Parangkusumo rituals are, to this extent, an excellent phenomenon for answering questions not just about *this phenomenon*, but about the syncretic view in general, and how other phenomena deemed hybrid or syncretic like it could be approached in more fruitful ways. In other words, this thesis revolves around empirical research for conceptual reasons and with conceptual consequences.

For that reason, the central question underpinning this thesis is: how we can move beyond the syncretic view in our approach of phenomena called syncretic, such as the Queen of the South rituals, while maintaining analytical depth?

With maintaining analytical depth I mean that we must take seriously practitioners' self-described religiosity, while simultaneously acknowledging the reality of the coexistence of genealogically different elements. Acknowledging this reality means that we cannot resort to solutions such as sweeping the problem under the rug by declaring the Queen to be "Islamized," or explaining the problem away by reducing the Queen to "folklore," "magic," or other non-religion. Such solutions do not solve the problem, instead allowing us to avoid confronting it at the cost of analytical depth.

To answer this central question, we need to know more about the Queen of the South. Who is she? How is she mediated, and how does she function in the discursive context? How is she imagined, and why is she important? How do people relate her to Islam? This analysis will for a large part be based on literature, but is supplemented by fieldwork. Chapter 2 deals with the Queen as a character in discourse and Chapter 3 deals with the power, agency, and presence of the Queen.

We must also examine the rituals performed at Cepuri Parangkusumo. What objects, acts, and places are involved? Who performs these rituals and why? How is the Queen of the South involved? Chapter 4 describes in detail these rituals. Influenced by the material religion approach, this chapter gives special attention to material entanglements at the site. This description is almost entirely based on participant observation, with comparisons and theory drawn from literature.

Finally, we must ask how practitioners and detractors mobilize local concepts of "religion" and "non-religion" in the construction of appropriateness and transgression. Chapter 5 revolves entirely around local concepts and categories. How do practitioners and detractors argue their positions? Why is this *syirik* (idolatry, A. شرك *shirk*) to one, and perfectly innocuous for the other? This chapter is based on informal interviews and conversations at the Cepuri.

This is the empirical data with which I will attempt to illuminate a conceptual problem. Before coming to these questions, Chapter 1 will more clearly delineate what that problem is. It will examine the syncretic view of Javanese religiosity, review common criticisms and attempts to solve it. In this chapter I will also offer a new criticism of the syncretic view and attempt to explore potential new avenues this criticism allows - or even demands.

**Names, Methods, and Sources**

As mentioned, this thesis is largely based on conversations with practitioners of the Cepuri/ beach rituals and Cepuri visitors (both with positive and negative opinions on the rituals) at the site, as well as observations of the rituals involved. These conversations and observations took place in April, May, and June of 2019. In addition, I will refer often to literature.

However, the Queen of the South is more like a variegated discourse than an easily summarized character. As we shall see in Chapter 1 and 2, there is a lot of diversity in the discourse surrounding the Queen, and there can be marked differences in ideation and perception among oral statements and historical texts. For example, among my interlocutors there was no agreement as to whether this Queen is alone, in the company of her first minister (*patih*), her daughter, or indeed both.

The character is even difficult to name. Several names flow through the discourse, and which of the figure(s) it refers to can differ. The names used for this figure and related figures include:

| *Name* | *Translation* |
|---|---|
| Ratu Kidul | Queen of the South (*Javanese*) |
| Nyai Roro Kidul<br>*and variants, such as*<br>*Nyi* instead of *Nyai*<br>*Rara* instead of *Roro*<br>*Loro* instead of *Roro*<br>*Lara* instead of *Roro* | Venerable Maiden of the South (*Javanese*) (Florida 1992, 20)<br>*Nyai* translates to "old woman" (Jordaan 1997, 302-3) or "married woman" or "ruler" (Wessing 1997b, 113).<br>*Roro* translates to "maiden" or "girl" |
| Dewi Kadita<br>*or* Kandita | Sundanese name<br>*Dewi* translates to "goddess"<br>*Kadita* is presumably a personal name |
| Ratu Laut Selatan | Queen of the Southern Sea (*Indonesian*) |
| Dewi Laut Selatan | Goddess of the Southern Sea (*Indonesian*) |
| Penguasa Pantai Selatan | Ruler of the Southern Coast (*Indonesian*) |
| Ratu Laut | Queen of the Sea (*Indonesian*) |
| Ibu Ratu | Mother Queen (*Indonesian*) |
| Kanjeng Ratu Kencanasari | Her Royal Highness Flower of Gold (*Court title*) (Florida, 20) |

These names are sometimes preceded by specific royal titles, such as *Kanjeng* or *Gusti Kanjeng.* As mentioned, these names are not only used for the same figure. Whereas most use (some of) these names and titles interchangeably, to refer to a solitary figure, some maintain that these names refer to a range of distinct and different entities, organized into a type of royal court, including such roles as the Queen's daughter and her aide or first minister.

To avoid reifying one name and valorizing it as the "correct" one, especially in the face of such diversity, I will use the English translation of perhaps the most common name, Ratu

Kidul - the Queen of the South[4] - to refer to the entire spectrum of these names and their concomitant perspectives. I will only use a specific name when discussing a specific version or when quoting someone.

**Positionality**

In contemporary anthropological research, a constantly recurring concern is to reflect upon one's positionality and what impact this positionality has on research. In my case this is especially important - as a white Dutch man doing research in Indonesia, the colonial history, implications, and dynamics are more than clear. It is important to reflect on this, but what such reflection would entail is something I am not entirely sure about. In my mind, any neocolonial implication caught by such reflection would already have been self-corrected; any neocolonial implication that has escaped such self-correction is likely to also escape deliberate reflection. It is not through reflection but through education and listening to the voices of the marginalized that we become aware of our own biases and the inherited biases of colonialism.

This is precisely the goal of this thesis. It seeks to remove a colonial bias from the study of Indonesia, to move towards an approach of this specific dynamic that is rooted in the Indonesian experience and in Indonesian concepts. I am writing this to combat colonialism in the study of Indonesia.

Nonetheless, it is still possible this thesis might further problematic discourses. As I said, it is not through reflection but through education that we become aware of our biases. I would not be surprised that what I am writing today with my best intentions and entirely in line with the prevailing notions of my day will, given developments in the next thirty (or even three) years, be found to be full of the most colonial and Eurocentric assumptions and implications. However, these assumptions and implications are as yet invisible to me, part of a hidden paradigm that I, due to its invisibility, cannot critique. It is unlikely that I, in an aside on

4 It may seem a little distasteful to insist on an English name when talking about a phenomenon from a nation that has suffered much under European colonization - the Dutch, the English, the Portuguese - when a perfectly adequate local term is available. However, I believe that the plurality of the Queen is central to a proper approach of the phenomenon. Choosing one local name over the other would be valorizing that name (and associated views) as the correct one, erasing the plurality. The artificiality of an English translation allows me to refer to the phenomenon as a whole - all different names, all different ideas, all different conceptualizations - without reifying one specific name as the "real" name.

positionality, will make large strides in this field when hordes of academics in the field of postcolonial studies are far more immersed in these issues, and the only realistic way I will develop is by being educated on the topic by those corners of the academic realm.

In short, my entire goal in this thesis is to critique, dismantle, and replace a colonial concept that has, in my opinion, done great damage to Indonesian reality, and I can do no more than my very best to exclude colonial bias in my thinking, writing, and conclusions.

Yet that is not the entirety of the problem. As a Dutchman writing about Indonesia I am drawing on and producing knowledge that both is produced by and produces a certain power dynamic. There are many Dutch anthropologists who study the Indonesian context; the reverse is less common. What I personally write or do not write is of little consequence to the larger (post)colonial power dynamic, which is expressed in that I am writing about Indonesia at all. This is a rub that cannot be solved within this thesis, short of me not writing this thesis. At this stage that would mean not attaining my diploma. So institutional and financial pressure is involved in the production of this thesis - an example of the powerful influence financial, institutional, and national power in the production of knowledge.

However, it is perhaps encouraging to note that Foucault (1995, 194), who famously wrote of the dynamic of power and knowledge, did not consider power to be inherently or essentially negative. Power also creates, structures, and orders. Yes, the very fact that I can write this thesis is the product of and producer of a certain knowledge-power dynamic. This knowledge-power dynamic expresses its own agency: it is impossible for me to write this thesis without engaging with that dynamic. In this way, it is not me who exercises power, but power which exercises itself through me. However, it is, perhaps, possible to utilize this dynamic and its power to critique damaging products of those power dynamics that still go criticized. This is what I set out to do and if I fail, it is because I have inadvertently overlooked some aspect of the intricacies of knowledge production and power.

# 1. Syncretism as Transgression

> Arguably the most prevalent understanding of Javanese Islam, or at least the one with the longest pedigree, is as a syncretist mix of beliefs and practices from Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, animism and ancestor worship. The idea that the Javanese adhere to this syncretist religion is so pervasive that we find it entrenched in the literature on Javanese culture, Javanese politics, Javanese socio-economics, and so forth.
>
> Van den Boogert (2015, 10)

To understand the pilgrims, the Queen of the South rituals and how they relate with practitioners' religiosity, we need to know how to conceptualize them. The common approach is the syncretic view. With the syncretic view, I do not only mean "syncretism" itself, but the shared conceptual scheme of "syncretism" and its many replacements. I use this term because it emphasizes my point, as I will argue below, that many of syncretism's replacements and successors do not differ in their core conceptual content (a mixing between two distinct things), and, more importantly, in their usage.

Unfortunately, the syncretic view is fundamentally problematic and conceptually flawed. In this chapter, I will examine the meaning and implications of the syncretic view, criticisms of its concepts and attempts to rehabilitate them, and how literature concerning Java deals with the issues. This chapter also examines a problematic aspect of the syncretic view - its politics of use - that clearly show how compromised and flawed it is.

But without the syncretic view, we are rudderless, lacking the concepts to properly frame or approach the Queen of the South or similar phenomena. However, if we carefully analyse the

pitfalls and issues of the syncretic view, we can approach the Queen phenomenon with special attention to its empirical implications *for* these pitfalls and issues. In other words, the Queen phenomenon itself could illuminate new ways to approach the Queen phenomenon and those like it.

In order to do that, however, we must first clearly establish what the syncretic view entails, what these pitfalls and issues exactly are, and why the syncretic view does not do as a conceptual approach.

**Perceiving Javanese Religion**

Java has long been seen as a place where two religions intermingle: the newer Islam and the older Hindu-Buddhism. Little can be said with certainty about early Javanese history, but the rudimentary outline is as follows. The influences of the Indian subcontinent were introduced via trade as early as the 5th century CE. Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms arose between the 5th and 13th centuries, culminating in the Majapahit Empire, which lasted until the 15th century. During the later Majapahit Empire, Islamic influences began to percolate throughout Java and the archipelago, most likely by traders or Sufi mystics. The first Western commentators of Java therefore found themselves confronted with a situation that seemed *both* Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic. Only the very earliest recorded encounters between Westerners and the Javanese differed, as they described the Javanese as either heathens (Hindu-Buddhist) or Mohammedans (Muslim), one or the other.

Soon, however, a discourse developed according to which the Javanese *mixed* Islam with their pre-Islamic religion. Since then, Western observers overwhelmingly characterized (what they perceived as) Javanese religion as a mixture. The notion of Javanese religion as a mixture was accompanied by the notion that on Java, Islam was only a thin veneer over a pre-Islamic core. In 1822, the Dutch resident of Gresik in East Java, A.D. Cornets de Groot, wrote that in domestic life, “the Javanese observes just a few of the practices prescribed for him by the Qur’an” (1822, 271-2). Even those they do carry out, he notes, they hardly ever do them at the prescribed times or with the proper preparations. For De Groot, this characterizes them as uncaring or lazy Muslims.

This understanding is echoed by almost all colonial writers on the subject. Similarly, Thomas Stamford Raffles, of the British administration of Java between 1811-1816, wrote:

> Their profession of Mohamedanism has not relieved them from the superstitious prejudices and observances of an anterior worship; they are thus open to the accumulated delusions of two religious systems. (1817, vol. 1: 5)

His contemporary, John Crawfurd, a Scottish Protestant, wrote:

> Of all Mahomedans (sic) the Javanese are most lax in their principles and practice, a singularity to be ascribed to their little intercourse with foreign Mohamedans. [...] In most of the Mahomedan institutions of the Javanese, we discover marks of Hinduism. The institutions of the latter have in reality been rather modified and built upon rather than destroyed. (1820, 271)

Crawfurd unites three different appraisals of Javanese religion: they mix two religions, their Islam is a veneer over their Hinduism, and they are "most lax" in regard to Islam.[5] In other words, Javanese religion has always been perceived as being marked by a plurality where the concepts of Western observers demanded singularity. These are the characteristics of the syncretic view. The word itself is even used. In 1860, Samuel Eliza Harthoorn wrote:

> This basic characteristic [of the Javanese], the tendency towards rest, the to him pleasurable sweetness of laziness[6] shows in everything, and is also the final cause of syncretism [*synkretisme*], of his boundless confusion of ideas. (1860, 246-47)

5 Rather remarkably, the celebrated historian M.C. Ricklefs describes Crawfurd's views as "not inconsistent" (2006, 216) with his own findings. Ricklefs and his combination of extreme erudition but unexamined use of the concept of religion will be examined further in this chapter.

6 The quotes listed in this segment can all be found in Van den Boogert (2015). However, I have not followed Van den Boogert's translations of the Dutch. In this quote, for example, Van den Boogert translates *vadsigheid* as "bloatedness." In contemporary Dutch, *vadsigheid* can indeed be used to refer to bloatedness or being fat. But etymologically, *vadsig* and *vadsigheid* referred to slowness, weakness, and laziness, which is clearly its meaning in this centuries-old quote. Nonetheless, what I quickly argue here can be found in much more detail in Van den Boogert, 2015.

We see that the syncretic view is not a new development, but rather a reframing of a very old tradition of perceiving Javanese religiosity. In the case of Java specifically, it shows a remarkable continuity with almost all colonial-era descriptions offered by Western observers.

**The Syncretic View: Concept and Ideology**

The syncretic view only superficially differs from these colonial views. It is accompanied with more palatable language and without the overt distaste accompanying these quotes. It can be accompanied with positive appraisals for the creativity of the syncretists. Nonetheless, contemporary understandings of Javanese religiosity are conceptually identical to colonial understandings: it is a mix, it is Islam transposed over a pre-Islamic core. Javanese religiosity is therefore syncretic, hybrid, a synthesis, a bricolage, et cetera. But what does it mean to call Javanese religion or Javanese Islam *syncretic, hybrid,* et cetera?

It is undeniable that pre-Islamic ritual forms, lifeworld components or cosmological knowledge thrive in contemporary Javanese society. This is not a controversial statement, nor is it unique to the Javanese context. As Said says, “all cultures are involved in one another; none is simple and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated and unmonolithic” (1994, xxv). I am not challenging the notion that Javanese religiosity is an assemblage. I am challenging the syncretic view, which, despite appearances, has a much more specific meaning, theoretical commitment, and indeed agenda, as we will see.

Throughout this chapter, I will from time to time differentiate between the concepts of “syncretism,” “hybridity,” et cetera, and the actual phenomena these words label. It would be confusing, not to mention self-defeating, to talk about how “hybridity” (the term) does not do justice to “real hybridity” (the phenomenon). To avoid this confusion, I will refer to the phenomenon these concepts seek to label as *salient religious assemblages.* This term acknowledges that these phenomena are assemblages of many parts, “extraordinarily differentiated and unmonolithic.” However, it differs from common-sense understandings of syncretism by stating that the syncretic view describes only *salient* religious assemblages rather than *all* religious assemblages. The reasoning behind this, and its implications for the syncretic view’s problems and solutions will be expounded on further on in this chapter.

*The Notion of Syncretism*

Syncretism, what the Oxford Dictionary of English defines as "the amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought" (Stevenson 2015), is a concept that has long been well-accepted, but has been thoroughly criticized in the past decades. The most commonly argued criticisms are, firstly, that it is derogatory (the negative associations are also shown by the Oxford Dictionary of English in their sample sentence: "*interfaith dialogue can easily slip into syncretism"* (Stevenson 2015)), and the second common criticism is that it presupposes pureness in the two things it combines (Stewart 1999, 40-41). Attempts have been made to rehabilitate syncretism and to replace it with other concepts. These replacement concepts, however, do not differ strongly in conceptual content and usage.

Syncretism originates in the missionary field. In this context, syncretism is the result of deluded or misguided people, the product of a failed or incomplete conversion. The "amalgamation," though "attempted," cannot succeed, because either one follows the true religion, or one does not. In this sense, syncretism implied, as Stewart (1999, 46) says, a "heretical and inconsistent jumble of theologies" throughout the era of missionary expansion and European colonial expansion.

In this context, syncretism functioned in a structure of legitimacy and authority. The term was often used to disparage colonial churches that, drifting out of mission control, began "to 'illegitimately' indigenize Christianity instead of properly reproducing the European form of Christianity they had originally been offered" (Stewart 1999, 46). Syncretism was seen as a kind of relapse of the convert. In the New World, syncretism was seen somewhat more positively, as a temporary stage on the road (of African Americans and other minorities) towards total cultural assimilation. Although valued positively, this still posited syncretism as a liminal, in-between state, neither here nor there, which would or ought to eventually dissolve into stability.

When contemporary authors call Javanese religion "syncretic," they obviously do not mean to imply "heretical" and "inconsistent." They use the term to refer to "a synthesis of religious forms" (Stewart and Shaw, abstr.) which seems at first glance unproblematic as it is devoid of overt negative association. Contemporary characterizations of Javanese religiosity as

"syncretic," "hybrid," or a "synthesis," are clearly not meant to imply inferiority or ignorance. Yet the history of syncretism is not the only issue.

*The Problems of the Syncretic View*

It is not only the historical, colonial baggage that should make us apprehensive about the validity of syncretism. The syncretic view in general comes with unacceptable implications if we follow the logical conclusions inherent in its conceptual content. The following examples are specific to the Javanese context. Many of these may hold true for other contexts deemed "syncretic," some may not.

The first problem is that adopting the syncretic view would imply that one must ignore what actual Javanese people say about their own religion. If we understand Javanese Muslims who engage in the Queen rituals as mixing their religion with something else, we do not take seriously what they themselves say about the subject, namely that they are Muslims. If a Javanese Muslim is actually engaging in two different religions - one Islamic, one Hindu-Buddhist - we must conclude that the integrity of their Muslimness is impacted by the other religion, making them only partially Muslim. Or we must conclude that they are fully Muslim *and* something else. Both analyses clash with their self-identification, which states that they are Muslim. Not half-Muslim, not nominal Muslim, not syncretic Muslim, not Muslim-and-something-else: Muslim. The conclusions of the syncretic view cannot be anything but in contradiction to their own claims.

This first problem leads to the second one: how can we justify the incongruity between self-description (Muslim) and analysis deriving from the syncretic view (not fully or straightforwardly Muslim?) How is it possible that Javanese Muslims do not understand what we have learned through our analysis? Throughout colonial history, the explanations can be divided into ignorance and passivity on one side and hypocrisy, laziness, and malice on the other. Either the syncretists do not *realize* that they are compromising their own religion, making them ignorant or naive, or they *do* realize but simply do not *care*, which makes them hypocritical, lazy, or dishonest. The reader will recognize these traits as age-old attributes of colonial and Orientalist stereotypes (cf. Alatas 1997). Though no contemporary scholar would ever dream of arguing that this is the case, one of these conclusions is unavoidable if we wish to maintain the syncretic view.

In other words, the syncretic view cannot be maintained unless we believe that the Javanese as a whole[7] are incapable or unwilling to understand what we as Western scholars[8] *can* understand. This is a colonialist and racist belief, and no scholar would argue thus, but it is nonetheless the logical endpoint if we take the syncretic view seriously.

Beyond these implications buried within the concept, the syncretic view has other flaws. The first and foremost is that it has no explanatory power. Calling something “syncretic” or “hybrid” tells us nothing of value about that specific phenomenon - it does not tell us how it came to be, what epistemological, political, social factors are in play, and why the phenomenon took this shape. That all remains to be done *after* calling something syncretic or hybrid. Therefore, it functions more as a classificatory label than anything else. I will explore this aspect of the syncretic view further on in this chapter.

Many of these criticisms are well-worn in the face of syncretism itself.[9] Especially in response to the notion that syncretism is derogatory, attempts have been made to rehabilitate it, to distance syncretism as a useful concept from its problematic baggage.

*Rehabilitating Syncretism*

Rehabilitation attempts may include accompanying the use of the term with sympathy towards the creativity and openness that characterizes the syncretists. But - as with the colonial trope of the noble savage - just because a concept is not intended to be derogatory does not mean it is not problematic. We have already seen how the problematic associations with syncretism arise not out of derogatory use, but out of its very conceptual content.

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7 Historically, that is. In contemporary Javanese en Indonesian religiosity, reformist voices are quite vocal about the incompatibility of Islam with practices such as the Queen rituals. Even so, the syncretic view entails that these reformers are right in signalling a contradiction.

8 When Indonesian scholars call Javanese religiosity syncretic, the colonial dynamics are less evident than when a colonial authority such as Raffles or a scholar from a formerly colonial nation does it. However, as I will explore further on in this chapter, the notion of syncretism is inextricably linked with the Western, Protestant-born paradigm of religion. So when Indonesian scholars call Javanese religiosity syncretic, they are employing a concept that dates back to and reproduces certain relations of the colonial era. The colonial dynamics are therefore more subtle, but still present.

9 Many of its replacement concepts, however, such as hybridity, have somewhat eluded these same criticisms, even though they are equally valid in relation to them. This is likely due the fact that they are often used in other frameworks and discourses, meant to criticize the concept of syncretism.

Other attempts try to combat its negative associations while simultaneously developing the concept beyond its conceptual criticisms. Stewart (1999, 55), for instance, argues that syncretism does not necessarily imply purity in the two things it combines, as it has, according to him, long been understood that no religion is "pure." In *Syncretism/Anti-syncretism* by Stewart and Shaw (1994), many authors engage with syncretism in ways that seek to develop it beyond its limitations and flaws. Stewart and Shaw (1994, abstr.) use syncretism to describe "synthesis of different religious forms," and argue that the use of term does not inherently imply anything negative. Much to their credit, they also acknowledge that the term on its own has little explaining power, and that rather than taking it as a static -ism, research on syncretism should focus on processes and discourses.

They also pay close attention to two other important aspects. The first is the agency of syncretists. Indeed, while some syncretization might occur unconsciously, the stereotype of the "deluded" syncretist is decidedly skewed in that processes of appropriation and reinterpretation are often performed entirely on purpose. Emphasizing the agency of syncretists functions to combat the stereotype of ignorance and naiveté. The second is their conceptualization of opposition to syncretism. Rather than equating opposition to syncretism with "purity," "authenticity," or even "orthodoxy," they call it anti-syncretism (Steward and Shaw 1994, 6). Rather than the self-evident default to syncretism's deviancy, they describe anti-syncretism as a specific type of discourse which is just as socially constructed as syncretism. They even note that one must be aware that syncretism is dependent on the category of religion and that one must be sensitive to how this category is lived and experienced differently in different contexts.

However, some problems still remain. For the Javanese case - and many other cases - the largest problem is the discrepancy between the label syncretism and the Javanese self-description. Few practitioners at the Cepuri would say that they are performing a "synthesis of religious forms," they would simply identify themselves as being an adherent to *one* religion.[10] And yet, although the gap between analysis and self-description points towards the

10 Of course, the possibility exists that "syncretism" is not a mischaracterization of practitioners' views, but an analysis deeper than Javanese practitioners themselves are inclined or able to access. If so, the problem is not solved, but made political instead of conceptual. The analysis still contributes to discourses that delegitimize these practitioners. As I will argue further in this chapter, however, syncretism is not a cogent analysis.

problem, the real problem lies in the gap between what syncretism is generally held to mean and what it is used to describe.

*By Any Other Name: Synonyms and Replacements*

Given the criticisms of syncretism, new words were required to describe salient religious assemblages. Many of these words are today far more commonly used than syncretism, their progenitor. Already in 1994, Stewart and Shaw (1994, 2) wrote: "we hear far less about culture as syncretic than about culture as collage, as creolized, as fragmented, as 'interculture', as subversive hybrid invention." Some of these terms seem unfamiliar today and may have fallen out of favour again, whereas others still enjoy success.

The concept today perhaps most common to replace syncretism is religious hybridity. Based on the writings of Homi Bhabha (2004), this term is used as if it were syncretism minus its problematic associations. Certainly, hybridity does not have the same historical baggage of being used in a derogatory sense, although it has been criticized for its biological associations, and indeed the term has its origins in racial ideology (Young 1995, 6). Hybridity offers no complete solution, however. In the introduction to *The Location of Culture,* Bhabha compares cultural hybridization with a stairwell:

> The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (Bhabha 2004, 5)

One of the merits of this analogy for hybridity is that it foregrounds transitionality and movement, which syncretism does not. It even argues that the differences at the opposite ends of the stairwell are not really opposite, but constructed as such by the connective tissue of the stairwell. This aspect is however rarely taken seriously when religious hybridity is invoked; religious hybridity is used to describe an intermingling between different religions. The

notion that such difference may not be “out there,” but be constructed, rarely finds reflection in such analyses.

The stairwell remains a line between two opposites; “upper and lower, black and white.” Whereas the movement implied by the stairwell-analogy is a meritorious addition, the stairwell also necessarily implies the stairwell is a connecting, 2-dimensional line between two opposites along which an individual or group can move. In other words, in the stairwell metaphor, if the upper end is “Muslim” and the lower end is “Hindu-Buddhism,” we once again end up with the conclusion that the Javanese are not fully Muslim or at least not *as Muslim as possible* - after all, they are somewhere on the stairwell and are thus less Islamic than they would be if they were all the way at the Islamic end of it. Bhabha argues that the dynamic of the stairwell prevents such polarities from settling, but this would merely force us to conclude that *no one* is truly Muslim - arguably better than arguing only *some* are not truly Muslim, but still hardly a useful concept.

Bhabha goes on to discuss the intricacies of these issues for 400 pages, and his ideas cannot be reduced to the metaphor of the stairwell. However, I would argue that the concept of religious hybridity as inspired by Babha, can be. It is mainly used in passing to describe the interaction between two religions, which are - if only for the purposes of analysis - taken as polarities. This way religious hybridity, though it appears to sidestep many of syncretism’s problems, steps into the same implications because of its very conceptual foundations.

A less common term is creolization (Hannerz 1987). Creolization, borrowed from the field of linguistics, suffers from the same problems as syncretism - in fact, it suffers from those very same problems *in the very field it was borrowed from* (Stewart and Shaw 1994, 2). Determining the difference between a creole, a pidgin, and a language is not a matter of analysis, but a matter of ideology (cf. Sanchez-Stockhammer 2012, 142-8).

The term bricolage, a term perhaps more common in anthropology than religious studies per se, implies the same thing - the mixing of separate elements - but differs in emphasis. Bricolage emphasizes not the mixing itself, but the repertoire that guides this mixing and its limits. The *bricoleur* is limited by “whatever is at hand” (Lévi-Strauss [1962] 1966, 17). Altglas writes that bricolage, as conceptualized by Bastide (1970) is more about filling in gaps in “collective memory” and is as such a quest for coherence rather than “a celebration of eclecticism” (Altglas 2014, 477). Conceptualizing a religious assemblage as arising from a

quest for coherence is radically different from the historical baggage of syncretism, which emphasizes the fundamental *incoherence* of the syncretic religion.

Interestingly, Altglas actually employs syncretism as a separate concept from bricolage, presumably, as Stewart and Shaw do, as a synonym for "synthesis." The emphasis of bricolage - as reclaimed by Altglas - on the sociocultural dynamics and processes of syncretism is valuable, because it allows for a more detailed analysis of syncretism. But this is also its problem: a more detailed analysis of syncretism is still an analysis guided by a fundamentally unworkable frame. A more complete understanding of the processes of "mixing" Islam with something else does not solve the difficult incongruity between self-description and analysis.

The concept of "multiple religious belonging" is also used to conceptualize salient religious assemblages (cf. Cornille 2002). The term seems to be overrepresented in discussions of Christian Buddhists (cf. Cornille 2002, D'Costa and Thompson 2016) and may have its origin in discussions surrounding the compatibility of those two traditions. Multiple religious belonging is a concept that has a somewhat unfortunate terminology - for a Javanese Muslim, for example, it would not fit, as there is a singular belonging: Islam. The Queen of the South rituals do not constitute *belonging*. As we shall see, there is an ethnic aspect to these rituals, which relate to belonging, but not, for a practitioner, "religious" belonging. For the Javanese context, the concept would require a lot of work and many caveats to be somewhat representative. The phrasing of its very terminology is too restrictive.

All these concepts that seek to replace syncretism, to conceptualize what it used to conceptualize, come with similar problems. The reason for this is that the problems with syncretism do not lie in its baggage, but in its conceptual content and, as we shall see, its reliance on the concept of religion and its politics of use. This common core is not challenged by these concepts, most of which are simply new coats of paint over syncretism. We find ourselves with no reliable way to examine Java's salient religious assemblages. And yet, scholars have examined those in great detail. What approaches and concepts do they use?

## Swings and Roundabouts: Parsing Javanese Religiosity in Academia

Most authors on religion in Indonesia or Java are aware that the syncretic view is flawed, either because of its problematic implications or its lack of explanatory power. Lacking a

reliable and workable concept to take its place, scholars examining Javanese religiosity are nonetheless confronted with it and have attempted to address its issues with varying success. I will give some examples here.

*A More Nuanced Syncretic View: Ricklefs' Mystic Synthesis*

M.C. Ricklefs is perhaps the most prominent historian of Indonesia and certainly of Java. His 2006 work *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries* is of particular importance to this thesis. Seeking largely to trace the development of Islam on Java, he necessarily also employs concepts of religion and hybridity to approach it. Despite the obvious value of the historical content of this book, which will be quoted extensively in this thesis, it falls short in its conceptualizations of religion and religious assemblage. Using new terminology which is functionally identical to syncretism, differing mainly in how it emphasizes the role of mysticism in assemblage, he analyses Javanese religion in a valuable way but cannot quite get away from the problems of the syncretic view.

The stated aim of the book is studying the interrelation between being Muslim and being Javanese. The main purpose of the book is to explain the "mystic synthesis," a synthesis "of being Javanese and being Muslim" (2006, 8) facilitated by the openness of Sufi mysticism.

It is noteworthy that Ricklefs locates the synthesis not between two religions, but between ethnic identity and religion, which already goes beyond the syncretic view. Nonetheless Ricklefs echoes certain conceptual pitfalls of the syncretic view and the concept of religion. This shows primarily by how often he discusses issues of personal belief, piety, and practice as self-evidently relevant, without proper reflection on the concepts he utilizes.

For example, when writing about the king Pakubuwana II, who, on the run for both his Javanese rivals and the VOC, sought refuge at Mount Lawu and aid from its spirit Sunan Lawu, Ricklefs concludes that Pakubuwana II may not have been all that serious about (Islamic) piety after all (2006, 134). This is an extremely odd conclusion, since Pakubuwana very clearly conceived of himself and presented himself as an Islamic ruler. The only way to conclude that his call for aid betrays a lackadaisical attitude to piety requires assuming that seeking aid from Sunan Lawu and a deep, personal Islamic piety are in fundamental opposition; incommensurable; perfectly mutually exclusive. Why assume this? Ricklefs has

not built an argument to substantiate that position, instead working with seemingly unexamined concepts of religion, Islam, and Javanese Hindu-Buddhism. Following these concepts, Islam and Javanese Hindu-Buddhism both occupy the conceptual place of "religion," and are fundamentally incommensurable things. These are the problematic characteristics of the syncretic view.

Ricklefs writes about Pakubuwana:

> In his search for spiritual solace and power, it seems that Pakubuwana II was perhaps turning away from the devout Sufism that had previously been the dominant style of the *kraton*. Certainly he must have concluded that Ratu Pakubuwana's magical Islamic books[11] had failed utterly to make his reign perfect and that holy war against infidels [the VOC, M.K.] had only led to disaster. Was he instead - or also - seeking more indigenous non-Islamic forces, or *had he perhaps been converted to a faith in such forces* by occult experiences he believed to be real? (Emphasis added, Ricklefs 2006, 138-9)

The notions of conversion, faith, and indeed "occult" here seem entirely taken for granted. It is an unfounded assumption that personal belief or faith is important in dealing with spirits - it may not even have been relevant. The assumption that it is rests on the perceived universalism of the concept of religion. Moreover, it is an assumption that Pakubuwana II must, at some point, *not* have believed in these spirits, and must at some point have "converted" to that belief. In other words, these spirits are seen as religion, and treated as such, parsed in terms of faith and conversion - without questioning as to whether there is any cause to see these spirits in this way.

Ricklefs sees contradictions where there are perhaps none because of the concepts he employs. These contradictions are then resolved in the mystic synthesis. This synthesis primarily denotes the "synthesis of being Javanese and being Muslim" - in which the

11 Ratu Pakubuwana, Pakubuwana II's grandmother, had ordered the production of several literary works which held (and describe their own) hidden power. These books - the *Carita Sultan Iskandar*, the *Carita Yusuf*, and the *Kitab Usulbiyah* - were largely Islamic in content and inspiration, and performed an Islamic identity, although they were, as Ricklefs notes, not within the realms of orthodoxy. Their hidden power was however, most important, and perhaps they had been intended to functioned similarly to *pusaka*'s, the invisibly powerful royal heirlooms that are so important to a dynasty. It is these books that had perhaps failed (cf. Ricklefs 2006, 103-115).

contradictions of an Islam interlaced with Javanese Hindu-Buddhist elements are resolved in the "ecumenical genius of mysticism" (2006, 223). Sufism allowed not only for Islam's easy adoption due to a previous commitment to Hindu-Buddhist mysticism (2006, 22), but indeed that "[r]econciliation of *contradictory ideas*[12] could take place in the obscure idiom of Javanese mysticism, which allowed great variety of belief and practice within the boundaries of Java's mystic synthesis" (2006, 187).

Ricklefs describes a lot of these contradictions. Descriptions of Javanese Islam seem to return time and again to the words "but" and "yet," signalling contradiction and paradox, which is then resolved in the mystic synthesis. "Self-consciously, indeed tenaciously Muslim in identity, *but* admitting indigenous ideas *in matters of faith*" (2006, 215), "this dominant mode of identity was self-consciously Islamic, *yet* recognized indigenous spiritual forces" (2006, 186), "Javanese elite of the later eighteenth century seem to have inherited [...] a strong commitment to Islam, *but* they admitted to it indigenous Javanese spirits" (2006, 187), and Mangkunegara I was evidently deeply committed to Islam, "*but* there was no evident difficulty in believing also that the autochthonous spirit Sunan Lawu gave magical assistance in [Mangkunegara's project to build a mosque]" (2006, 171).

Ricklefs' well-intentioned point with the "mystic synthesis" is to demonstrate that Javanese Islam grew to be about being *both* fully Javanese *and* fully Muslim within the realm of an "eclectic and catholic" (2006, 117) Javanese Sufism. But at the same time, Ricklefs writes that the mystic synthesis is characterized by a trade-off (2006, 223). There is a delegitimizing potential here. Ricklefs sees contradictions and labels them fully Islamic because they fall within the purview of Sufism, but reformists might just as easily argue that the embrace of all these contradictions within Sufism reveals that Sufism is not fully Islamic.

The problem is not how Ricklefs uses the term Sufism, but what he perceives as contradiction. Ricklefs' "buts" and "yets" mark a contradiction between different religious traditions, which the mystic synthesis resolves. But many of these "buts" and "yets" seem entirely invisible or irrelevant to the people he describes. Ricklefs' uses commonly accepted concept of religion, echoing the so-called Protestant bias. He also draws his boundaries between Islam and non-Islam in accordance with what Shahab Ahmed (2016, 113-29) calls the identification of Islam with the law. Despite Ricklefs' stated aim of focusing on identity,

12 All italics in the quotes on this page represent emphasis added by me.

on ways of "being Muslim," the way he sees contradictions betrays a legalistic definition.[13] A true focus on Islam as religious identity would leave us to conclude that Sunan Lawu - if the Muslim Pakubuwana II engages with him - is Islamic or not in conflict with Islam. But Ricklefs works the other way around: it is Pakubuwana II's Islam that is "in the dock," so to speak. It is his Muslimness that is potentially compromised by Sunan Lawu; not Sunan Lawu's non-Islamic nature that is potentially compromised by Pakubuwana II's Islam.

However, Ricklef's main point is that these contradictions are, indeed *resolved*. Ricklefs never concludes that Pakubuwana II *is* compromised. Nor does he ever state that Javanese Islam is less Islamic for its openness to non-Islamic elements. But his very perception of contradiction is founded on the legalistic category hidden beneath - unnoticed, unexamined, uncriticized. It is this conceptualization that sets the stage for how Ricklefs perceives contradiction, where he places "buts" and "yets" and which are then integrated into the mystic synthesis.

For Ricklefs, *shari'a* does not determine whether someone is Muslim, but it does determine to what extent that person's actions are Islamic. This legalistic conceptualization of Islam is conjoined with a tendency to Protestant bias - the tendency to perceive religion as mostly located in those area's Protestants find most important: personal piety and faith. This is reflected in his notion that Pakubuwana II's and Mangkunegara I's encounters with the spirits are most important because of what it shows about their beliefs, and his notion that Pakubuwana II must have been "converted" to "faith" in the spirits, and that this somehow impacted his Islamic piety.

This is, of course, not to deny that *Mystic Synthesis* is an immensely valuable, sophisticated work, in which Ricklefs strives for nuanced and solid analysis. The problematic aspects I

13 In fact, Shahab Ahmed's *pars pro toto* for problematizing misleading conceptualizations of Islam - the interdiction of drinking of wine by Muslims - is directly mentioned by Ricklefs. Ahmed uses wine-drinking as an example of what legalist definitions of Islam would call un-Islamic, but which was a mainstream feature of almost all Islamic societies, enjoyed by some of the most famous Islamic scholars in history (Ahmed 2016, 5-113). Wine-drinking cannot straightforwardly be called un-Islamic unless we ignore the lives of Muslims and equate Islam entirely with Islamic law (cf. Tamimi Arab 2019). This is precisely what Ricklefs does. He interprets the banning of alcohol as an Islamizing step and sees the predilection of Javanese aristocrats to drink wine mostly as a selective application of the *shari'a*, writing: "it was not unusual for Javanese aristocrats to reconcile their Islamic faith with an appreciation of alcohol." Again, Ricklefs does not conclude that this makes them failed Muslims, but it is telling of the slumbering Islam-as-law conceptualization that banning alcohol is an "Islamizing step," and that Islam is "reconciled" with an appreciation for alcohol.

have outlined here have to be teased out, so to speak, but they are there, sprouting from the seeds of the profoundly limited categories Ricklefs employs through no fault of his own: these are, unfortunately, almost everybody's categories.

Ricklefs is aware of the problems, that much is clear. He makes it very clear that Sufism was the dominant mode of Islam in Java - a truth that, due to the enshrinement of Islam-as-law in academia, is often neglected in favour of approaching Sufism as a fringe endeavour, as a contested practice, despite its historical/geographical ubiquity (Ahmed 2016, 31). He is also certainly aware of the problematic implications of the syncretic view, such as the colonial interpretation that the Javanese, given their apparent hybridity, must be ignorant or lax Muslims: he reminds the reader at multiple occasions that the synthesis of contradictions in Javanese Islam is not unique to Java, writing that Islam "became plural in its local manifestations" (2006, 217) throughout the Islamic world. But while this may serve to keep at bay the problematic conclusion that "the Javanese were not very good Muslims," it does nothing to keep at bay the perhaps even worse conclusion that apparently, "the Javanese were not very good Muslims - and neither was anyone else."

Ricklefs' view on religion in Java is certainly nuanced and not problematic in any overt way, but there is a lack of critical reflection on the concepts of religion and non-religion, Islam and non-Islam. Ricklefs' approach to religion is an extremely erudite, learned, and nuanced approach that unfortunately relies upon the same framework as the syncretic view, and thus, inevitably and probably unintentionally, reproduces these notions, albeit in more nuanced language.[14] Nonetheless *Mystic Synthesis* excels within the limits of its flaws, and in terms of historical information it remains useful and will be used throughout this thesis.

*Resisting the Syncretic View: Woodward's Islam in Java*

If Ricklefs is an author who echoes the syncretic view with new terminology, Mark Woodward could not differ more. Woodward strongly disagrees with the syncretic view and has been instrumental in rehabilitating the image of Javanese Islam as Islam and not as some syncretic mix (1989, 2011). In his seminal work *Islam in Java*, Woodward (1989, 1) agrees with Hodgson when he says that Geertz (1960) denotes far too many elements of Javanese

14 This position could be taken as emblematic for the broader approach to this topic in academia. Indeed, Picard (2011, 8) even hails *Mystic Synthesis* as the "more balanced vision" that corrects the Islam-as-veneer discourse, which it certainly does. It does not, however, correct the syncretic discourse.

life as Hindu, and that very little has survived from the Hindu past. Laudably going against the grain, Woodward calls Javanese Islam actual Islam, without ifs, ands, or buts. Religious discord today, Woodward argues, is not a debate between different religious forms, but an interior debate between Sufi and legalist Islam (1989, 16).

Nevertheless, Woodward touches upon and mentions several Hindu elements, which would seem to be in contradiction with these statements. However, Woodward argues that these Hindu elements have been totally incorporated by Javanese Islamic cosmology (1989, 16). They are disparate parts assumed into an Islamic whole. To Woodward, the question of "are there foreign elements" is "not interesting"; how they are interpreted is (1989, 17). Notwithstanding a very curious use of the word "foreign," one can see where Woodward wants to go: the syncretic view, as we shall see, is largely about perceiving, pointing out, and labelling "foreign elements" - and very little else. Woodward wants to go beyond that and explore the actual relationships and interpretations. Java has "Islamized" its Hindu-Buddhist tradition (1989, 17), but what does that actually entail? Woodward's characterization of the relationship between Javanese Islam and the preservation of Hindu-Javanese elements is as follows.

> These aspects of contemporary (and historical) Javanese religion are the product of a sophisticated, intensely intellectual attempt to harmonize two very different religious traditions. In this respect, Javanese Islam can be called syncretic. But it is a syncretism in which Muslim, and more specifically Sufi, elements predominate. Nor are the Javanese alone in their attempt to unify the epic traditions of the past with Muslim monotheism. (Woodward 1989, 234)

Woodward's clear denouncement of conceptions of Javanese Islam as a "mix," his reluctance to call it syncretic, and his immediate addition that it is a "syncretism in which Muslim [...] elements predominate" can be read as a response to the knee-jerk categorization of Javanese Islam as syncretic, with its implication of incompatibility and contradiction. Woodward wishes to emphasize the Islamicness and coherence of Javanese Islam, by being cautious and unwilling to call it syncretic. But this introduces new problems.

Woodward's approach is, essentially, that the presence and practice of non-Islamic elements do not render anyone that calls themselves Muslim less than fully Muslim. This

means that we have to change our conceptual understanding of Javanese religiosity. If people adhere to Islam, but also engage with the pre-Islamic Queen of the South, we are - in the borders of the paradigm of religions - *forced* to conclude that their religiosity is a mix. Woodward is somewhat vague on this subject: while he acknowledges that Hindu-Javanese elements exists, he is unwilling to call Javanese Islam syncretic, arguing that while such elements are present, it is a Muslim whole. The only way we can argue it is not a mix (without changing some fundamental axioms) is through one of the following statements:

- The syncretic view is dependent on *mixing* religions, but there is no mixing, since the Queen of the South is a thoroughly Islamic (or Islamized) figure.
- The syncretic view is dependent on mixing *religions*, and this is not what occurs, since the Queen of the South is better described as belonging to Javanese culture or folklore rather than religion.

The problems of the second conclusion are easily recognized: we fall into the well-worn trap of defining religion ideologically and circularly. Categorizing the Queen as folklore and not in conflict with religion may well be done out of post-colonial intentions to rehabilitate Muslim Queen-cult practitioners, and therefore with good intentions, but definitively relegating any ritual phenomenon to non-religion is analytically shaky and conjures up the ugly history of valorizing certain people's religions as "religions," and others as "folklore," "superstition," "animism," "magic" which should not be done lightly, or indeed at all.[15]

Woodward mainly argues the first point. Woodward writes that "Sufi interpretations of Islam are used as axioms ordering, explaining, and imparting meaning to Hindu-Javanese metaphysics, myth, and ritual" (1989, 235). Concerning the confluence of Hindu elements with Islamic ones, he writes: "Roman legal principles or Neoplatonism[16] become Islamic if

15 Even if actual practitioner statements suggest that they categorize these practices as non-religion, we cannot assume we have solved the problems with the syncretic view. Care must be taken to examine what local concepts of religion and non-religion underlie such statements, lest we take "religion" as a human universal. This is precisely what I will do in Chapter 5.

16 It is interesting that Woodward mentions Neoplatonism, because that is one of the six examples Shahab Ahmed deals with as an example of the inner contradiction and complexity of the "human and historical phenomenon of Islam" (2016, 5-113). What for Ahmed is a perplexing conundrum, showing the complexities in determining when something is Islamic, Woodward in one sweeping statement brands fully, uncomplicatedly Islamic.

interpreted in terms of a system of symbolic knowledge derived from Quranic or other Islamic principles" (1989, 63). He is in no uncertain terms stating that the same is true for Java's pre-Islamic heritage. The Hindu elements are not of Islamic origin, but they *become* Islamic by being interpreted through Islam. But this comes with other, subtler problems. Certainly, if Muslims engage with this figure, it does not seem unlikely to say that she functions in an Islamic world or cosmology, similarly to other supernatural beings such as angels or jinn, which we would never question the Islamicness of. However, this reduces and flattens the complex multi-valence of the real phenomenon: an interesting multiplicity is imploded into a singular Islam, which obscures and erases the pre-Islamic nature and history of the figure. That is undesirable. In addition, it also fails analytically: it does not *solve* the problem of the syncretic view but merely displaces it to minority religions. After all, if we say that the Queen is an Islamic figure, what can we say of the Christians, Buddhists, and Hindus who engage with her except that *they* hybridize their own religion with the - apparently Islamic - Queen?

Furthermore, it is not obvious by what criterium Woodward determines Islam. Yes, in the above quote Woodward refers to the Quran as the basis for what makes something "Islamic," but we know that he considers Sufism as Islam, and Sufism contains many schools of thought which hold that there is divine truth accessible that is higher than the Quran (Ahmed 2016, 98). If these Sufi's are Muslims to Woodward, it must be their self-description that matters.[17]

Woodward's analysis rids us of the ethical and analytical problems of the syncretic view but at the cost of gross oversimplification and a reckoning with these problems later on. For a full understanding of Javanese religiosity, we must take spirit cults not as having "become Islamic" in any over-simplified way. We should also, in my opinion, raise our eyebrows at how Woodward - a researcher! - labels the question of "foreign[18] elements" "not interesting," without arguing why this is the case. It *is* interesting - not merely how these elements are interpreted but also *on what basis* they are and are not included. Why does the Queen still

17 Unless this mystical understanding of truth is what he means with "other Islamic principles." The question then is, in what way can we determine whether a principle is an Islamic principle?

18 Calling the presence of pre-Islamic elements in an Islamic contemporaneity also reveals Woodward's notion that a little Islam makes the whole Islamic. Historically, Islam is the foreign element, while the pre-Islamic elements are indigenous. Woodward takes Islam as the beginning point and sees pre-Islamic elements as foreign.

enjoy her offerings whereas Siwa, Durga, and Wisnu must go without? These are not uninteresting questions.

Ignoring religious assemblage so as to avoid the syncretic view damages the truth, does a disservice to the complex reality of Java, and compromises the possibilities for scholarly inquiry. Can we recognize the Queen as important to Muslims *without* questioning their Muslimness *and* still recognize her pre-Islamicness at the same time?

*Other Examples*

Most authors disagree with Woodward, arguing that there is something fundamentally mixed about Javanese Islam. Arguing that syncretism is far too simple a concept (2004, 13), Stephen Headley writes that Java has an "ambient religious ecology" (2004, 28), a "holistic cosmology" (2004, 50) onto which Islamic contents are transposed. While there are some issues with this framing, it has merit in that it conceptualizes the Islamization of Java not as if a concrete thing called "Islam" moved over the island, but highlights how Islamization occurred within the "ambient religious ecology." In other words, local concerns and terms of interacting with religious knowledge guided how the transmission of Islam occurred. Van den Boogert (2015, 212) also describes the immense importance of local concerns and understandings of religious knowledge in regard to Christian mission, where the Our Father was interpreted not as the missionaries did, but through a framework of powerful words and phrases and used as a means to repel snakes. Although not utilizing this concept, Ricklefs (2006, 39) also pays attention to this dynamic when he argues that one of the first monarchs to adopt Islam most likely desired to harness the supernatural power of Islam due to him living in a "culture so attuned to ideas of occult powers."

Headley and Woodward's views could not differ more: while they both acknowledge a co-existence of Islamic and pre-Islamic elements, Headley analyses this co-existence in terms of an incorporation of *Islamic* contents into a *pre-Islamic* whole, whereas Woodward sees it as an incorporation of *pre-Islamic* contents into an *Islamic* whole. The focus on these issues suggests that the pre-Islamic spirits and Islam are seen as somehow competing, awkwardly sharing the same space. It is this perception that leads Robert Wessing (2008, 530) to say that notions of myth and spiritual power remain important "*in spite* of the increasing influence of Islam in Java" (emphasis added). It is also this notion that makes him remark: "*Interestingly*,

however, none of my informants mentioned that *belief* in the Queen or Nyi Blorong was forbidden by religion" (emphasis added, 2008, 542). Wessing here seems surprised that religion does not forbid belief in the Queen or her snake-like counterpart Nyi Blorong, because he perceives the Queen and Nyi Blorong *as religion*, as seen by his focus on "belief," and therefore necessarily in conflict with another religion. Again, like Ricklefs, Wessing does not draw any problematic conclusions or make problematic assertions, but we see that his expectations and perception are guided strongly by the concept of religion and confounded by his field experiences.

## The Syncretic View as a Marker of Transgression

It seems that the problem of the syncretic view cannot be solved. Attempts to move beyond very often end up in the same place. Why is this the case? How is it possible that all these efforts make only marginal progress or offer more detailed, more nuanced approaches within the same problematic frame?

I argue that it is due to what I call the syncretic gap, a gap between supposed meaning and actual usage. What the syncretic view is held to describe and what it is actually used to describe is not the same. Consider: the old criticism against the syncretic view has been that it presupposes purity in the things it combines. Against this critique, Stewart argues that the concept of syncretism does not imply pureness in the things being combined, because "historians of religion have, indeed, long expressed" that "there are no pure religious traditions." "This should lay to rest the frequently heard criticism that syncretism necessarily assumes the existence of ideal pure tradition" (Stewart 1999, 55). To rephrase, all religions are assemblages. It is hybrid all the way down. But is this how the syncretic view is actually applied?

### *The Syncretic View in Action*

Examining the usage of the syncretic view reveals two important characteristics that are in sharp contrast with its stated aims.

Firstly, it is obvious that the terms that belong to the syncretic view are not used in all cases of religious assemblage. The assemblage of Christian and Islamic elements in Al-Andalus

may be called hybrid - but the assemblage we call Christianity is almost never highlighted as such.

Secondly, the terms are largely used in relation to the Global South. While much has been written about the conceptual issues surrounding the syncretic view, precious little research has been done on its use. One early computer-based bibliographical search as early as 1982 revealed that “syncretism” was used overwhelmingly in relation to Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa (Pye 1994, 218). A cursory glance at literature today suggests that more Asian phenomena are deemed syncretic, but that European and Anglosphere contexts remain under-represented in the realm of syncretism. Hybridity - in all likelihood due to its origins - is also used mainly in post-colonial contexts.

If, as Stewart argues, it is a commonly accepted truism that “no religion is pure,” why is it that only *some* phenomena are overtly labelled as such? Clearly, what is said about the syncretic view and how it actually functions differ. We may outwardly affirm that Catholicism is a syncretic product of Judaism and Hellenic culture and religion, but we never talk about it, never call it syncretic. But the integration of Yoruba *orixas* with Catholic saints in Candomblé is called syncretic at the drop of a hat. The syncretic view, though it wants to conceptualize assemblage in general, has a clear *filter* in what kinds of assemblages are worthy of study and what kinds are ignored. It is a filter that selects only certain kinds of assemblages that are apparently more common in the Global South.

*The Syncretic as the Salient*

Above I used the term *salient religious assemblage* to describe th*e phe*nomena that the syncretic view labels. In neuroscience, salience is the quality that makes a thing stand out from its neighbours, and it is a key component of attention and learning. In a field of white dots, a red dot is salient because of its colour. The attentional filter skips over the uniform white dots but highlights the red dot, because it stands out. This allows perception and cognition to be quicker and less resource-intensive than if one would consider each dot individually. Of course, we understand that each white dot differs from all other white dots, and if we were asked to find which dot is m*arginally* smaller, we could approach them as individual objects, but we group them together, understanding them as essentially similar in a way the red dot is not. This is salience.

The salience I have been referring could be called *conceptual salience*. When I say that the syncretic view describes *salient* religious assemblages, I mean precisely this quality of drawing the eye. All religions are assemblages, but a *salient* religious assemblage is one that *stands out from its neighbours*. Something about the integration of *orixa's* with Catholic saints draws the eye in a way that the Catholic integration of Hellenic thought with Judaic discourse does not, even though both phenomena are assemblages. The red dot is salient because its colour differs from that of its neighbours. But what quality makes salient religious assemblages stand out from their peers to earn themselves the label "syncretic?"

*Salience and Paradigm*

The syncretic view is conceptually dependent on the concept of religion. Without the concept of religion, notions like "religious syncretism" and "religious hybridity" are unintelligible. An interaction between separate things cannot be named if we cannot conceptualize separate things. This is obvious and seems hardly worth mentioning. But the understanding that the concept of religion is a Western, specifically Christian, specifically Protestant construct - historically particular, but long perceived as a human universal (cf. Masuzawa 2005, Fitzgerald 2003, Asad 1993) puts this truism in a new and strange light.

I argue that salient religious assemblages derive their salience precisely in relation to the paradigm of religion. This is the field of white dots. To be more precise, they are salient because they violate specific characteristics of the concept of religion and of the discourse of "world religions."

Three characteristics of the concept of religion play a key role selecting specific religious assemblages for salience. The first is what phenomena are categorized as "religion." The second is the essential sameness of all religions. The third is the incommensurability of all religions.

The first characteristic, how phenomena are categorized as religious, is a selection based on Protestant preoccupations (cf. Masuzawa 2005). Elements such as cosmological knowledge, affirmed faith, ritual, doctrine, sacred texts - this is religious. Things like language, political ideology, food, architectural styles, the nation-state - such things are not religious.

The second characteristic is the essential sameness of all religions. In the religion paradigm, it is understood that different religions differ in content, but are of the same

analytical category. They are different instances of the same kind. To use Aristotelian terms, the religion paradigm can accommodate and understand religious difference as difference in *accident*, but not difference in *essence*. The fact is, however, that any reasonable basis to assume Buddhism and Christianity are the same type of thing while Christianity and neo-liberalism are entirely different types of things is exceedingly hard to pin down, even though this is seen as self-evident.

The third is the incommensurability of all religions. While religions are essentially or analytically the same *kind* of thing, individual religions are entirely separate, tightly bordered spheres - sovereign, internally coherent and cohesive, and mutually exclusive with any other religion. Their coherence depends on their integrity. A religion is seen as a house of cards. For the structure to remain cohesive, all elements (all rituals, doctrines, customs) are connected in webs of dependencies with all other elements. Just as you cannot add a new card from another deck to a finished house of cards, a religion cannot incorporate new rituals, doctrines, or customs from another religion. It is conceptually impossible, it destroys the integrity of that religion.

*Salience through Transgression*

These three characteristics of the paradigm of religion is the white background against which we find our red dot. Salient religious assemblages stand out because *they do not fit this paradigm*. They cannot be parsed, cannot be forced to make sense when proceeding from these axioms. This stands out, demands attention, study, and explanation.

Consider the role of the first aspect, of what we consider religious, in this example. A European Christian has a taste for Indian cuisine and regularly eats Indian food. We would not register anything worth investigating about someone like that, even though it is undeniable that their dietary choices and self-identification as a Christian form an assemblage of genealogically distinct elements. The attention filter skips right over this assemblage, it is unremarkable. However, a European Christian who leaves small offerings to Ganesha immediately draws attention.

In terms of historical trajectory, leaving offerings to Ganesha and eating Indian food are *equally alien* from self-identification as a Christian. And yet, the second assemblage is immediately more salient. The difference is that leaving offerings to Ganesha is registered as

being “religious,” and therefore in the same realm as self-identifying as a Christian. This is what I mean when I say the concept of religion determines what is highlighted for comparison.

It is a characteristic of the concept religion which entails that this assemblage cannot exist. Namely, the incommensurability of different religions. After all, non-religious elements rarely share this kind of mutual exclusivity. For example, say this Indian cuisine-loving Christian would also eat non-Indian food from time to time, meaning that their dietary practices are a confluence of culturally distinct elements of the same kind - food - that would nonetheless raise few eyebrows. The category of religion differs from the realm of food practices in a way that *does* impart salience to such an assemblage. Commitment to Christianity and offering to Ganesha are *mutually exclusive* in a way that commitment to Christianity and enjoying Indian cuisine are not. This is due to the way that Christianity and Hinduism are seen as internally coherent and externally exclusive spheres. From the paradigm of religion, the Christian who offers to Ganesha breaks the mould, cannot be squared with the central characteristics of the concept of religion. They transgress the paradigm. Such a situation is strange, stands out, demands our attention. It is red, unlike its white neighbours.

The discourse of world religions also plays a role in the generation of salience. So far, I have spoken of religion and religions as abstract concepts, but no one thinks or speaks of empty religions.[19] Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism - these are religions. The way this discourse and the conceptual content of religion itself are interlinked gives us another clue as to why only some religious assemblages demand such attention. The co-constitution of discourse and concept entails that - although we might affirm that “no religion is pure” - only assemblages that transgress the borders of these established, well-known religions are salient.

For example, the Greek *kyrie* (lord) as an address of deity is well attested in the Hellenic world, and its place in Christian liturgy suggests that Christianity could be fruitfully conceptualized as a religious assemblage of Judaic and Hellenic elements. The same could be said for the early Christian understanding that the Hellenic deities were real and the disagreement over whether eating meat from sacrifices to them was permissible. But these do not demand attention and Christianity is not called syncretic. Why? Because these

19 Although the fact that fiction authors can conceive of fictional religions reveals that the abstract concept of religion can function separately from actual religions.

assemblages sit comfortably within the realm of Christianity, a single religion. They do not register as plurality, because their ossification guarantees them perceived singularity, making the assemblage invisible. Their status as assemblage is obscured by the discourse of the singular world religion Christianity. In this way, although we may be aware of them and, indeed, affirm that "no religion is pure," they simply do not demand our attention in the same way as assemblages that span across the borders of what we call "religions."

*The Syncretic Gap*

What, then, is the syncretic view? How do words like syncretism, hybridity, creolization, actually function? What do they describe? They describe those religious assemblages, that, unlike other religious assemblages, transgress the paradigm of religion. This is why *only* assemblage across the borders of common-sense religions is reliably called syncretic or hybrid. They are conceptually empty, denoting only transgression of a paradigm taken as universal. Instead of describing religious assemblage in general, they function entirely to classify transgressions of the paradigm. Syncretism and hybridity function as handmaidens of religion, as border guards who identify trespassers.

This is the syncretic gap: the gap between what the syncretic view *is supposed* to express, and what it *actually e*xpresses. What does it actually tell us, then, when something is called syncretic? It tells us only that this was noteworthy the person who labelled it as such. It tells us that, in contrast to most oth*er re*ligious assemblages, this one is salient. But salience is not a quality inherent in something. Salience arises out of contrast, comparison. Nothing special about the red dot makes it salient; it is salient because it stands in a field of white dots. *If* that same red dot, so salient among its white neighbours, *stoo*d in a field of red dots, we would skip over it entirely.

Salience guides perception, but explains nothing.

The analogy of the red and white dots fails in fully grasping what is at stake, because the role of the paradigm of religion is not included. Instead of a red dot in a white field, the situation of the syncretic view and paradigm of religion are more akin to a multi-coloured field seen through a colourblind lens. The blindness of the paradigm flattens many different colours to white, leaving only the red ones to stand out. The salience is thus not due merely to a contrast produced by inherent differences, but to the lens that produces this contrast. Just as

there is nothing inherently salient about those dots without the colourblind lens, there is nothing inherently special about phenomena deemed hybrid without the paradigm of religion.

This is why none of syncretism's replacements could solve the problem. The problem never lied in the concept, but rather what it referred to. *The problem was never intellectual, but an issue of perception.* We *know* that we would not look twice at a red dot if it stood in a field of red instead of white - but our perception immediately focuses on it. On an intellectual level, we even *know* that all dots are differently coloured - but we cannot take off the lens. That is to say, we *know* that "no religion is pure" - but our perceptions immediately highlight those that are less pure than others in accordance with the paradigm of religion. We *perceive* as if some religions actually *are* pure.

This is also precisely why syncretism has so little explanatory power, and why attempts to replace syncretism come to nothing. There is nothing to replace. We think we need a new concept to conceive of religious assemblage, but we do not, since that is not what the syncretic view denotes. When we develop replacements for the syncretic view, we are simply using new words to highlight the same transgression of the conceptual scheme of religions. Instead of attempting to find new ways to conceive of religious assemblages, we should follow the line of perception and salience, examine the lenses - in other words, the concepts and paradigms that give rise to it.

To properly understand a salient religious assemblage, a phenomenon called hybrid, we must pay close attention to conceptual transgression. We have already well established that most practitioners generally do not notice anything amiss where Western observers[20] are stumped. Clearly to these practitioners, there is no transgression and no salience; no contradiction. In other words, it is not enough to study syncretism while taking into account local understandings of religion. If syncretism is a label for transgression and there might be no transgression, *it is already a mistake to study syncretism* at all,[21] no matter how much one takes into account local concepts. To proceed from the syncretic view means that all knowledge we produce derives from the misguided notion that a contradiction exists and is being harmonized. In doing so, we are entirely blind to the possibility (likelihood, even) that there is no contradiction to begin with, and no harmonization. Perhaps the contradiction exists only in outsider minds, in outsider paradigms; but not for the practitioners. So instead,

20 Not to mention local reformists.

21 At least, it is when "syncretism" is an outsider term, like on Java.

we should take a step back and keep open the possibility that a given assemblage is *not* syncretic - which is to say, not salient, which is to say, not a conceptual transgression. A given religious assemblage - salient from an outsider point of view - *may* be the product of a deliberate harmonization of contradiction (as the syncretic view implies), but may equally likely just not feature any production of contradiction at all. We must understand why such a religious assemblage is not salient to the people that practice it. After all, without the paradigm of religion, it does not necessarily follow that, for example, engaging now in Christian and then in Islamic prayer styles produces contradiction, the same way now eating Indian and then eating French food does not produce contradiction. At the same time, local opponents clearly do see a contradiction, but we should not assume this contradiction arises in the same way as the one highlighted by the syncretic view.

The study of syncretism and hybridity must become the study of local concepts, categories, paradigms, and contestations. Knowledge produced in this study could and should in turn open our understanding - and more crucially our *perception* - to paradigms of religion or its supposed cognates that differ from the self-evident one, even where this Western concept was appropriated. Such knowledge may not only alert us to the mistaken idea of the universalism of religion (of which we are already aware), but might even allow us to change our *perception*, which is apparently where the universalism of religion is prone to remain entrenched. This could give us a deeper understanding of the dynamics of religion in postcolonial contexts and also open our perception to the role of assemblage in so-called world religions, where we are usually blind to it although we realize it is there on an intellectual level.

*Moving forward*

Of course, one problem looms large for our avenues forward. We can absorb new information into our thinking processes, but apparently, this is not so easy for our perception. The avenue approached above - paying close attention to why salient religious assemblages are not salient to their actual practitioners - might eventually lead to a perception no longer guided on the terms of the paradigm of religion. But until then, we are still likely to see assemblage only where it transgresses it.

This thesis, though it eventually led to this argument, is still a product of the concerns of the paradigm of religion. The very reason I am writing about the Queen of the South rituals is because they were salient to my perception, because they stood o*ut an*d demanded explanation. We are still most interested in those cases that do not fit in the religion paradigm, violating the boundaries of a religion. It is, therefore, not enough to examine syncretic cases with an eye for why they are not syncretic after all, if we do not constantly consider the implications of the empirical data from those examinations to our notions of religion and its Eurocentrism. Otherwise, we will still end up producing better and better understandings within the syncretic view.

However, the deconstruction of syncretism I have offered does have some immediate benefit. We are no longer obliged to follow its rules - the rules of play that made it so that one was fully Muslim only if one was Muslim only. Seeing contradiction there is no longer a logical necessity, but a product of the paradigm of religion. We can now take seriously practitioners who feel there is no contradiction as well as detractors who claim there is, without our analysis inadvertently implying either to be correct. What the syncretic view can only approach as syncretism can be given meaningful typology. Whereas the syncretic view assumes that contradiction is really there, which practitioners harmonize (creatively or ignorantly), we can now entertain three different local attitudes to assemblage - the non-production of contradiction,[22] the harmonization of produced contradiction, and the rejection of produced contradiction. Distinguishing these clearly could offer us the empirical data we need to effectively confront the paradigm of religion.

22 One might argue that what I call the non-production of contradiction is just a rehash of the old colonial explanation of syncretism being due to ignorance: the locals do not experience contradiction because they do not understand their own religion. The difference, however, is that the colonial explanation proceeds from the notion that religion is a human universal and therefore there actually is an essential contradiction between two religions that the locals apparently cannot see. By understanding that the contradiction between two religions is predicated on the paradigm of religion, and that this paradigm is not universal, it is likely that the contradiction exists only in the minds of outside observers. This is an aspect that is overlooked when the agency of the syncretist is emphasized as part of rehabilitating. The notion of unconscious syncretism is unpalatable because it calls to mind the explanation that the Javanese are syncretic due to ignorance of their own religion. The difference lies in that the notion of ignorance functions to explain how a really existing contradiction is not even seen by the practitioners themselves. The value of this approach lies in how it does not take contradiction for granted. So the incongruity between outsider perception and practitioner experience is not explained by the practitioner being “ignorant” or “nominally Muslim.” Rather, the incongruity is situated precisely in the concepts of the observer, which are no longer implicitly taken as universal.

## Conceptualizing Religion

It is well and good to say that I will not follow the syncretic view, and instead take a step back to see how it arises and how the sense of contradiction it implies is (not) constructed and negotiated both by practitioners and opponents. But this position, this specific criticism of the syncretic view, still employs a notion of the religious, and the idea that the things we call "religious" are in fact capable of mingling, mixing, co-occurring. What concept of religion or religious interaction underlies this position, and by extension this thesis? If this is not critically examined, or if we keep it too vague, we run the risk that the paradigm of religion can sneak into our analysis by disguising itself as universal again.

The most important aspect of any conceptualization of religion with regard to my purposes in this thesis is reflexivity. By this I mean that any useful conceptualization of religion must be able to directly include differing discourses and concepts of religion in its conceptual frame. We cannot take this new concept as universal again. It is instrumental. This is central to relinquishing the problematic paradigm of religion as well as to allowing our empirical data to feed back into our understandings of religion. In other words, a useful conceptualization of religion must allow for mixing and mingling as natural rather than as exception to be explained, encompass those elements called religious, and, most importantly, take the very concept of religion, its adaptations, transformations, translations, and opposites across various contexts as its object of study.

### *Religious Ecology*

Criticizing the term syncretism as a way of conceiving of Javanese religion, Headley uses the term "religious ecology." This "ambient religious ecology" integrated Islam into it. This could be read as a rehash of the old "veneer of Islam" approach, so common in colonial opinions, but I believe the notion of "ecology" could do away with the analytical sameness of different religions, allowing for a true, qualitative difference between them, rather than seeing them as different instances of the same kind.

In the natural world, ecology is a system of interactions between living organisms and non-living chemicals and influences. A religious ecology could be a system of interactions between agents, objects, places, acts, and discourses. An ecology can be in slow change resembling equilibrium, or change fast in disruption. In a biological environment organisms

adapt in response to opportunities as well as demands, resulting in species developing along divergent paths to fill specific ecological niches. In the same way as we conceive of plants, fungi, and animals as qualitatively different, yet able to interact, we could conceive of the agents, objects, and techniques we call religion as elements in a religious ecology. Just as a fungus can grow on a tree while a bird lives in the branches and ants march along its bark, Catholics incorporate Hellenic thought and Judaic discourses while Brazilian practitioners introduce *orixas* to it. In the paradigm of religion, these things ought to be impossible, leading to transgression, salience, and syncretism. But an ecological metaphor could accommodate them.

The metaphor of religious ecology foregrounds *relations* and *interactions* on a wide scale, as well as introducing ideas like ecological niches and biodiversity, which seem valuable assets to a reconceptualization. We may fruitfully conceptualize of different religious forms filling different social niches. Shinto rituals for the marriage niche, Buddhist rituals for the death niche. Ecological niches can shift and differ in different areas.[23]

Even so, a central question remains: what exactly is *religious* about "religious ecology"? On what basis can we include and exclude behaviour from our conceptualization? If we find such things as nationality, race, or family in the belonging niche, is that still religious ecology? In addition, while the metaphor seems to have potential, the actual process of making it into a workable concept for assemblage remain vague. This vagueness poses a risk for common-sense notions of religion and the religious to sneak back into our analysis.

*The Transcultural Approach*

Another possibility is the transcultural approach (cf. Stockhammer 2012), which often uses metaphors of liquid (Brosius and Wenzlhuemer 2011); using such words as flow and turbulence, they conceptualize of cultural elements as being subject to flowing through other contexts. The transcultural turn also implies not just an understanding of culture as liquid, but indeed a *trans*cendence of the notion of cultures as bounded spheres at all, hence the term. This same aspect could be extended to religion, by approaching the concept and paradigm of religion as a discursive flow on its own.

23 One is reminded of how the Our Father was re-purposed to keep snakes at bay (Van den Boogert 2015, 212). Whereas it functioned in a niche of prayer or devotion, it turned out to be well-adapted for the words-with-power-niche.

This framework is worthwhile in its emphasis on dynamic flow and the naturalness of interaction. The transcultural approach takes it as self-evident that elements mix. A mix is never a conceptual transgression. What it does to culture is also precisely what we would require for religion - a transreligious approach. This transreligious approach would not only examine how elements or flows cross the borders between religions, but question - transcend - the very idea that there are borders between religions. Religions are large and powerful flows, but individual streams - ritual forms, doctrines - can easily split off or be incorporat*ed. We c*an recognize genealogical difference without this being transgressive. This is exactly what we require.

Maran (2012, 59) has criticized the approach for the risk of re-introducing an obsession with purity through the back door, since, in any analysis of a context in which two different flows interact, the dynamism and diversity implicit in *the analogy of f*low must be set aside as the flows are approached as frozen and separate entities for the purposes of analysis. This leads us back to a common-sense collision of two spheres. While this is true, I do not think it is necessarily a fatal flaw. Simplification or freezing of complicated realities is necessary for any analysis.

The metaphors of liquid also, in my view, tend to under-emphasize the factors opposing and preventing such flow. Elements of assemblage are integrated and incorporated for a reason - they are effective, bring social prestige, are aesthetically pleasing, or help address local concerns. Often, elements are *not* integrated - architectural styles, for example, may differ wildly over a relatively small area despite long interaction - and sometimes they are outright resisted. A metaphor of liquid implies mingling as inevitable.

These are minor complaints. One larger reservation I have with the approach is that I think it allows the syncretic view to sneak back in too easily. We have seen how *knowing* that no religion is pure does not necessarily solve our *perception* of purity and impurity. What exactly is religious about a religious flow? While the transcultural performs admirably in reframing mixing as natural and culture (or religion) as a construct, it seems to me that the transcultural approach leaves too much room for the paradigm of religion to guide our perception what religion is. By this I mean that the transcultural approach, though valuable, runs a great risk in ending up as just another synonym for the syncretic view. Though its metaphors see mixing as natural and therefore not as transgressive, we have seen that knowing that has little

impact on what kind of mixing draws the eye. Therefore, the transcultural approach runs the risk to not exert enough influence on the concepts and salience that guide perception, leaving the door open for implicit notions of religion to set the agenda. If that happens, the transcultural approach will become merely a very nuanced way to approach what the syncretic view highlights.

*The Rhizome*

A rhizomatic approach, based on the works of Deleuze and Guattari (1988) has been developed by Daan Oostveen in his PhD thesis (2020). Although he proceeds from the concept of multiple religious belonging to examine Chinese religion, a concept that also falls under the syncretic view and struggles with similar problems, Oostveen develops a rhizomatic perspective precisely to deal with these problems, in which

> religions are not seen as bounded entities, but rather as networks or assemblages of elements which sometimes group together to form larger networks, sometimes exclude other structures, but are often connected in many ways to other religious segments of society. What is imagined as "Buddhism" or "Christianity" in a hermeneutic of multiple religions, should better be described as networks of religious "words, things, gestures, powers, sounds, silences, smells, sensations, shapes, colours, affects and effects." (2020, 33-4)

Basing himself on the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, he proposes the rhizomatic perspective in opposition to the "arborescent" - treelike, branching - perspective that Deleuze and Guattari characterize as the opposite of the rhizome. The rhizome is an interconnected, three-dimensional network, like the network of fungoid roots. Oostveen convincingly argues that the world religions paradigm is an arborescent scheme, saying "The multiplicity of particulars in the arborescent schema are subsumed and reduced under a single organizing principle, and are therefore not truly multiple" (2020, 190).

Oostveen argues that employing the metaphor of the rhizome for religion can establish two seemingly paradoxical effects: both a greater continuity and a greater difference between "religions." These effects are both subversions of two consequences of the arborescent

scheme, which I also identified as two of the three characteristics of religion vital to the generation of salience. The first consequence of this arborescent scheme is the essential *sameness* among religions in that they are understood to be different instances of the same phenomenon called "religion," and the second is the essential *difference* of religions in that they are understood to be mutually incompatible, separate "branches." Employing the metaphor of the rhizome subverts both. It implies greater continuity, in that it allows us to conceptualize *as the norm* the diverse affiliations and practices of multiplicity that cannot be conceptualized as anything but a transgression of the separateness of religions in the arborescent scheme. Simultaneously it also offers the possibility of greater difference, in that the three-dimensional, interconnected nature of the rhizome allows us to conceive qualitative differences in ways that the arborescent scheme obscures with its subsuming and reductive notion of "religion." For example, it allows us to conceive of the Catholic style of prayer and the Islamic style of prayer not as different instances of the same thing called "prayer," but as fundamentally different practices that are situated differently in the metaphorical rhizome, practised not only in different ways but perhaps serving entirely different purposes. Aspects of religion now can be incommensurably different, without religions being analytically the same. The metaphor of the rhizome allows us to conceive of religions as being connected in ways the current paradigm does not, and of aspects of religion as being really, analytically different in ways the current paradigm discourages.

Following Oostveen's notion of rhizomatic religion, it follows that religious hybridity is meaningless, since there are no bounded spheres of "one religion" that can be hybridized. Every point in a rhizome can and must be connected to every other point. In other words, when practitioners conceive of themselves as belonging to this or that religion, Oostveen argues that this is the result not because that bounded sphere exists, but because the discourse of "this or that religion," as well as the discourse of "belonging" are themselves elements within the rhizome.

The rhizomatic perspective solves most of the issues with the religion paradigm that lead to the issues of the syncretic view. Working with the perspective of an extended network of things, acts, places, et cetera, the ideas of discrete "religions," such as Christianity or Islam, become themselves discursive acts in this rhizome. To paraphrase Oostveen, no one interacts with "religions," one interacts with people, places, texts, objects, buildings, food, et cetera.

"Religions" can be maintained as a category - as they should, since so many operate with these categories - but they and their borders should be seen as phenomena of study, and no longer an unquestioned foundation of any scholarly analysis. In this way, the rhizomatic approach can also "take a step back" by incorporating the world religions paradigm *as an element in the rhizome*, which means that the aspects of the concept of religion that are problematic *for analysis* can and should *become* our object of analysis.

An issue that Oostveen's mobilization of the rhizome does not solve, however, is *what exactly is religious about the religious rhizome*. Oostveen agrees with Tillich that the religious is our relationship towards "ultimate concern," but this is a definition that leaves us without a way to conceive of those practices that are concerned with the everyday rather than the ultimate. Furthermore, if we were fully committed to the rhizomatic approach, we would be forced to understand our "religious rhizome" as part of a larger rhizome of human behaviour. Who is to say where the religious rhizome and the cultural or social rhizome begin and end? This is vital, because if we cannot clearly articulate it, even though we conceptualize religious diversity in a new and fruitful way, *where we see it* will *still* be guided by the religion paradigm, and, as I have argued above, it is precisely this mode of perception that is the problem. This way, the rhizome also runs the risk of just becoming another nuanced approach co-opted by the syncretic view.

Even so, for the purposes of this thesis - which is already concerned with a phenomenon highlighted in the syncretic view - the rhizomatic perspective offers the perfect conceptual framework to facilitate those steps I described above: the close examination of local categories and uses, and the (non-)production of contradiction. My usage of the term assemblage throughout this chapter has, perhaps, already revealed that this is the conceptualization in which I will place my analysis.

**Conclusion: Making the Implicit Explicit**

One thing that became abundantly clear in the course of this chapter is how difficult it is to shake off the assumptions and blinders of the paradigm one inhabits, even if one realizes it is there. Nonetheless, in the rest of this thesis, I will operate with a rhizomatic concept of religion; meaning that the Queen of the South will be approached as genealogically non-

Islamic, but not necessarily in competition with Islam or other religions, nor put away as non-religious. Approaching Javanese religiosity as rhizomatic allows for the Queen to be *both* in some sense relevant to religiosity *as well* as in essence different from and therefore not by necessity in conflict with Islam. The Queen, her places, her rituals, and her mediations, are but many strands in the rhizome that may be connected with the places, rituals, and mediations called Islam or Christianity. The religiosity of the practitioners at the Cepuri will not be seen as syncretic or hybrid, but as an assemblage; in no way qualitatively different than the religious assemblage of those who call them idolaters. The differences in opinion on the appropriateness of the rituals will be approached as discourses, specifically as discursive acts that are themselves part of the assemblage, and attempt to police the rhizome.

# 2. The Queen of the South

Then it is told of the gods in the water:
the nature of Java is not all the same
[but] also separates and unifies.
A maiden is the queen.

*Serat Babad Nitik* (1872)
(translated by and quoted in Hostetler 1982, 129)

The being that is addressed at Parangkusumo is the solitary queen who rules Java's southern sea and its unseen spirit realm, a beautiful woman dressed in green, golden-crowned - spouse of kings, guardian of dynasties, and commander of spirit armies; changeable and with a great sexual appetite; she who grants stability to the realm and fish to the fishermen, but who strikes the kingdom with earthquakes if offended and demands offerings in exchange for the fish, lest she send misfortune, storms, or freak waves to drag the offenders to her watery palace in the depths.

A primary characteristic of this Queen is that she is unseen (*gaib*), yet countless mediations make her available to the senses and the imagination. These mediations range from century-old manuscripts to contemporary rumours, from paintings to films, from possessions to blog posts. They are narrative, visual, and embodied. The spectrum of these mediations is characterized by a remarkable variety of voices and perspectives, which result in the Queen being perceived, valued, and engaged with in varied and occasionally contradictory fashions. The description above, in all its brevity, is therefore not a true and encompassing description, but rather a helpful sketch that will serve as the jumping-off point for the more complex aspects and divergent interpretations of this figure.

In this chapter, I will first describe the many and divergent perspectives on and versions of the Queen. I will argue that the Queen is best approached as a discourse. I will continue to describe an important aspect of the Queen, which is her connection with the founder of the royal dynasty. I will then map the Queen's relationship to Islam; which is sometimes seen as positive and inclusive and sometimes as antagonistic and exclusionary. In short, this chapter will focus on who the Queen is. The following chapter will focus on what the Queen does.

*Figure 3: A woodcut of the Queen on one of the many carriages one can take a ride in on Parangtritis beach. 2019*

## A Discursive Being

As touched upon in the introduction, the Queen of the South is a complex phenomenon, and it is more effective to speak of a discourse rather than of a spirit being or a mythological

character, precisely because the discourse contains so many different perspectives and divergent interpretations *of* this character that are all worth taking into account. One of the first and most salient divergences is the amount of names used to describe this character, as described in the introduction.

*Sources and Diversity*

In this thesis, I will often refer to academic literature, to supplement conversations or observations. However, literature sometimes fails to capture the multiplicity of perspectives on the Queen. For example, authors usually take one name, and in doing so, one version of the Queen. For authors such as historian M.C. Ricklefs, who commonly refers to her as Ratu Kidul (2006), this is no surprise, since Ricklefs is a historian, not an anthropologist, and thus uses only textual sources. Mark Woodward (1989) also consistently calls her Ratu Kidul, sometimes even by her full royal title in the courtly style, Gusti Kanjeng Ratu Kidul. He also writes that Nyai Rara Kidul[24] is the aide of Ratu Kidul (1989, 101). In contrast to Woodward, Ricklefs in a later work (1998, 8) includes that name in a list of names for the Queen herself: "Ratu Kidul, Nyai Kidul, Nyai Rara Kidul." Karen Strassler (2014, 106) argues that all names usually refer to the same figure, and that fragmentation of the Queen into different figures for her different names is partly due to film adaptations. This is worth remarking upon, because Woodward's distinction between Ratu Kidul and Nyai Rara Kidul as two different beings is based not on film, but upon a publication of the 17th century text *Babad Tanah Jawi* ("Chronicle of the Land of Java"). Niels Mulder (1978, 32) again uses the name Nyai Loro Kidul for the Queen herself. Robert Wessing (2008) calls her Nyai Roro Kidul, whereas Stephen Headley (2004, 145) uses Lara Kidul as her name, Ratu Lara Kidul as her full name and title (155), and Ratu Kidul as shorthand.

Most of these authors are short and to the point in naming and describing the Queen, but this does not reflect the variety and dynamism of these names and figures they potentially represent among my conversation partners. Descriptions in academic literature usually do not acknowledge the wide variety and disagreement surrounding the character, favouring one clear and short description.[25] Although authors who use such short descriptions do not have

24 The differences between Rara and Roro, as well as Lara and Loro are due to differences in orthography of the Javanese language.

25 Notable exceptions notwithstanding, such as Robert Wessing (2006b, 2008, 2016) and Judith Schlehe (1998).

the Queen as their primary subject and could in this way be forgiven for the misleading succinctness of such descriptions, the inflexible picture these descriptions paint of the Queen as an indigenous sea deity is highly misleading in its very inflexibility.

In a word, this mismatch between the muddle of diversity among my interlocutors and the inflexibility of these characterizations is due to the textual sources these authors use. To make such clear distinctions between different beings, they refer largely to *babad*, usually translated as court chronicles, although more broadly the term is used for "stories about past events" (Wieringa 1999, 245). Certain accounts make very clear and sharp distinctions between different characters, such as the distinction between the Queen, Ratu Kidul, and her aide, Nyi Roro Kidul, in the *Babad Tanah Jawi* (Woodward 1989, 101). These *babad* and *serat* (tales) are important sources for the history of Java. Names one may find used are as the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, the *Major Surakarta Babad*, *Babad Kraton*, or the *Serat Babad Nitik*. Important is that these *babad* are not static texts but *living traditions of corpora of texts*, which were copied and adapted by scribes and poets regularly. As such, what we call the *Babad Tanah Jawi* is not primarily an object or a text, but a scriptural praxis that stretches itself through time, complete with additions, changes, omissions, branchings and mergings. In fact, the *Major Surakarta Babad* is itself an offshoot of the *Babad Tanah Jawi* (Florida 1992, 23), or potentially the other way around (Ricklefs 1972). These *babad* are often in Old Javanese, also known as Kawi, and in a difficult poetic style, which few Javanese and fewer academics read. As such most academics who are not directly involved in the field of Javanese philology rely on academic translations and editions of such *babad*. This is a shortcoming, because in this way the variety and change that marks different *babad* manuscripts is erased as the accessibility of a given translation leads to a kind of canonization of that text. Worse still, editing and translation efforts took place mainly under the auspices of and furthering the interest of colonial power.

The spectre of colonialism hangs over almost every aspect of the *babad*: their physical location, their content, and their publishing to wider audiences. Many important manuscripts are not physically in Java or the property of Javanese people: the manuscript known as the *Major Surakarta Babad*, a massive work of no less than eighteen folio's and 9000 pages is in the possession of the Leiden University Library (Wieringa 1999, 123).[26] The content of the

26 In fact, many interlocutors had a perception of Leiden as holding a vast repository of Javanese culture and history, and told me that if I was truly interested in the legendary history of Java, I ought to return

manuscripts is also marked by colonization: many *babad*, in their function as chronicles, refer to the Dutch and English regularly, and some texts show the impact of colonization and attempts to process it narratively, such as the *Surya Raja*, in which the Javanese defeat a vaguely defined invader clearly modelled after the Dutch (quoted in Ricklefs 2006, 161-70).

But most of all is the editing, translation, and publication of these manuscripts to the wider scholarly field marked by colonization. The academic study of *babad* has its roots in Dutch colonial study of Javanese language and culture, from which the Javanese themselves were excluded, in part through the usage of the Dutch language. Even the contributions of Javanese people to the field of Javanology in the late nineteenth century were in Dutch. To publish anything about Javanese history or culture, one would have to peruse almost all literature in Dutch (Tsuchiya 1993, 78). The process of the publication of a *babad* meant that the living, dynamic corpora were frozen into static texts, and this process was entirely in the hands not of the Javanese, but those of colonial authorities. In fact, nine *babad*, including the so-called *Major Surakarta Babad* (or *Babad Tanah Jawi*), were published by the Balai Pustaka ("Bureau of Books"), a Dutch colonial-government agency (Tsuchiya 1993, 90), which - though sometimes touted as responsible for the birth of modern Indonesian literature - "determinedly manipulated and disrupted local literary practices in the interest of promoting European values and maintaining Dutch power" (Fitzpatrick 2000, 114).

One particularly lurid example of the influence of colonial power on the publication, valorization, and reification of these texts is the *Babad Tanah Jawi* as published by Meinsma in 1874. This text - one of the the most consulted in the field (Ricklefs 1972, 285) - differs from other *babad* in that it is "short, in prose, heavily edited, and perhaps not even by a Javanese author" (1972, 286). In fact, this prose *babad* is so short compared to its poetic source, the *Major Surakarta Babad*, that it is "roughly equivalent to rewriting the Authorized Version of the Old Testament in 185 pages" (1972, 286). While some of these limitations and issues were acknowledged by the Meinsma edition, they are relatively unknown today. The Meinsma text was republished in 1941 W.L. Olthof published together with a Dutch translation, but omitted these acknowledgements. The Olthof edition, scholarly suspect but more accessible, became the most consulted *babad*. The impact of this work is of such an

to my own country, to Leiden. "Leiden" has a magical sound in Indonesia, and many have the idea that all the knowledge of their country is stored there (Henk Schulte Nordholt, email to the author, May 5th 2020).

extent that a version of the *Babad Tanah Jawi* I bought in Yogyakarta in 2019, evidently intended for the general Indonesian public, was an Indonesian translation of W.L. Olthof's Dutch version. We find ourselves confronted with a book with a peculiar and colonial history. The book I bought is a 2017 printing of an Indonesian translation of a 1941 Dutch translation of a 1874 prose summary (perhaps by a Javanese author, perhaps not) of a much larger 1788-1836 poetic Javanese manuscript, but it is sold to contemporary Indonesians as "the" *Babad Tanah Jawi*.

Despite the colonial nature of the early study of the *babad*, and the impact of colonialism in the transformation of these dynamic corpora of texts into static and ossified books, the content of these published *babad* is still a usable and valuable historical source, and I will often refer to authors who use them. The stories in texts like the *babad* and *serat* wield authority in Java by virtue of their venerable age as well as the courtly nature of their origin and status. This makes them valuable in the study of Javanese religion - and as an added boon, provide the researcher with clear narratives in written form. These texts are valuable in informing our understanding of the Queen, and I will often refer to authors utilizing them.

However, the lived experience of practitioners at Parangkusumo is rarely entirely accordance with these texts. The majority of my conversation partners do not entertain the clear boundaries and hierarchical cosmologies some academics describe (in passing), and most proclaim that these mysterious matters are unknown to them - perhaps unknowable at all - rather than stake their claim to one specific cosmology. Those few who claim to be privy to the details differ entirely in their conception from others who claim the same. The clarity of an academic description based on a *babad* passage is at odds with the muddled contestations and uncertainties of contemporary practitioner statements. The way the Queen is represented by the above authors tends to rely on these texts, and usually presents these perspectives as the way these things simply are, rather than as one of many perspectives. This is probably not their intention. The limited and fixed nature of their descriptions represents not faulty scholarship, but a difference in focus. In a work not devoted to the Queen, a short description will simply have to do. All the same, the way in which the Queen's portrayal is informed almost exclusively by specific textual sources, as well as the terse, factual way in which this is done, has negative consequences.

This trend effectively makes it seem as if the Queen can be described by reference to texts alone. Oral statements by practitioners are not important. While Woodward (1989, 50) says that the *juru kunci* often relate *babad* accounts to visitors, there are many local voices that disagree with the *juru kunci* and question their authority (see Chapter 4). Taking texts as sufficient is only defensible if we take practitioner sources as irrelevant altogether, or as superseded by the textual sources. The first position leads us into a scripturalist bias in which texts are of more value than other sources. The second position leads us to understand the oral coastal traditions as later or secondary developments based on a primary textual court tradition. As we shall see further on in this chapter, it is unlikely that the court tradition predates the coastal tradition. Moreover, it is undesirable to take an elite perspective as primary simply because it is - because of its textual nature - easier to consult.

I do not think any of the above-mentioned authors would disagree with me, nor do they intend for those implications to radiate from their work, and, as stated before, their terseness can probably be attributed to practical limitations and different interests. However, one could adapt Marshall MacLuhan's (1966) phrase "the medium is the message" for this situation, saying "the sources are the message." None of the above-mentioned authors *argue* that texts are more useful than practitioner statements, but in almost all cases, *they use texts instead of practitioner statements*. It is not what is said, but what is done. This valorization of textual authority runs the risk of creating a skewed discourse in which one ossified, courtly perspective is portrayed as simply the way things are, the authors' intentions notwithstanding.

In this thesis, I will not approach the Queen as a being, but as a discourse: all perspectives on and mediations of *the* Qu*een* are voices in a varie*gated* discourse. There is no "true" or "correct" version. The cont*est*ations and uncertainties of practitioner statements are not a lack of information to be filled in *wit*h textual sources, but *esse*ntial constitutive elements of the everyday experience. Even Wessing (2006b), who, as an anthropologist, goes far beyond relying on te*xtua*l sources, writes as if detailed information is most relevant, describing his interlocutors' relationship with the Queen with phrases like "only [...] the sketchiest information," "unable to provide further details" (2006b, 53), "knowledge rapidly di*mini*shes" (2006b, 1). Yet he concludes that in areas where detailed *theoretical* knowledge is absent, people nonetheless know exactly *what to do* in response to Queen-related crises and risks (2006b, 53-6). Detailed, specific, and theoretical knowledge, then, should not be seen as

primary for the Queen discourse. People who may have very little to tell about the Queen and her exact relationship with her satellites, the aide and the daughter, may still be intimately involved in ritual performance and apotropaic practices concerning her.

While the textual sources and their detailed, specific narratives have an important place in the discourse about the Queen, we should be careful not to let them overshadow the value and importance of statements and acts by practitioners, no matter how contested or vague they may be. These statements and all other mediations constitute the broader discourse of the Queen, and all incongruities, vaguenesses, and gaps are essential parts of that discourse, not distractions from the "true" textual perspectives. This is why I will not smooth over any incongruities or attempt to harmonize disagreement in this thesis.

*Coast and Court*

In addition to her many names, another important divergence in the discourse is the difference between the coastal and court aspects of the Queen. Concerning beliefs and practices surrounding the Queen, we can follow Wessing to make a broad distinction between two traditions: the coastal tradition and the court tradition (1997b, 2006b, 2008). The court tradition is practised by royals and courtiers, and focuses on the connection of the sovereign with the Queen through her marriage with the founder of the dynasty, echoing the East Asian genre of stories featuring the liaisons of *naga* princesses with the founders of the state (although Woodward (1989, 261) is quick to point out that there is an Islamic precedent for marriages with *jinn*). In contrast, the coastal tradition is practised by fishermen and villagers along Java's southern coast, placing the Queen in the position of tutelary spirit who guards the community. These coastal traditions are almost entirely oral, whereas the court traditions are textual, and Wessing (2006b, 49) reports that these two traditions hardly interact. In the court tradition, the Queen is the spouse of the sovereign and the protector of the realm. Parangkusumo and Parangtritis are important cultic sites in the court tradition and as such, aspects of this tradition will be dealt with in far more detail below. The coast tradition deserves a quick glance, since it informs Parangkusumo less, and certain aspects of the Queen that are important may not be touched upon much in dealing with Parangkusumo.

The coastal Queen is an ambiguous figure - responsible for the bounty of the sea for fishermen and others who make their living on the coast, a figure that the community relies

on, but who is also dangerous and demands human lives in exchange. She is easily angered, and the colour green she wears, her favourite colour, is not to be worn on the beach, as in her jealousy she either will drown the offender or take them to her palace (Wessing 2006b, 50). The Queen regularly takes or invites women to join the courtiers in her underwater palace (Wessing 1997b, 104), who may come to it in body or in spirit. Impolite, arrogant, or hot-headed men are in danger of being swept away as punishment for their rudeness (1997b, 105). Those who have been swept up to the Queen's palace may be contacted in a trance, while unconscious, or in a fever, giving the Queen the semblance of an underworld monarch, ruling over the drowned dead. But the Queen is also a mother, and the villagers are her children (1997b, 106). The Queen demands offerings in exchange for the wealth she brings, and the human lives taken are a result of the offering not being forthcoming (1997b, 105). In the coastal tradition, amulets and offerings for the spirits to avoid dangerous waves play a large part (1997b, 114). A public sacrifice is performed once a year in the hope to recompense Nyai Roro Kidul for the bounty the sea provides, in order to limit her claim of human lives. This ceremony is called *selamatan pancer*, performed during the liminal and dangerous month of Sura (1997b, 114).

The court and coast traditions are not neatly separated and share some attributes, which may be due to interaction. Whereas the ascription of violent natural disasters to the Queen would seem to fall more in line with the ambiguous figure of the coastal tradition, the 2006 earthquake was, by some, seen as a response from the Queen to the failure of the Sultan to uphold Javanese traditions (cf. Schlehe 1996). Here the courtly aspect of the Queen's relationship with the Sultan and her relationship with Javanese values is juxtaposed with a coastal aspect of the Queen's proclivity for righteous punishment and her agency in natural violence. Practitioners at Parangkusumo are not neatly separated in these two traditions either: they are mostly neither local coast dwellers, nor members of the court. Usually, they are inhabitants of Yogyakarta or Solo, or from other central Javanese cities such as Semarang. But a sizeable amount of visitors came from other locales, including Jakarta and Surabaya, and a minority other cities were also mentioned such as Banyuwangi and even Labuan Bajo on Flores.

How large are these traditions? It is sometimes assumed that the Queen is widely known throughout Java, an impression often sustained by popular media (Wessing 2006b, 47). On

the contrary, Headley (2004, 138) argues that her “cult hardly extends beyond the palaces and a number of villages on the southern coast,” which Wessing (2006b, 49) calls an overstatement, saying that in fact, the entire southern coast and the courts are part of the Queen’s “domain.” While the actual rituals of the court tradition are restricted to the courts themselves, a general awareness of the figure as she appears in the court tradition pervades the areas around the courts as well. The courts of this domain are presumably those of the Yogyakarta sultanate, the Surakarta sunanate, and the principalities of Pakualaman and Mangkunegaran. My own research supports this characterization; no Yogyakartan I spoke to had to be explained who the Queen of the South was. At the same time, Wessing (2006b, 1) writes that further from the above-mentioned domains, knowledge about the Queen quickly diminishes, and she is merged with local spirit figures. It is worth noting that when Wessing speaks of this diminishment of knowledge away from this domain, he seems most concerned with *what* is actually known about the Queen in these areas, not with knowledge *of* her, as none of his interlocutors were unaware of the Queen - although his East Javanese interlocutors were not aware of the Queen’s *courtly* aspects. It may be that general knowledge of the Queen as a character is indeed as widespread as assumed, whereas detailed and specific knowledge(s) about her are more limited to the actual centres of her cults.

Given the fact that the Queen is often assumed to be a Javanese phenomenon - be it encompassing all of Java or a few coastal villages and palaces - it is remarkable that at Parangkusumo, I spoke to practitioners from Bali, Sumatra, and Sulawesi. This suggests that awareness of the Queen may be much farther reaching than Headley or even Wessing describe, perhaps through online means.

*Myths and Characters*

The stories of the “origins, antecedents, and early personal history” of the Queen are “many and varied” (Florida 1992, 20). One of the most repeated is the one in which a princess becomes a spirit queen (Wessing 2016, 373-74). In these tales, Nyai Roro Kidul is a Sundanese princess, the daughter of the king of the West Javanese kingdom Pajajaran. Other accounts claim she was from the kingdom of Kediri in East Java, or the kingdom of Koripan in the same area. As princess, Nyai Roro Kidul leaves the court for a variety of potential reasons. According to one she is cursed by her evil stepmother or jealous co-wife to suffer a

disfiguring skin disease,[27] causing her to leave the palace and seek refuge in the forest, where she meditates in some versions, possibly accompanied by her mother. According to another story, she refused to marry, causing her father to banish her. Other versions combine these, having her develop leprosy on the eve of her marriage or during the refusing or banishing. There are yet other versions in which she is meditating in the forest for none of the reasons above, gaining great supernatural powers. From the forest she ends up in in most versions, she wanders until she came to cliffs on the southern ocean. The majority of versions hold that the voices of spirits or gods urge her to enter the waves that she might regain her beauty and become queen of the spirit world. A minority of versions hold that she tries to commit suicide but was instead granted the rule over the spirits of Java and crowned Queen of the South Seas.

Other versions, recorded by Purbatjaraka (1962, 23) and Woodward (1989, 37)[28] hold that the Queen was already queen when she was born; she declared herself immediately after birth as the beautiful queen with her palace in the southern ocean, gods and spirits were present for the birth and the long dead king Sindula appears, proclaiming her as his grandchild with powers unequalled, who will not take a husband until, at the end of time a Muslim king appears and who will be her husband.

Mirroring the differences in these origin stories, my conversation partners differed on how they conceived of *who* was actually living in the spirit kingdom in the sea. The way these persons and their relations are conceived of can differ along the following lines. The roles in the underwater kingdom are queen and *patih* (first minister).[29] Most people describe the

27 Popular retelling sometimes describes the Queen as looking like a woman during full moons, but disfigured during new moons. Other variants have her looking incredibly old during new moons or monstrous. One of the Queen's names is also connected with this diseased aspect: *loro* in Nyi Loro Kidul means "disease" or "suffering." Jordaan (1997, 303) postulates that Nyi Roro Kidul is the older version, as *roro* means "girl" or "woman," and that *loro* represents a linguistic change. Even so, the shift from "woman of the south" to something like "diseased one of the south" is a remarkable parallel. It must be noted that none of my interlocutors mentioned this aspect, so it does not seem to be foregrounded or present at Parangkusumo.

28 Schlehe (1998, 53) however, remarks that both Purbatjaraka and Woodward refer to a passage of the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, Santoso edition, which she was unable to find on the pages mentioned or elsewhere. This passage may therefore be a reproduced scholarly error.

29 It is worthwhile to mention that *patih* was a function installed in the royal courts by the Dutch after the VOC victory in the Java War to manage administration and as a liaison between the Dutch and the court (Hughes-Freeland 2007, 183). In the presence of a *patih* in the underwater palace, we see Dutch colonization extend even to the spirit world.

Queen as a solitary queen (though still with an entire court of nondescript spirits). In this case she can hold any of the gamut of names listed in the introduction. Others insist that the Queen and the *patih* are both important. Names ascribed to the Queen and the *patih* vary from anywhere to the title Ratu Kidul to Nyi Roro/Rara/Loro/Lara Kidul and other monikers; although some will insist that one variation of this name refers strictly to the Queen and another to the *patih*.

There are also those who claim that the Queen may be accompanied by her daughter. This daughter may be identified as the *patih*, or simply be her daughter. I have not heard anyone claim the Queen has two: a daughter *and* a *patih* as well.

Sometimes, the benevolence and malevolence of the Queen is split along these characters. In this case, the Queen will be dangerous and the *patih* helpful, or vice versa. Practitioners tend to address the Queen rather than the *patih*. One non-practitioner believed that while they address the Queen, if there is any response, it will be from the *patih*, as the Queen is both too important and too spiritually developed to concern herself with such requests. This statement shows a certain disdain for practitioners and their goals, a theme that will return in Chapter 4 and 5.

There is one specific name, not often used, which refers to a character that is not as fluid as the others. This is Nyi Blorong. Nyi Blorong is almost never identified as the Queen (certainly not by practitioners), but she is sometimes identified as a daughter or underling of the Queen – and very rarely as her enemy. She differs from the other spectrum of characters in that the Queen, *patih*, and daughter are usually portrayed very similarly, while Nyi Blorong is a half-snake spirit woman with a serpentine lower body. No matter how she is identified - daughter, servant, or enemy - Nyi Blorong is always dangerous. Yet she still offers help or *uang gaib* (supernatural money) to those willing to make terrible sacrifices to her.

### Spirit Queen of a Muslim Kingdom

The Queen, as she is perceived at Parangkusumo, cannot be distinguished from the court tradition or the royal cult,[30] for the simple reason that Parangkusumo is held to be the site

30 Royal cult here denotes both the worship of the Queen by the sultan or the royal court, as well as the worship of the sultan by the people. The sultan's status as imbued with hidden power and as in mystic union with God is related to his legitimacy, and as we shall see shortly, the Queen of the South plays a role in this legitimacy.

where the foundational episode of the kingdom, in which she played a central role, took place. The Queen of the court tradition is inextricably connected with the kingdom of Mataram (1578-1755) and the man traditionally held to be its founder, Panembahan Senopati.[31] It is their meeting that is the single most important episode in the many stories about the Queen. It is this episode by virtue of which Parangkusumo is such a busy ritual site.

*Mataram: A Short History*

Both Surakarta and Yogyakarta trace their dynasties to Mataram. In the decline of the legendary Majapahit empire (15th c.), a period poorly attested in the historical record, multiple Islamic and non-Islamic kingdoms apparently struggled for supremacy. *Babad* describe that in the warfare of this period the kingdom of Pajang gained some dominance (Ricklefs 2008, 59-60). Pajang was seen as a continuation of Majapahit through its predecessor Demak, considered the first Muslim kingdom on Javanese soil and the site of what is traditionally seen as Java's first mosque (Ricklefs 2006, 26). Pajang was overthrown by its vassal state Mataram, after which it engaged in a campaign of imperial expansion. This kingdom of Mataram would become the most enduring Javanese dynasty, differentiated from the earlier Hindu-Buddhist kingdom of the same name as *Mataram Islam*, with the earlier Mataram becoming known as *Mataram Kuno* (Ancient Mataram). Later chronicles state that the founder of Mataram, Danang Sutawijaya, also known as Senopati Ingala (Ricklefs 2006, 33) and most famous as Panembahan Senopati,[32] had obtained the favour and love of the Queen of the South, through whose power and aid Mataram arose victorious.

The historical reality of Panembahan Senopati and to what extent his exploits are confused with those of his successor and grandson, Sultan Agung, is a matter of debate (Ricklefs 2008, 59-60; Woodward 1989, 9). This Sultan Agung was the first, and until 1749, only Mataram sovereign to use the title of sultan (Ricklefs 2006, 153). He fortified Mataram's power and nearly conquered the Dutch foothold of Batavia. Later kings struck deals with the VOC for

31 Reigning from 1585-1600 (Florida 1992, 23).

32 The name is strictly speaking a title. "Panembahan" is a lordly title that is derived from the word *sembah* - "to worship" - and could be understood as meaning "the one who is worshipped," "the one who is obeyed," or, to use an English title, "his worship." "Senopati" or "Senapati" is a military title that is derived from Sanskrit *sena* - "soldier" and *pati* - "leader" and could be translated as "commander." The name by which this figure is remembered, then, could be roughly translated as "lord commander."

military aid in rebellions and wars of succession. One such rebellion was the Mangkubumi rebellion (1749) or the Third Javanese War of Succession. During this rebellion, the king Pakubuwana II fell ill and handed the sovereignty of Mataram over to the VOC. Presumably in response to this, the rebel prince Mangkubumi declared himself the true sovereign and took the title sultan. This rebellion eventually ended with a treaty that divided Mataram into the current-day realms of Surakarta and Yogyakarta; prince Mangkubumi becoming Hamengkubuwono I, the first Sultan of Yogyakarta.

*The Meeting of the Queen and Senopati*

The royal houses of Yogyakarta and Surakarta, then, both trace their lineage to the legendary founder of Mataram; Panembahan Senopati, whose success is closely associated with his episode with the Queen of the South. The story of their meeting appears in many versions and many readings, the oldest remaining of which is found in a manuscript of the *Babad Tanah Jawi*,[33] which dates back only as far as the 18th and 19th centuries according to Ricklefs (2006, 34), while Judith Schlehe dates the earliest one to the middle of the 17th century (1998, 43). Popular retellings and oral transmissions of this story do not differ greatly from the *babad* version (Schlehe 1998, 48). The summary given here is based on Schlehe's (1998, 48-51) and Florida's summary (1992, 23-24) of two *babad* accounts.

> Senopati searches for special gifts and powers to help him in his struggle to establish Mataram as an independent power. After a series of such attempts and after receiving the *wahyu* (divine light) of kingship, his uncle and mentor Juru Martani advises him to search for more signs. Juru Martani will go climb mount Merapi, whereas Senopati will go to the southern coast. At the Samas river (now known as the Opak river), a great fish[34] or the king of fishes appears, who takes

33 Javanese historiography proceeds from the reality that kingship is an almost sacred quality that cannot simply be thrust upon ordinary men - for example, it is an accepted axiom that any king must be descended of a different king; otherwise it would not be possible for him to be king at all. As such historiography like the *Babad Tanah Jawi* functions partly as a legitimization of the current monarch but also as an explanation (cf. Woodward 1989, 32-3).

34 This fish, called *ikan olar*, is speculated by some authors to be a version of a *naga*. Woodward connects *olar* with *ular*, meaning "snake" (1989).

Senopati on his back and carries him to the southern coast.[35] In the *Major Surakarta Babad*, Senopati is asleep while this happens.

At the southern coast, the *Babad Tanah Jawi* tells that Senopati begins prayer; in the *Major Surakarta Babad*, Senopati begins meditating. The intense power (*tapa*) of the hero's prayer/meditation is so strong it disturbs the natural realm, causing chaos (*gara-gara*); the seas roil and a great storm destroys many trees, fish are smashed against the rocks, and the sea becomes seething hot.

At this, the beautiful queen (*ratu*) named Rara Kidul who rules all spirits of Java and who lives in the sea, thinking that "Judgement Day had come" (Florida 1992, 23) comes forth from her palace in the depths. She sees that it is only a man who with his power (*sakti*) is causing the chaos in the sea. In the *Major Surakarta Babad*, she recognizes him as her destined mate. She approaches and makes a gesture of respect (*sembah*), kisses his feet, and asks him to stop the chaos in her realm. In the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, she informs him that his pleas to God have already been answered: he and his descendants will become kings of Java, and all spirits will be under his command and help him against his enemies. She pledges her troth to him, "promising that henceforth she would forever be his vassal and he forever would enjoy overlordship over all she ruled" (Florida 1992, 23).

The dead fish come back to life and Ratu Kidul returns to her realm; Senopati follows her, walking over the water like her and coming to her magnificent sea palace, where he is the only man. The beautiful spirit queen and the handsome hero fell in love "and soon thereafter into bed" (Florida 1992, 23). They eventually spend three nights and three days together as husband and wife. Every day, Kanjeng Ratu Kidul teaches Senopati the art of kingship and the "secrets of authority over both human and spirit realms" (23). When he leaves, she tells him how he can reach her if he requires her help in battle. He is only to assume a meditation posture and concentrate (*mengheningkan cipta*) and look up to the heavens (*tawang*), and she and her spirit legions will come. Then he leaves and

35 In one version related to me by interlocutors, Senopati came down on a raft rather than a fish.

returns to dry land at Parangtritis, where Sunan Kalijaga, one of the *wali songo*,[36] is waiting.

Soon after, Senopati engages in battle against his foster-father and overlord, the Sultan of Pajang. Here at the Battle of Prambanan, he follows Ratu Kidul's instructions and with her assistance and that of her spirit armies, he defeats the Sultan and succeeds him as "ruler of all of Java."

This story, though it expresses the heart of the court tradition and the very origin of the connection between the sovereign and the Queen, relates directly to the small coastal village of Parangkusumo: the Cepuri Parangkusumo is held to be the place where the initial meeting occurred when Senopati meditated. Although the meeting with the Queen is held to be central to Senopati's kingship, it must be noted that in this version of the story, it is not entirely clear to what extent Senopati's rise can be attributed to the Queen, and to what extent Senopati's rise was willed by God (and relayed through the Queen). This summary has the Queen informing Senopati that he will be king because God has already answered his pleas, but it is with her aid he secures victory in the battle. This is an ambiguity that is reflected by statements of practitioners in Parangkusumo, as we will see later.

36 "Nine Saints," the legendary nine men who, according to tradition, brought Islam to Java.

*Figure 4: The stones inside the Cepuri. The smaller stone is held to be the Queen' s seat, whereas the larger is Senopati's seat.*

Panembahan Senopati and the Queen's relationship has different characteristics depending on who is doing the retelling of the story. According to the *Serat Wedhatama*, supposedly written by Mangkunegara IV of Surakarta, the Queen's intention was to reap the benefits of Senopati's asceticism (Van den Boogert 2015, 225). For some of my conversation partners, the sexual nature of their relationship and the more impressive details of it (three nights and three days) are a foregrounded and important aspect. For others, the relationship between Senopati and the Queen is much more akin to a spiritual connection and political alliance. Florida (1992, 22) writes that marriage is really too limited a term for what is "a profound spiritual and sexual union which was never, however, to be subsumed under the codified laws of mortals." Another aspect of this union that is not abundantly important in the above summary, but that is central throughout the entire court tradition of the Queen, is that her marriage was not to Senopati only, but to all other kings of his descent. This is of vital importance to one of the Queen's most salient aspects as she is conceived of at Parangkusumo: her connection with royalty.

The Queen both facilitates (through her aid) and legitimizes (through her association) the sultan's rule. The Queen is the spouse of all sovereigns of Mataram and their successors: Yogyakarta and Surakarta (Woodward 2011, 88). She is thought to advise the sovereign, and it is with her help that he can control the spirits of the realm. Woodward (1989, 166-9) places the relationship with Ratu Kidul in the perspective of the sultan's duty to control the primary sources of power (*kasekten*) in the kingdom. Without this invisible power, there can be no political power, and vice versa. This control is exercised in three ways: by controlling the *pusaka*, the powerful heirlooms of past saints and kings; by performing *tapa* or meditation, like Senopati, which generates his own power and gives him the ability to control these power sources; *and* through his relationship with Ratu Kidul, who is one of the most powerful sources of *kasekten* available to the sultan. At the same time, the Queen's status as spouse to the dynasty's founder makes her a figure similar to a spirit ancestor, although her parentage is never invoked. In fact, the monarchs Pakubuwana X-XIII of Surakarta are seen as the Queen's adopted sons rather than husbands, due to an incident where Pakubuwana X almost fell as an infant and was saved by the Queen as she exlaimed "Oh, my son!" The decline of the influence of Surakarta's court is sometimes attributed to the Queen no longer being married to them (Woodward 2011, 88; Florida 1992, 24).

The generational transference of the spirit marriage with the Queen is attested by many histories and interlocutors. For example, Senopati's successor, Sultan Agung, was said to have a very close connection with Ratu Kidul.[37] Agung was in fact described as having two courts: his physical court at the city of Karta and another one; the sea-palace of his wife Ratu Kidul (Ricklefs 2006, 34). He is said to have regularly visited her court. In one episode in the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, she asks him to stay before he dies; this way they could live together forever and the curse that is (in some stories) the cause of her existence as spirit queen would be undone. However, Sultan Agung refuses because doing so would interfere with the will of God (Ricklefs 2006, 34-5).

37 In the text *Serat Babad Nitik*, there is in fact a different meeting-and-marriage episode in which the meditation that disturbed the world was Sultan Agung's, Senopati's son, and that his power did not merely disrupt the ocean, but also the Merapi volcano which "spit out tongues of fire," and even disrupted the spirit world (Hostetler 1982, 130). He then followed her into the sea.

*As the Sultan's Spouse Today*

The Yogyakartan sultan in the modern Indonesian state is still seen as king and as a source of order (Hughes-Freeland 2007, 182). Whereas earlier kings, especially in the pre-colonial period were sacred rulers, close to the divine, this shifted somewhat during Indonesia's independence (cf. Strassler 2014, Hughes-Freeland 2007). The Yogyakarta sultanate remains important and, unlike the Surakarta court, even politically relevant in part due to the "nationalist heroism" (Hughes-Freeland 2007, 183) of Hamengkubuwono IX, who supported the struggle for independence against the Dutch, and in doing so, remained the only "traditional" ruler to survive as a postcolonial politician.

The effects and consequences of the Queen as spirit wife of the king can be seen everywhere today, despite the sacred monarchy having been subsumed by a secular democracy. The connection with the Queen places the sultan in a "tradition of legitimacy" stretching back to Sultan Agung "and beyond" (Hughes-Freeland 2007, 190). At both the courts of the sultan of Yogyakarta and the susuhunan of Surakarta, there are sacred court dances called Bedhaya which are related to the Queen - not only in content, but even in authorship, as the Queen had a hand in its composition (cf. Florida 1992). Even copying the dance requires offerings of *sesajen* and incense. This dance will be examined in more detail below. More evidence of her importance includes the Taman Sari (Javanese; Garden of Flowers), called the Water Castle by the Dutch; a massive structure formerly part of the royal palace of Yogyakarta, which included shrines dedicated to Ratu Kidul (Woodward 1989, 19). Taman Sari is still described as "haunted" (according to Hughes-Freeland, 196; presumably *angker*, a quality of place in-between sacred and haunted), and it is said that a person who walked from a three-tiered circular meditation chamber through a 25 kilometer tunnel to the ocean would meet with the Queen herself (Hughes-Freeland 2007, 196). There is also a yearly ritual organized by the kraton in which the sultan's courtiers bring an elaborate offering to the sea at Parangkusumo, to his wife the Queen of the South. All four courts - Yogyakarta, Surakarta, Pakualaman, Mankunegaran - have such rituals. These offerings are meant to secure the harmony between the human realm and *alam*, the natural world. These offerings also have a certain political angle. In the yearly offering to the Queen, the sultan emphasizes his spirit marriage with her, affirming his status as the heir of Panembahan

Senopati and therefore rightful sultan. This ritual will be described in more detail in the next chapter.

In addition, there are plentiful rumours concerning the Queen and the sultan. Interlocutors speak of rumours which hold that the day after Hamengkubuwono X's 1989 coronation ceremony, he sat alone in a carriage – but some present mention seeing a beautiful woman all dressed in green sitting next to him. These reports were included in the national magazine *Tempo*'s coverage of the event (Hughes-Freeland 2007, 189). Apparently, these rumours were started by one of the sultan's brothers with "major tourist interests," giving the rumour an economic as well as legitimating aspect (190). Similarly, when, during official ceremonies, the Sultan's wife, Ratu Hemas,[38] walks behind her husband, some say this is simply part of the traditional role of a wife: the *konco wingking* or friend at the rear – but others say that this is because the space beside him is already occupied: another queen is walking there, and only certain eyes may see her.

The current sultan of Yogyakarta, Hamengkubuwono X, seems to have a somewhat complicated relationship to this spirit marriage. My interlocutors told me that Hamengkubuwono X is more modern, more Islamic than his father. Certainly he has broken with some traditions: he has ended the tradition of polygamy and concubinage, having only one wife, Ratu Hemas. He has relinquished the traditional royal title of *Khalifatullah* or caliph, which, rumour has it, is because he is grooming his eldest daughter for the throne and a female sultan cannot be caliph. Some told me that he has already gone on Hajj – this is apparently a misconception; no Yogyakartan sultan or Mataram king to date has gone on Hajj (Kurniawan 2015). Some people even told me that the Queen has discontinued the tradition of her marriage to the ruling Sultan for him - with all associated implications - because he is too strict, too Islamic for her tastes. Many compare him unfavourably to his father, Hamengkubuwono IX, a man with much *kharisma* and an aura of power, who was well known for his connection with her.

Although Strassler (2014, 110) writes that Hamengkubuwono IX lost some of the charismatic, spiritual power associated with Javanese kingship by virtue of his visibility and involvement in national politics, interlocutors still described Hamengkubuwono IX as having

38 One interlocutor, needing to distinguish between the Queen of the South and Ratu Hemas, called the latter *ratu hidup*, the "living queen." What it implies about the Queen of the South (or spirits generally) that they are not *hidup* is unclear.

been far more intimate with the Queen than his son. He described her in his autobiography, and my interlocutors made much of the fact that he had had multiple concubines, but never a queen – the implication being that he already *had* a queen, the Queen of the South. He reputedly met with the Queen in a special chamber in the Taman Sari, apparently to re-enact the sexual union between sultan and Queen (Hughes-Freeland 2007, 189). One story was that when he died in the United States, he was in fact not dead at all, but had in spirit gone to visit the Queen – something he regularly did, but in private and purposefully undisturbed. This time he was discovered, leading his discoverers to believe he was dead. In removing his body, they ensured that he could not find his way back. This story and its focus on the out-of-body nature of the visit differs remarkably from Senopati's *bodily* visit of the Queen's palace in the sea. My interlocutors claimed that several servants of the kraton have also reported seeing the Queen at the palace shortly after Hamengkubuwono IX's passing.

In post-colonial Indonesia the role of the monarchs has lessened due to the rise of the nation-state and electoral politics. Yet her power in the realm of politics remains and has adapted to this new structure, as we shall see in the following chapter.

## Spirit Queen in a Muslim world

### *Mataram and the Queen's Origins*

Does the Queen predate her appearance in the story of the Muslim king Senopati? The relationship of the Queen with Islam is a complex one that we will return to again and again in this chapter, but in the context of the story of the Queen and Panembahan Senopati, it is worthwhile to consider: did the story of Senopati refer to a figure already known to those who composed it or wrote it down? Or did this figure develop alongside Senopati's place in the legendary history and cosmology of Mataram? Does the Queen predate the kingdom of Mataram and perhaps even Islam, or does her inception lie in the Mataram cosmology of the realm? Is she a pre-Islamic figure incorporated into an Islamic world, or is she a more novel development *within* Javanese Islam? The question may seem almost arbitrary, but in the construction of contradiction between the Queen and practitioner's religiosity, this distinction is given supreme importance.

On the one hand, there is no conclusive archaeological evidence the Queen predates Islam or the kingdom of Mataram. The oldest historical mention of the Queen is in the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, of which the oldest manuscript can be dated back a mere couple of hundred years. In that version of the story, the Queen is presented as being privy to God's decrees, given that she informs Senopati God will grant his wish. Presumably for these reasons, and in line with Woodward's larger project (1989, 2011) to rehabilitate Javanese Islam as Islam rather than as a syncretic religion, Smith and Woodward (2015, 319) choose to contest the Queen's ready identification as a "goddess," writing that "it is essential to understand that Ratu Kidul, who has often been described as a goddess, is actually a woman who became a spiritual being as a consequence of her ascetic practice," and characterize her as "the magical woman of the *Muslim* Mataram dynasty" (emphasis added, 325). However, in describing the Queen as "actually a woman," they reify one understanding of the Queen over others.[39]

Most authors agree that historically, the Queen predates both the kingdom of Mataram and the establishment of Islam on Java. Only a small minority of writers, argues Wessing (1997a), hold that either Panembahan Senopati or Sultan Agung invented the Queen out of thin air.[40] Wessing shows that there is much to suggest that the Queen or a figure much like her existed long before, his reasons including, among others: tales of a 14th-century king of Majapahit making regular sacred journeys to the southern coast; a broader current in India, China, and mainland South-east Asia of founders of states marrying princesses from "magic bamboos or who appear from foam floating in the sea," or even *naga* princesses; and the Indonesia-wide practice of the veneration of sea spirits, snake-spirits, and rice-spirits. Several authors have focused on possible Indian origins of the Queen (e.g., Appel 2011; Chandra 1995; Jordaan

39 This is not the only strange assertion Smith and Woodward make. In their article, they describe how Islamic detractors claim that the sexual rituals of mount Kemukus are based on a misinterpretation; a hermeneutic and discursive act that seeks to delegitimize and erase this ritual, because it offends reformists. Rather than engage critically with the reformist (re-)interpretation, Smith and Woodward seem to accept it at face value as true.

40 While the motive for this invention would presumably be supernatural legitimacy, one woman from Yogyakarta told me that she believed "the sultan" made up the Queen because he failed to establish a port at the south coast. The waves were too violent to allow a port, but because a sultan cannot simply admit failure, he invented an underwater sovereign who defeated him, but who was also immediately subsumed as an ally of the realm. This statement shows one potential response to the Queen, in line with early Enlightenment critique of religion, as it "explains away" the traditions and beliefs of the past by attributing them to erroneous interpretations or wilful inventions with prosaic motivations. At the same time, this woman would not say the Queen definitely did not exist.

2011a, 2011b), but Wessing in a later work (2016, 379-81) argues that this Indian influence may have been ex-post facto rather than primary, connecting the Queen with Cambodian foundation myths based both on similarity, known political connections, and by tracing the "literary magic" of the translation process. This "literary magic" is *kerata basa*,[41] a type of knowledge production that will be mentioned several times in this thesis.

I would argue that the distinction between the court and coastal traditions also suggests that the Queen predates her adoption as state protecting spirit of Mataram. If the Queen had her inception in the myth of the founding of Mataram, this would mean that the court tradition was the first tradition, and one would necessarily expect coastal traditions to derive from that tradition. If this were so, we might expect a central aspect of the court tradition, the Queen's connection with the court as a vital, even essential aspect of her character, to be present in both traditions. But we know that practitioners of the coastal tradition are often not aware of the Queen's courtly connection at all (cf. Wessing 2006). Furthermore, the geographical spread of the coastal tradition (the entire southern coast) far outstrips that of the court tradition (the courts of Central Java). These facts suggest the possibility that the coastal tradition does not derive from the court tradition, and predates at least the story of Mataram's founding, and possibly Mataram itself and the widespread establishment of Islam on which the Mataram dynasty prides itself in the *Babad Tanah Jawi*.

In addition to this, even myths explicitly about the Queen suggest she predates Islam. Two in particular are worth discussing. The first is a myth describing the Queen's birth in the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, described by both Purbatjaraka (1962, 23) and Woodward (1989, 37) who summarizes this myth as follows. The Queen is the daughter of the king of Galuh, a mythological pre-Hindu kingdom. During her birth, her mother was accompanied by *bidadari* (heavenly nymphs), and her birth caused chaos in the realms of evil spirits. Directly after her birth, she declared "I am the *ratu ayu* (beautiful queen) who controls all the spirits of Java. My palace is in the southern ocean." Then a long-dead king named Raja Sindula appeared, proclaiming her as his grandchild with powers unequalled, who will not take a husband until at the end of time a Muslim king will appear and be her husband. Lightning flashed and voices of spirits accompanied this prediction, which were signs that the *dewa*

41 *Kerata basa* serves to discover, explain, or defend connections and (mystical, hidden) truths by a form of etymological analysis and association of the Javanese words involved. In short, *kerata basa* is both etymology and logomancy.

(gods) agreed. Woodward (1989, 37) sees in this passage a religious justification for the conversion to Islam by projecting an approval far into the past and by having other parts of the prediction fulfilled in later sections of the *babad*. However, this myth does not merely project approval of Islam far into the past, it also projects approval *onto pre-Islamic beings*, such as the *dewa*, Raja Sindula, and, one could argue, the Queen herself.

The second myth, recorded by Woodward in 1979, is as follows:

> Syech Maulana Maghribi came from Arabia to Java to teach the religion of Islam. When he arrived he went to Gua Langse (a cave located on the southern coast) to familiarise himself with Java and to learn how Islam could be established. While he was meditating Ratu Kidul appeared. *She gave him permission to bring Islam to Java* and asked him to marry her. All of her attempts to seduce him failed to break his concentration. Finally she removed her clothes and stood before him completely naked. Still he refused to yield. Then a flash of light emerged from her vagina. [...] It was reflected in a jewel in the saint's turban and transformed into a keris (dagger) that became an heirloom of the kingdom of Demak (the first Islamic state in Java). (Emphasis added, Smith and Woodward 2015, 326)

Both these stories serve (among others) the purpose of establishing continuity between a pre-Islamic world and an Islamic world; specifically, they project a legitimization and approval of Islam onto pre-Islamic figures. Therefore, for these stories to be *intelligible* as such a legitimization, it must be concluded that the Queen as a character (perhaps differing strongly from the character people know of today) predates the widespread establishment of Islam. If the Queen did not predate Islam, her approval of it would carry less than no weight and these stories would serve no legitimizing purpose. These stories then suggest that *either* the Queen did exist in some form before the Islamization of Java, *or* at the very least that from quite early on she was *perceived* as having existed before the Islamization of Java. As such, it seems plausible that the episode of the Queen and Pamembahan Senopati emerged into a discourse in which the Queen already existed, and that the situation of the Queen forces authors to grapple with a genealogically non-Islamic figure in an Islamic context. Which is, of course, precisely the problems this thesis opened with.

*Contested Cosmologies*

There is occasionally some debate as to whether the Queen really exists or not, although far less than a casual observer - and even some authors - would suppose. The paradigm of religion tends to equate practice with belief and vice versa. Within the bounds of this paradigm, it can be perplexing to find that many opponents of the Queen's practices do believe she exists. Wessing (2008, 529-30) argues that the broader awareness of the Queen may partly be due to films made about her, but also that these films remove the Queen from a local context in which she is self-evident and places her on a national stage in which she has to *compete* with other truths. From my own conversations with practitioners, non-practitioners, and the occasional detractor, it seems that awareness of the Queen is usually synonymous with belief in her reality. Such reality should not be taken to imply a positive attitude towards her, however. Furthermore, there is a sizeable minority of people unsure of her existence, who are nonetheless not comfortable concluding that she does *not* exist. A phrase used by multiple interlocutors in this context was "*percaya gak percaya,"* a difficult to translate sentence expressing shades of uncertainty, of half-belief, of "maybe," of "who knows?," the words of which literally translate to "believe not believe."[42] A common position for non-practitioners seems to be that the Queen is probably real but simply not relevant to them. Detractors of the Parangkusumo ritual ecosystem may argue that the Queen does not exist, although more common is the position that she is absolutely real but somehow un-Islamic or dangerous, and that rituals addressed to her are *syirik.*

Most who take the Queen as a reality (or potential reality) are Muslim, for whom the existence of the Queen is in no way incompatible or in competition with their understanding of reality as being caused by and under the rule of God, the Queen's non-Islamic historical origin notwithstanding. This co-existence of the Queen in an Islamic cosmos is not exclusive to the Queen, and includes, for example, the Hindu deities who, as characters of the *wayang* are euhemerized (reframed as human heroes or ancestors) and incorporated in an Islamic world. This is one of the reasons Javanese Islam has so often been regarded as somehow different from other Islamic contexts, and, indeed, as "syncretic." This co-existence has been characterized both as those native, non-Islamic elements being subsumed under and

42 Van Heeren (2008, 105) translates *Percaya Nggak Percaya*, the title of a "horror infotainment" show, as "believe it or not."

integrated in an Islamic cosmology (cf. Woodward 1989, 2011) and as Islamic elements being subsumed under and integrated in a native Javanese cosmology (cf. Headley 2004).

This holistic cosmology or even ontology is not exclusive to Muslims. Javanese Christians, especially Catholics,[43] appear to inhabit a similar world, where God is lord over all, but in which spirits such as the Queen are unquestionably real and often benevolent as well. Already it seems plausible that the Javanese understanding of what exactly religion is does not align with the Western paradigm of religion. The shared cosmology goes beyond merely the existence of such beings, but involves classification as well; Catholic interlocutors on multiple occasions mentioned *jin*, as did one Protestant interlocutor who, when he was Catholic, visited Sufi saints' shrines to perform *ziarah* (pilgrimage) regularly. In other words, the cosmology of Javanese people who identify their religious adherence differently, is remarkably shared, and disagreements both between and within religious groups seem to revolve much more about *appropriateness of action* rather than *correctness of beliefs*.

*Spirit Species*

In the cosmological hermeneutics and disagreements over the Queen's existence and Islamicness, her classification gains a sudden importance that cannot be ignored. Taking into account the Queen's relationship with Islam and the implications at stake for the syncretic view, the word "goddess" implies something different than the word "spirit" or "*jin.*"

The language used by academics deserves reviewing. The following is not a comprehensive catalogue of all literature surrounding the Queen, but offers a glimpse of the variation of academic English-language classifications used:

- goddess
  - (Wessing 1997b, 97; Strassler 2014, 106; Jordaan 1997, Headley 2004)
  - "Goddess of the Southern Ocean" (Ricklefs 2006, 34; Wessing 2016, 371; Van den Boogert 2015, 33)
- deity
  - "Powerful local deity" (Ricklefs 1998, xxi)

43 I have not found any Protestant practitioners at Parangkusumo. Protestants I spoke to concerning the ritual tended to describe it as *syirik*. It is remarkable that Christians use an Arabic-derived term for an Islamic concept to designate improper practices. I will examine words and categories in more detail in Chapter 5.

- spirit
  - (Wessing 2016, 378)
  - “extremely powerful spirit” (Woodward 1989)
  - “very old spirit [force]” (Ricklefs 2006, 186)
  - “autochtonous spirit [force]” (Ricklefs 2006, 134)
  - “spirit queen” (Strassler 2014, 98)
- power
  - “indigenous Javanese power” (Schlehe 1998, 49)
- other, such as
  - “[not a goddess but] actually a woman who became a spiritual being” (Smith & Woodward 2016, 319)
  - “Islamised chthonic being” (Wessing 1997b, 102)
  - “supernatural personage” (Hughes-Freeland 2007, 189)

Terminology in Javanese or Indonesian differs. These include *penunggu*, tutelary spirit, *lelembut*, a kind of troublesome spirit, and *dhemit*, a place spirit which functions on the national level (Wessing 1997b, 101). A *dhanyang* or *dhemit* is a spirit which, in cooperation with the founder (*pembabat*) of the community, protects the community from natural disasters and to maintain the fertility and prosperity of the human group, as well as safeguarding the spirit world from intrusions by humans (107). Such a spirit is called a *dhanyang* on the village level and a *dhemit* on the level of the state. In her relationship with the realm of Mataram and the founder of Mataram, Wessing argues that the Queen is best seen as a *dhemit*. A *dhanyang* can merge with the founder spirit, becoming a *dhanyang-leluhur*, the ancestral *dhanyang*. The prominent role of Senopati at Parangkusumo can be seen as an example of this importance of the ancestor (*leluhur*) and founder.

Among my interlocutors, the classifications are quite different. Most common is the classification of the Queen as *jin* or *roh* (spirit; from Arabic *ruh*). Writing in 1997, Wessing argued that this classification of *jin* was due to “the growing influence of Islam” (1997b, 101). And certainly, describing the Queen as *jin* or the Arabic-derived *roh* is a hermeneutical and discursive act that places the Queen well within the frame of orthodoxy, which holds that other beings such as *jin* are indubitably real, as the Quranic account holds that they were

created by God before He created humanity.[44] It inoculates the Queen against attacks from those orthodox detractors who might seek to argue against her reality. The existence of *jin* is not something orthodox Muslims problematize.

At the same time, though the term *jin* is used incredibly often to describe the Queen, we should not be too eager to conclude the Queen "is a *jin"* to most of Parangkusumo's practitioners. In his critique of scholarly literature explaining the *slametan* ritual, Van den Boogert (2015, 181-213) argues that the authors he responds to are projecting their own notion of what religion and ritual is onto their research subject, leading them to baselessly assume, for example, that the *slametan* reveals much about the Javanese worldview, despite the fact that their interlocutors never verbally express those same findings even when prompted to do so. Van den Boogert shows that anthropologists not only run the risk of applying observer categories and concerns as if they were universals, they run the more insidious risk of asking questions from those observer categories and concerns. The consequence of this is that knowledge produced - data acquired and conclusions drawn - are based entirely on questions that miss the point or locate the point elsewhere. Similar to the syncretic view, what appear to be sensible, harmless requests for information are actually *leading* questions that may not be relevant or even entirely intelligible to interlocutors. Allowing such questions to inform our understanding of these phenomena can create an insidious illusion of understanding, of having pinned the phenomenon down; or worse, of understanding it even better than the locals - as with the syncretic view.

Given this important warning, we should be wary to state that to practitioners at Parangkusumo, the Queen "is" a *jin*, because this information is not volunteered, not salient - she was almost always only described as such when I specifically asked, often multiple times, what she was, or whether she was a *jin*. When explaining or introducing the Queen to me, none of the people I spoke to opened with such a description of kind. Rather, they tended to begin precisely with her status as Queen and her dwelling in the sea: as such, a more fitting description of the Queen is simply that she is the queen beneath the sea.

44 "We created man out of dried clay formed from dark mud - the jinn We created before, from the fire of scorching wind." (Quran 15:26-27)

*Discourse and Allegiance*

As we have seen, disagreements concerning the Queen and Islam are rarely a matter of whether she exists or not, which is taken either as self-evident or as unfalsifiable mystery. The disagreements revolve almost entirely around whether it is appropriate for someone to engage with the Queen, and how the Queen positions herself in regards with Islam.

In terms of appropriateness there are those who believe that engaging with the Queen is entirely inappropriate for a Muslim. For example, the rumour of the Queen's presence at the sultan's coronation in 1989 went around, was met with "objections as to the appropriateness" for the sultan to be "consorting with the Hindu-Javanese mythological figure, despite Ratu Kidul's other Islamic identifications." (Hughes-Freeland 2007, 190). There are also those to whom the rituals are entirely neutral, that are in no way related to them being Muslim. Interlocutors at Parangkusumo who held this position seemed to regard the rituals as a technique entirely neutral in regards to their religion; going to the Queen for help related to religion as calling an electrician to fix your wiring. Then there are those who hold that the ritual is positively entangled with Islam, and that the Queen functions as an intermediary to God.

In terms of the Queen's relationship with Islam, the opinions are similar. Some hold that the Queen is somehow inimical to Islam, a dangerous spirit who dislikes Muslims and Islam. This is, perhaps obviously, not a position held by most Parangkusumo practitioners. Others seem not to care much about the Queen in relationship to Islam, in a way that suggests that the Queen is cosmologically but also in terms of affect entirely neutral towards Islam. The third option is that the Queen is positively connected with Islam; she likes Islam and Muslims and recognizes Gods overlordship. A very small majority of people even seem to hold the Queen has converted to Islam. This, too, suggests that the Javanese concept of religion is not comparable with the Protestant-derived Western notion. The idea that a spirit being could convert to a religion is nonsensical in the religion paradigm, because a spirit being *is part* of a religion. The archangel Gabriel can not convert to Buddhism. It is also possible that the Queen is simply not marked for religious scrutiny (as the Christian's Indian food mentioned in Chapter 1). So either the local concept of religion is very different in its conceptual characteristics, or in what kinds of things are seen as religious.

The Queen's positive as well as negative connections with Islam can take surprising shapes. The positive connection with the Queen, for example, can function in a number of ways. In Wessing's (1997b) description of the Queen in Puger, the Queen becomes a figure that in her benevolence and danger reflects the soul's relationship to God. As long as one's soul is in balance with Nur Ilahi (the light of God), good things come forth from Nyai Roro Kidul. "However, when one is out of touch with God, and becomes arrogant, she brings one down (*diterjang*)" (1997b, 116). The Queen becomes, in this way, a kind of reflection of the soul, the purity of which is measured by Islamic (mystical) values. This concept of the Queen as an instrument of God is also reflected in the idea that the ritual to the Queen functions towards God, with her as intermediary. Wessing writes:

> ...informants say that the prayers are made to God and that Nyai Roro Kidul is His instrument. The scope of her rule, under God, over both spirits of the land and of the sea, added to the contradictions she embodies, allow her to participate in the power of Islam and give her an extraordinary multi-vocality, which is the source of her power as a mythological figure who cannot be denied, because the myth in which she lives gives expression to the truths of life in Puger. (1997b, 117)

But the positive connection need not be literal or mystical only; it may also be metaphorical. The 19th-century poem *Wedhatama* takes the sexual union of the sultan and the Queen as a metaphor for the mystical union with the divine, in which the Queen is a symbol of truth (*hakekat*) on the mystical Sufi path to enlightenment (*ma'rifat*) (Hughes-Freeland 2007, 189). Given the likelihood of the Queen's predating Islam, this is not only a creative artistic integration and re-interpretation of an old figure to address new concerns, it also serves as a way of retaining the Queen under an orthodoxizing regime, similar to her classification as *jin*.

*A Champion of Javaneseness*

The negative relationship between the Queen and Islam can be subject to surprising interpretations, as it did in the statements of one (non-practitioner) woman from Yogyakarta.

She believed the Queen was fundamentally opposed to Islam. When I told her that I had heard someone claim the Queen had converted to Islam and gone on *hajj*, she said that that was nonsense; impossible even. Impossible in the same way as it is for the archangel Gabriel to convert to Buddhism? No, it was impossible because the black rock of the Ka'abah emits a kind of energy that is entirely opposed to her; an energy that lives inside all Muslims, whom she actively dislikes. And yet, this negative attitude of the Queen towards Islam was *valued positively* by this woman. She was Catholic, and - in the 2019 electoral tensions between Jokowi and Prabowo - was very worried by the growth of fanatical Islam and disturbed by the fact that the radical FPI (Islamic Defenders Front) had been a large part of Prabowo's campaign. She had tremendous respect for the Queen. She believed that those who performed the rituals at Parangkusumo would never be answered by the Queen, who was far too spiritual and enlightened to be bothered by the material requests of those who petitioned her. Their answers came from the *patih*. For her, the Queen was an agent against the encroachment of fanatical Islamists, a champion of Javanese traditions and the equality of religions as described in *Pancasila*.

The above account is not the only time the Queen is perceived as being a champion of Javanese tradition or Javanese values. For example, the young men taken by the sea at Puger are described as over-confident, careless hot-heads, about which Wessing (1997b, 105) notes, "Such behaviour, said to especially occur among young men, is felt to be quite improper in Javanese culture, which demands respectful behavior from the young. In acting "un-Javanese" therefore, these young men somehow stand outside, beyond the protection of society and are thus liable to punishment by the spirit world." In this way, the Queen can be seen as an enforcer of Javanese values by punishing those who do not adhere to it. The same is said about the Queen's fellow spirit, the Merapi, the grumbling of whose volcano some interlocutors directly connected with the sultan's perceived "Islamization" and distancing from Javanese traditions. The Javanese spirits as well as the Javanese landscape are invested in these Javanese traditions.

Although the Queen's relationship with and appropriateness in Islam may be questioned, her relationship to Javaneseness seems to be largely positive, even in such surprising ways.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the Queen of the South through an approach that seeks to focus on the discourse around the figure rather than attempt a description of the figure itself, because the ambiguity and disagreement that marks this discourse would make a description of the figure necessarily incomplete. As such I have highlighted the difference and variety that marks the different aspects of the Queen. I have described the differences between the coast and court conceptions of the Queen. I have placed the Queen in her (court tradition) historical context of Mataram and described her connection with the Mataram dynasts and the current day sultan of Yogyakarta. I have also attempted to sketch the many different valuations of and perspective on the Queen's relationship with Islam while paying attention to what these valuations and perspectives imply about the local concept of religion.

# 3. Power and Presence of a Spirit Monarch

Always, the spirits
are in attendance to the maiden.
The Queen is truly the greatest
and she is still unmarried.

*Serat Babad Nitik* (1872)
(translated by and quoted in Hostetler 1982, 130)

In the previous chapter, I wrote that it would revolve around who the Queen "is," whereas this chapter will examine what the Queen "does." To be more specific, this chapter will expand on the Queen's agency and power, and how these extend into the Javanese spirit world, the ocean and landscape, and the political realm. I will compare the Queen's agency across these three realms with the broader Javanese conception of power. In the previous chapter, we have relied mostly on narrative mediations of the Queen - texts, stories, and rumours - whereas in this chapter I will also examine how the Queen's powerful agency and presence is made manifest through visual and embodied mediations.

**Three Spheres of Power**

To properly understand the figure of the Queen and how and why she is mediated, there are three aspects that deserve more attention. These are the Javanese/Indonesian/Muslim concept of *alam gaib*, the role of spirits in the landscape, and her connection with political power. Each revolves around different aspects of the Queen highlighted in different discourses. These are her aspects as ruler of the spirit realm, queen of the ocean, and as a political force.

*Ruler of the spirit realm*

Interlocutors and *babad* texts refer to the Queen as the *penguasa alam gaib*, the ruler of the *alam gaib* (sometimes spelled *alam ghaib*). This term derives from the Arabic term ‘*alam al-ghayb*, consisting of the words for “world” or “nature” and “unseen” or “hidden.” ‘*Alam al-ghayb*, which Bubandt et al. (2019, 1) translate as “the dominion of the unseen” includes all things that cannot be seen by virtue of them being covered up, as well as things necessarily invisible, such as God, paradise, the past and the future. The Indonesian *alam gaib* differs in that the word *gaib* does not translate so clearly to “invisible,” rather, it has become associated with the magical and strange. Whereas the Arabic ‘*alam al-ghayb* is, among other things, the immaterial where God’s revelation comes from (Ahmed 2016, 20), and where hell and paradise are located (Bubandt et al. 2019, 1), the *alam gaib* related to me by my conversation partners in the context of the Queen is slightly different. It is similarly immaterial (or perhaps more properly *other-material*, since the Queen and similar beings are understood to have a form and shape), but interlocutors rarely use the term for God, angels, or matters theological or positive: it is a term that has a spooky implication. This is not so different from other Islamic contexts; the Arabic ‘*alam al-ghayb* can also be “disturbing, troublesome, even dangerous” (Bubandt et al., 1). The *alam gaib* is inhabited by *makhluk gaib* (“unseen creatures”) or *makhluk halus* (“subtle creatures”) which include evil spirits, ghosts, and *jin*. Places that are associated with *alam gaib* are often described as having a spooky aura and as being *angker*, a word that expresses shades of meaning in between “haunted” and “sacred.” For example, one interlocutor told me that usually, during *maghrib* (the Islamic prayer time that also denotes dusk in Indonesia), she likes to stay indoors because that is when the *alam gaib* is opened. She explained that in the *alam gaib*, it is night when it is day here, and it is day when it is night here - so during the liminal period of half-light, dusk and dawn, the *alam gaib* and the human world are actually synchronized in their liminality, both being not in day and not in night, making it a period of supra-normal risk.

A similar rumour related to me concerned two foreign tourists who visited Imogiri, the sacred grave complex in which the Mataram kings of old as well as the more recent sovereigns of Yogyakarta and Surakarta are buried. These foreigners were constantly being rude and loud and otherwise unfit to visit such a sacred place. Because of their unfit behaviour, they saw something horrifying and fled screaming, although no one can say

exactly what it was that they saw. I would be wise to take heed of this story should I visit Imogiri.

Stories such as these also fall in the purview of the *alam gaib*. It is not only the concept of the invisible or necessarily invisible, such as the uncreated or the divine immaterial reality from whence God's Revelation pours forth; it is also - and, in my findings, primarily - the realm of the uncanny, the scary, and the dangerous. The *alam gaib* is a serious matter in the Javanese context. Sightings of ghosts, jin, and spirits are part of everyday reality. The extent to which these are relevant to daily life is hard to overstate: during the early stages of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, the local authorities in Kepuh, Sukoharjo, drew on the relevance of spirits in order to limit social contacts by dressing up volunteers as *pocong*, ghosts appearing as a dead body wrapped in a shroud, in order to scare the populace into staying home, using the immediately impactful threat of spirits where the vague threat of the virus was not potent enough a deterrent (Purwanto 2020).[45] The danger inherent in these beings or in other phenomena associated with the *alam gaib* such as *ilmu hitam*[46] is a social reality. They must be respected.

It is in this context that the title of the Queen of the South as *penguasa alam gaib* is relevant. She is understood to be either *a* or *the* ruler of this mysterious realm. In the *babad*, she is described as the ruler of all *jin* and *setan* on Java, although she paradoxically shares this title with others such as the spirit-monarch of the Merapi volcano, who, as the guardian of the north in the cosmology of Mataram is known as Sunan Merapi (Woodward 1989, 199).[47] The Queen is thus paradoxically the ruler of all spirits, but also one of four spirit guardians with whom the sovereign must ensure good relations.

Whereas some sources describe the Queen of the South as a goddess, it is important to remember that she is more associated with the mysterious and the terrifying than that word would perhaps suggest - for some interlocutors she is one of the things that go bump in the night. This association may have its roots more in the coast tradition than in the court

45 The *pocong* drew a lot of attention and pictures of them went viral; in this regard, the *pocong* tactic is not merely substituting the threat of spirits to create the fear authorities feel *should* be felt for the virus, it is also a type of awareness campaign drawing on the widespread relevance of these spirits.

46 Black magic, litt. "black knowledge."

47 Although other names have been applied to the Merapi king, such as Sapu Jagad. The King of the Merapi is in all likelihood no less complex, diverse, and variegated than the Queen of the South.

tradition, and may be furthered by her portrayal in films, which I will discuss in the following chapter.

This is perhaps also part of the reason for her somewhat ambiguous nature. Though she is seen as a benevolent spiritual benefactor in the case of the sultan (and other leaders, as we will see) rumoured to be her spiritual husbands, she is also often depicted as a dangerous, scary being. She appears in the background of photographs like ghosts, there are sightings of her, some people claim to hear the bells of her carriage if she passes by through the night - perhaps to visit the sultan, or her fellow spirit-monarch at the Merapi. Some of my conversation partners shared stories of meetings with mysterious old ladies - who are implied to have been warriors of the Queen in disguise - at the southern beach with a distinct fear (but also excitement; the ghost story combination), one of them drawing attention to her goose-bumps as she told the story.

*Queen of the Ocean*

Although the Queen of the South is sometimes described as "a sea goddess," as valued and appeased because she protects fishermen and birds-nest gatherers who brave the plummeting cliffs next to the sea - especially in the coast tradition - this is not an aspect I have found to be very relevant for the practitioners at Parangkusumo specifically. A typical visitor at Parangkusumo petitions does not ask for fish or calm seas, for example - in fact, her connection with the sea might be concluded to be almost incidental in Parangkusumo next to her status as a powerful unseen agent and monarch. In comparison, the Queen's northern counterpart, Sunan Merapi or Kyai Sapu Jagad, said to live in the volcano Merapi which is north of and always visible from Yogyakarta, is much more directly related to the actual events of the volcano. The differences between the spirit and the volcano are usually not well articulated; the volcano and the spirit are in many ways the same thing. It is worth mentioning that the volcano Merapi is, like the Queen's subaquatic realm, seen as a spirit kingdom inhabited by unseen creatures that demand respect; in this way, the volcano and the coast are mirrors of each other as invisible, non-human realms. It is in this aspect too that the Yogyakartan conceptualization of the cosmology of the kraton becomes relevant.

*Figure 5: The Kraton depicted between the volcano (out of image to the left) and the ocean (right). Mural in the Merapi Volcano Museum, 2016.*

Yogyakartans often emphasize that a straight line runs from the Merapi, through the Tugu (a monumental obelisk), through the Kraton, through the Krapyak (a historic royal hunting lodge), through the shrine at Parangkusumo into the sea. In this line, the royal palace is right in the middle of the northern volcano and the southern sea; one spirit kingdom on a mountain of fire, one spirit kingdom beneath the waves. The palace and the sultan are the centre between these two elemental extremes of natural violence - the centre of the world, in fact - and it is up to the sultan to maintain the balance between the two. This mandala-like cosmology in which the palace is the world's centre derives from the kingdom of Mataram (Woodward 1989, 199). In this cosmology, Mataram is guarded by the four guardians of the cardinal directions, of which the Queen rules the south. This is "a common element in the Sufi theory of sainthood, where the spirits of the four quarters are the aids of the *qutb* (A.; pole saint)" (Woodward 1989, 261).

The agency of the sea - in both its ability to provide sustenance and ability to kill or destroy - is understood as the agency of the Queen. For example, in the summer of 1994, several villages were destroyed on the south coast of East Java by a tidal wave due to an earthquake on Bali. Wessing (1997b, 100) notes that the Queen had been angered because the wrong

*wayang* story had been performed for the occasion of a circumcision in one of the worst hit villages, Pancer. Not only does this explanation show the hand of the Queen in the actions of the sea, it also highlights the Queen's entanglements with Javanese culture - in that she cares about the proper traditions - and Islam - in that she cares about the proper traditions *at a circumcision*. The same is true for the Merapi, mount Lawu, and certain other landscape features. The acts of the volcanoes and of the sea are also the acts of the spirit beings that *are or inhabit* these landscape features. In this way, landscape features such as oceans, mountains, forests, at cetera and the *alam gaib* are intertwined, possibly inseparable. The landscape of Java, its natural features, and the unseen realm of the *alam gaib* are not clearly separated - figures such as the Queen inhabit, and more crucially, *act* in both realms.

The configurations of landscape elements with their spirits are not easily described. They are not akin to house and inhabitant, or subject and ruler; they are not as easily identifiable as separate from each other. I propose the term "landscape agencies" as the most accurate term to describe these configurations. The volcano is not merely inhabited by Sunan Merapi; the ocean is not merely inhabited by the Queen - the actual agency of the volcano and sea, the positive or negative impact they make on people's lives, *is subsumed by the agency of those spirits*. While the Queen is not the ocean ontologically, the actions of the ocean are those of the Queen. In the shape of these spirits, the agency of these landscape features is made salient and intelligible; and most importantly, open to interpretation, negotiation, and appeasement. However, while the agency of the sea is identified as and subsumed under the agency of the Queen, her agency extends further than merely the sea's, into the *gaib*. This landscape agency also entails that humanity should be careful in their meddling with the landscape, as even mere rocks are not just rocks. Wessing (1997b, 104) writes, for example, that the rocks in the sea at Puger which pose a danger to fishermen were once candidates for demolition, but locals objected that "these rocks belong to Nyai Roro Kidul's servants and to disturb them would be to invite disaster." As such, the powerful agency of the creatures of the *gaib* is not separated from the landscape of Java.

The undifferentiatedness of sea and Queen must be kept in mind when the Queen's connection to the sea seems almost incidental - for example, when we see that no practitioner at Parangkusumo asks for sea-related boons. Her unseen kingdom and the visible ocean are not easily separable. Those at Parangkusumo may not ask for sea-related boons, but they

*come to the sea* to petition her; not to mention that the coastal tradition is almost entirely about seeking sea-related boons. So while the concerns and statements of petitioners at Parangkusumo, who often foreground the episode with Senopati and ask for well-being in their city lives, are not directly related to the sea or to matters nautical, it would be incorrect to conclude that the sea is her domain only insofar as she happens to inhabit it.

*Political Force*

I already described the connection of the Queen with the sultan above, including the perceived decline of her connection with Hamengkubuwono X compared to his father, IX. Headley (2004, 522) writes that the political role of the Queen as protector of the king has "eroded." While this is not an opinion shared by everyone (many interlocutors at Parangkusumo told of the close connection with Sri Sultan), a shift certainly has occurred and is still occurring. The aid, advice, and connection she bestowed formerly on the sultan alone, is now also available to others in power: politicians. This changing perspective on the Queen, whose favour could before only be imagined to extend to kings, directly relates to the establishment of Indonesia as a nation-state; a body with a president at the top, rather than a sovereign. This transference of her connection with a sacred monarchy onto a national, secular, democratic order is directly related to the democratization of her image (Strassler 2014, 127). My interlocutors have relayed to me rumours that point out how strange it is that Jokowi,[48] despite being such an important man and a very public figure, is almost never accompanied by bodyguards; isn't that odd? They continue to imply that that is because he has a contingent of invisible warriors sent by the Queen to guard him; a direct reference to the armies that helped Senopati in battle against the Sultan of Pajang. Similar rumours tell of a connection and/or marriage between the ruler of the southern coasts and historical politicians, Soekarno and Soeharto. This shift of the allure of sacred kingship onto national heroes did not limit itself to association with the Queen; when Soekarno was appointed as the first president in 1949, he chose Sitihinggil as the place of the ceremony, the highest point of the Yogyakarta palace where the sultan would sit in contemplation in thrice yearly rituals (Hughes-Freeland 2007, 189).

48 The common nickname of Joko Widodo, the current president of Indonesia.

We see that the Queen can be seen as a figure that both legitimises and explains power. The sultan's connection with the Queen legitimises his power in that in his performance of this connection, he affirms he is the rightful descendent of the Mataram dynasty, whereas it also explains his enduring political power as governor in a nation where other courts hold only a traditional place. The stories of the Queen's involvement with prominent politicians also serves to explain the power these seemingly ordinary mortals hold.

Yet the presence of these spirit agencies in the political realm does not only hold explanatory power; they also constitute a discourse that facilitates political performance. Strassler (2014, 103-4) describes that in June 1999, presidential candidate Gus Dur (Abdurrahman Wahid), performed a ritual at Parangkusumo, seeking the Queen's blessing for his candidacy, which caused some controversy. Strassler interprets this as a political performance which "demonstrated both his conviction that unseen spiritual forces play a role in the politics of the visible world and his desire to achieve a reconciliation between Islam and 'indigenous spiritual forces'..." (104). It is also a performance of seeking the aid and power of she who gives aid and power to *rightful* rulers. Gus Dur did indeed become president in October of that year.

More recently, a *paranormal* named Ki Sabdo performed and filmed a ritual in which he called upon the warriors of Ratu Kidul, Nyi Roro Kidul, and Nyi Blorong to accompany and protect Jokowi in the elections (TribunKaltim.co, 2019). This video went viral and was widely shared. Figures such as the Queen expand the realm of political discourse.

*Power Through All Spheres*

On 27 May 2006, the district of Bantul, south of Yogyakarta, was devastated by a 6.2 magnitude earthquake that left six thousand dead, hundreds of thousands homeless, and damaged large amounts of buildings and infrastructure. Although the city of Yogyakarta was largely unaffected, the sultan's palace was partly damaged (Strassler 2014, 128). Many interpreted the earthquake as a sign of the Queen's anger with Sultan Hamengkubuwono X for his involvement with a capitalist and environmentally destructive modernity and for failing to defend Javanese tradition (Schlehe 2010, 116).

Gus Dur offered another interpretation. He said the Queen was angry because Habib Rizieq, head of the radical group Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, FPI), had

forced her to wear an Islamic headscarf. This comment referred to debates about “a proposed pornography law that sought to outlaw forms of dress and behaviour deemed erotic and hence inappropriate in (an Islamic) public” (Strassler 2014, 129).

The Queen is present in both the *alam gaib*, the sea, and the halls of political power. But crucially, her power is power in all three realms; her agency is agency in all three realms. We see that the Queen’s agency in the realm of the landscape is not merely contained to the landscape; it is a response to the sultan or to the FPI. When in 1985 the central portion of the Surakarta Kraton burned to the ground, witnesses claimed to have seen the Queen dancing in the flames over the pavilion as it crashed to the ground, and interpreted it as the Queen abandoning the Mataram dynasty - the end of the last age (Florida 1992, 24). In other words, the Queen does not merely function in the realm of the landscape and in the political realm; her functioning *bridges* these realms. This is not exclusive to the Queen. The Merapi reacts to political events, in eruption or smoke, such as political tension or actions by the government or sultan. One of my conversation partners and language teachers, a Catholic, mentioned that one eruption of the Merapi was directly preceded by legislation to limit the number of churches built. To her, the Merapi’s eruption was a response to this religious intolerance and ongoing Islamization. The anger of the volcano is the product of an imbalance in the political world. As one person put it: when the politics get hot, the Merapi gets hot (*panas*). These entanglements do not limit themselves to the political and landscape realm; the *alam gaib* is also included. The Queen rules the invisible spirits that inhabit forests and streams.

The Queen’s power, as well as the power of political rulers is “simply one of the forces of nature” (Woodward 1989, 169), and can be used for good or evil. The same is true for supernatural power in general (Bowen 1993, 187). Political power and the supernatural abilities which make a person *sakti* (“powerful” in Hughes-Freeland 2007; “energy” in Koentjaraningrat, 1980; from *kesaktian*, “magico-spiritual power” in Smith and Woodward 2016) are the same type of power (cf. Anderson 1990). The sultan, after all, also rules all of the spirits, and controls the invisibly powerful *pusaka*.

Benedict Anderson writes that the Javanese concept of “Power” (*kasekten*) is radically different from the English-language word “power.” It is concrete and present in powerful people and things; all power is power of the same kind; there is a limited amount of it - it can be gained from somewhere else, but not created from nothing; and power is not related to

right or wrong, illegitimate or legitimate. “Power is” (Anderson 1990, 23). What, in western (post-)Christian cultures is separated as political power, legitimacy, charisma, supernatural power (such as Senopati’s powerful meditation boiling the ocean), and others, are all the same kind of power in the Javanese conception. According to Anderson, for someone not native to Javanese culture, it may be impossible to ever fully understand the Javanese concept of power.

This concept of Power, and the way it encompasses influence, agency, and power in so many different areas, illuminates how the Queen can function in so many spheres. The Queen’s agency in the *alam gaib*, that realm of invisible, inscrutable forces that suffuse daily life and demand respect; the agency of the landscape in the shape of volcanoes, oceans, and rivers - those things that give and take in a way relevant to human life, and the agency of the political power that rulers hold and lose to other rulers; are all precisely that: *kasekten*. It is an agency that includes the agency of landscapes and invisible beings as well as the agency of human beings and states. They are the same agency, and those three realms - the unseen, the landscape, and the political - are not differentiated; agency in the one is agency in the others. These realms are not separate.

When the sultan performs the yearly Labuhan ritual, he is maintaining this equilibrium of power and the harmony between these inseparable spheres. The myths of the unions between Senopati and the Queen or Agung and the Queen “...represents the union of the worlds of humans and spirits. Such a union is not only spiritually desirable, it is a strong requirement for the peace and prosperity of Java” (Hostetler 1982, 131). But it is not merely the worlds of humans and spirits: two separate interlocutors mentioned that the Labuhan had as its purpose to bring harmony between mankind (*manusia*) and nature/the world (*alam*). The political realm finds itself confronted with the *alam gaib* and the physical landscape of Java (*alam* or nature), and agency flows freely between these realms. Human society finds itself confronted with a society of invisible beings and of landscape agencies, societies that act upon each other, are entangled with each other - even ontologically they are not necessarily essentially separated: the spirits of people can turn into nature spirits instead of ancestor spirits (Wessing 2006a, 110). The Labuhan serves as a gift, offering, and appeasement to this society as a whole; it is intended to maintain the harmony between all bearers of power in all societies. Schlehe (1996, 393) writes: “In the Javanese worldview, the individual, society, nature, and

the cosmos are inseparably connected, and ideally, they should exist in a state of harmonious equilibrium."

**Media and Presence**

"Do not teach the people to see something that does not exist."
R. Hartono, Minister for Information in 1998
(Quoted in and translated by Van Heeren 2007, 217)

The Queen's image - the green clothing, black hair, crowned, surrounded by waves - is, according to Strassler (2014, 98) "iconic," an image that "circulates widely on the covers of folklore books, in paintings and posters sold in roadside stalls, in crude illustrations on trucks and pedicabs, and on the walls of shops, restaurants, and people's homes, not to mention the internet." Yet it was not always this way. Discussing Javanese folk art, Fischer (1994, 111) writes, "Few traditional images of the sea queen can be found." Historically, the Queen is more often than not *not* portrayed; those mediations that render her present are usually exclusive and spiritually risky, such as the court dances. In this way, the Queen was *gaib* in both senses of the word; supernatural and unseen. The development of the Queen's availability as image is a result of the development of the Indonesian state in the post-colonial period (Strassler 2014, 120). The transference of her previously unique connection with Javanese monarchs onto post-colonial political figures (already touched upon in this chapter), the democratization of her image, the political transformation of the Indonesian state in the post-colonial period, and the role of visuality in modernity are all interconnected. Strassler argues that all media of the Queen - painting, photography, digital photo-manipulation, and film - operate within what she calls the "'photographic' visual and circulatory regime tied to Indonesia's modern, mass-mediated, national political order" (102), drawing upon Azoulay's (2008) point that the demand for everything to be available to sight is part of a visual as well as political regime facilitated by the technique of photography. We will see that, indeed, pre-photographic mediations of the Queen, such as the court dances, differ from the visual media listed above in a variety of ways, remaining less accessible and less democratized.

*Dance*

At the courts of Yogyakarta and Surakarta, there are two sacred varieties of the Bedhaya dance. In Yogyakarta, this is the Bedhaya Semang; in Surakarta, this is the Bedhaya Katawang (Hostetler 1982; Florida 1992). These differ in that the Surakartan dance is performed annually whereas the Yogyakartan dance is not. These dances are performed by nine of the best palace dancers, dressed as *bidadari* (nymphs) or as the Queen herself (Ricklefs 1998, 6). Hostetler (1982, 127) writes that the last performance of the Bedhaya Semang at Yogyakarta occurred sometime before 1920, but that the court was, in 1982, attempting to reconstruct it. These dances are very long, taking around four hours. Hostetler describes the dance as follows:

> A Bedhaya dance proceeds in a slow fluidity of unison movement, the nine dancers creating the impression of a single entity in continual metamorphosis. The flowing delicacy of the movement combined with the lush textures of the music form an art in which the expression of rich depths of feeling is made exquisite through subtlety and restraint. Although the poetic text sung by the chorus often tells a story, the dance itself is formal in design and gives only the most abstracted portrayal of a dramatic event. The mood is lyrical but solemn, captivating but remote.
>
> […]
>
> Association with meditation is also found in the mystical interpretations given to the formal designs of the dance, particularly as espoused by dance experts in Yogyakarta. In these interpretations, the dance is regarded as a symbolic portrayal of a person's spiritual life culminating in the experience of mystical oneness. (Hostetler 1982, 128)

The Badhaya Katawang is held to have been composed by Sultan Agung and Ratu Kidul (Florida 1992, 24).[49] They composed the text and movements to repeat the passion of the

49 Hostetler (1982, 130) notes an alternative version that in the Serat Babad Nitik, where Sultan Agung is inspired to create a gamelan by the sounds of leaves rustling in the ocean palace, and names the dance

Queen for her original Mataram lover, Panembahan Senapati, and to reactualize that passion in her serial sexual/metaphysical unions with each of her successive lovers, the kings of the last age. The song, in essence, describes and is meant to realize the (erotic and other) potency of Javanese kingship (24).

Because the Queen created it, the Bedhaya Semang is sacred (*kramat*) and threatening (Hostetler 1982, 132). Any activity involving this dance - be it transcription of the notation, rehearsal of music or dance, or performance - must be accompanied by the prescribed offerings.

> Simultaneous with the burning of incense, the spirit is addressed by name and asked to look favorably upon whatever activity is being proposed and grant the participants safe-keeping in the endeavor. In the case of "Bedhaya Semang," the names invoked are Ingkang Sinuhun Kangjeng Sultan Agung and Kangjeng Ratu Kidul. (Hostetler 1982, 133)

This inclusion of Sultan Agung with Ratu Kidul shows again the fluency of the human and non-human, the ancestor spirits and the nature spirits. The sacrality of the dance is further evidenced by

> ...the stipulation that the dancers be ritually clean. This means, primarily, that a dancer may not participate during menstruation. Special cleansing procedures, such as fasting and hair washing, may also be included. It is, in fact, common to find women barred from ritualistic activities during menstruation. (Hostetler 1982, 139)

The dance conveys true presence, rather than mere depiction. During the performance of the highest and sacred Bedhaya, the Queen is present. In contrast to images and film, where she is also rendered present, the privilege of seeing her is accorded only to her lovers, the Javanese kings. During the reign of Pakubuwana II (1726-1740), other courtiers were forced to turn their backs during this dance. Only the king was allowed to witness it (Ricklefs 1998, 6-9). This mediation is and remains thoroughly undemocratized. The Queen's presence in the

the Queen is already dancing the Bedhaya Semang. The Queen, then, created the dance, and Agung named it and took it to his court.

Bedhaya is not open to the general public, and dance is in this way very different recent visual mediations, as we shall see below. The Bedhaya, which predates the secular nation-state and its demand for democracy and visibility, not only differs in how *unavailable* it is, but also differs in that the Queen's presence is not even *visually mediated*. Rather, the Queen is *embodied* by the dancers; her presence mediated through their bodies.

This mediation can occur through the individual body or through the collective body. An interlocutor who was herself a dancer told me that sometimes, during the Bedhaya (not necessarily the sacred variant), people suddenly realize they are looking at ten dancers rather than nine. One of those is the Queen, who in her approval has joined the dance. But in their costumes and make-up, the dancers look almost identical, so the Queen's presence is visible only in the number of dancers while her actual appearance remains invisible in her anonymity among them. In this way the collective bodies mediate the Queen.

During the dance, possession can also occur, which one could call an individual embodiment of the Queen. This possession can be a sign of the Queen's approval, but it is also a risk dancers take and hope to avoid with offerings. When possessed, a dancer moves preternaturally smooth, and might, at the end of the dance, faint, and on reviving not realize the performance is already complete - because the Queen or an envoy performed the dance in her body. My interlocutor said that possession could be a consequence for impurity such as menstruation on the part of the dancer. At the same time, the risk of possession is not reduced to zero by adhering to the taboos and performing the offerings: she always prayed to God before performing such a dance.

*Image*

The Queen is a popular subject of painters. Perhaps the most famous painting is *Nyi Roro Kidul* by Basuki Abdullah, who preceded the creation of this artwork with meditation and other spiritual practices in room 308 of the Samudra Beach Hotel in Pelabuhan Ratu.[50]

*Figure 6: Basuki Abdullah. Nyi Roro Kidul, 1955.*

According to the painter, the Queen appeared to him directly (Salman Rusydie Anwar 2010, 35 quoted in Strassler 2014, 122). This painting is not merely a depiction, but a true reflection of the real Queen. In this sense, it functions as a photograph (Strassler 2014, 122). Basuki Abdullah even claimed he received instructions from Ratu Kidul ("*petunjuk dari sana*"). "*Dari sana,"* which translates to "from there," expresses a communication from the

50 This room is now an offering site to the Queen, decorated entirely in green. Many other hotels have or are rumoured to have such rooms set aside for the Queen, but multiple interlocutors were of the opinion that they had copied Samudra Beach Hotel.

spirit world (2014, 122-23). However, her face was never quite clear, for which Basuki Abdullah relied on models. Modelling for the Queen, however, turns out to be a risky endeavour, as misfortune struck all his models.

One remarkable type of image of the Queen is that of *foto asli* (real photographs), which are taken to be pure, immediate photographs of the Queen's appearance (Strassler 2014). In their immediacy, these are comparable to the ghost photographs in which the Queen is discovered to be standing in the background. They are mysterious and potent in that they are taken to be *asli* images of the Queen. But the immediacy of a given image is not dependent on the quality of *asli* of the image, due to how images of the Queen in general are conceived of.

Images of the Queen are not merely traces of her, in the manner of death masks or fingerprints. Rather the painted or photographic images of the Queen are "indexical in the sense that they establish contact between the spirit queen and the beholder of the image" (Strassler 2014, 123). In other words, these images are *icons*; they are not merely traces of her, dead images of the real thing, but they manifest the Queen's real presence. As Strassler puts it:

> the photograph is not conceived as a trace of a past but now absent presence, but rather as a medium for transmitting an ongoing but otherwise invisible presence. It is an ontological rather than a temporal gap that the image bridges, acting as a conduit across the line of the unseen and the seen, the supernatural and the worldly, the spiritual and the material. (Strassler 2014, 123)

Strassler responds to Tom Gunning, who argues that the image's effect of creating presence is not attributable to indexicality. An image, he argues, is not an index, a sign for something, but the presence of something; experienced phenomenologically rather than semiotically. Strassler's (2014, 124) response is that *indexicality itself* is subject to cultural mediation; in the Javanese semiotic ideology of the Queen, which she calls "auratic indexicality," the image is *both* an index *and* a presence. This may explain why - rather than disappearing, withering, or being disenchanted by mechanical and digital reproduction - the powerful presence of these images is enhanced (2014, 124). "The logic of auratic indexicality treats the

photograph not as a copy but as a conduit, allowing spiritual power to be conveyed across multiple mediations" (2014, 125).

Images of the Queen are images in which "representation is subsumed by presence," (Freedberg 1989, 28, quoted in Strassler 2014, 125). The Queen, in this way, conforms with the modern regime's demand for visibility, without succumbing to the overall visuality of modernity (Strassler, 2014, 125). In other words, the Queen's images are stubbornly and irresistibly *more* than images. As such, the Queen's images carve out a space for the "alternative political ontology" (2014, 125) in which she is so important. "She achieves visibility without transparency," (2014, 125); in other words, the bare fact of her visibility - paradoxically - does not diminish but rather increases her *gaib*, both in the sense of unseen and in the sense of supernatural power.

That is not to say *all* images of the Queen function in this way. Strassler (2014, 126) notes the sale of photographs at Parangtritis beach of young women in pin-up like poses superimposed over the waves, hearkening back to the classical depiction of the Queen. The mimetic dangers of embodying or depicting the Queen, and the associated presence and power of her images are not present in these examples.

*Film*

One reason the Queen may be so well known is her popularity in film. Robert Wessing (2008, 532) writes that prior to 1982 and the release of the film *Nyi Blorong*, the figure of Nyi Blorong was practically unheard of. The opinion that Nyi Blorong is the Queen's daughter - also a widespread position today - can also be traced back to this film. This indicates that these films do not only spread general awareness of the Queen in general but also promote specific understandings of the characters involved. Wessing (2008, 531) argues that truth is a social fact constructed through narratives that is continually judged against other truths, and that the depiction of the Queen in theater and television movies removes the character from the local context and places her on a much larger, national stage, which opens her up to other truths, readings, and interpretations.

The Queen often features in the Indonesian horror genre, which has a number of distinctive aspects. They are also labelled as *film mistik* (mystical films) or *film klenik* (superstitious films) and like the "legend film" genre, they are often dramatizations of folktales (Van

Heeren 2008, 96). Indonesian horror films usually contain a lot of humour within the horror, have an "extravagant use of erotic elements" (Van Heeren 2008, 97), and have a religious expert character, usually a *kyai* who functions as *deus ex machina*. In the horror trope of sexuality, the Queen often (but not always) is the one who engages in the steamy exploits of the film. Wessing (2008, 536) connects this with the Queen's sexual relationship with Panembahan Senopati and the young men she desires and sometimes sweeps away. The Queen and Nyi Blorong are also often connected with snakes.

Most of these films take place in a contemporary time and deal with plots in which the moral order is destroyed by the villains of the story, who "engage in rape and adultery and use black magic, corruption, and violence" (Strassler 2014, 116). The Queen is often portrayed positively in such films:

> Ratu Kidul appears in such films as a beneficent advisor and a force of righteous vengeance, dispensing gory justice against those who violate the harmony of the community and the decency of its citizens. (Strassler 2014, 116)

The Queen, then, is not a negative figure in most film portrayals, and when her dangerous side is shown, it is employed in the service of the protagonists. Wessing (2008, 540) even notes that one teenage interlocutor complained that the Queen was too tame, which made the film not terrifying enough.

These films, then, shape the ideation of the Queen in the popular discourse. In this way, although they are obviously fiction in terms of plot and occurrences, they are taken as *immediate* in terms of relating true knowledge *about* the Queen. But they are immediate in more ways. Like images, these films are more than depictions but conveyors of *presence*, as seen in Wessing's (2008, 537) report that people avoid going to the movie theatre wearing green.

*Sight, Sound, and Smell*

So far I have examined *mediations* of the Queen, *as she is mediated*. In other words, others - painters, actresses, and dancers do the mediating. There are, however, other sensual experiences that make the Queen present; but in these, no human mediators are present.

These events are held to be the Queen making her own own presence known. They are largely non-visual, being through sound and smell. At Parangkusumo, *juru kunci* were not shy in calling those who claimed to have seen the Queen directly braggarts and liars. The Queen does not show herself to us. Of course, the *juru kunci* are part of the court authority and as such they would never claim that the eyes of anyone who is not a king could be able to see her. All the same, the Queen's presence is usually said to be detected in sound and smell.

The sound which reveals the Queen's presence is the sound of the bells of her carriage. These can be heard near the rivers as those function as her roads when she goes to visit the Sultan or the Merapi. The other sound is the noise of pounding hooves: "the noise of the spirit horses of her invisible army, the *lampor*" (Strassler 2014). This sound heralds the flooding of the river Code.

The smell which heralds the Queen is usually described as a fragrant scent (*bau harum*), although some specified that it was the smell of incense (*dupa* or *kemenyan*). The association of this scent with the *alam gaib*'s presence is so strong that one time I scared one of my language teachers, when I went on a field trip with the school to Imogiri, the royal tomb complex. On leaving the complex, I casually remarked smelling *dupa* in the car. This remark was met by unmitigated agitation by one of the occupants of the car, so intensely was an unexplained scent of *dupa* related to the uncanny and invisible. She calmed down after I had verified that I had merely smelled the *dupa* in my bag for our own use in Imogiri. Of course, that specific *dupa* was a human product and as such a human mediation, but the smell of it was a powerful mediation of the Queen's (or another's) *potential* presence.

Another mediation that heralds the Queen's presence which is neither sound nor smell but invisible like both is a sudden and strong gust of wind. At Parangkusumo, the dry leaves of the palmyra palms rasp loudly in such a wind, making the Queen's presence all the more audible. Some describe a wind with the fragrance of incense as a sign of the Queen's presence, others take a gust of wind in general as a sign of her presence.

These three invisible signs; the sound of bells or horses, the smell of incense, and a gust of wind are signs of the Queen's presence that are not directly mediated by humans.

## Conclusion

The figure of the Queen cannot be separated from the Javanese conception of politics, nature, and the unseen being so closely connected as to be almost undifferentiated. Certainly, in terms of power and agency, they are one, with power flowing freely between them. And yet because of the concern with keeping harmony between these realms, we cannot say they are entirely undifferentiated; they are seen as separate and as capable of a disharmonious relationship. The presence of the Queen was formerly mediated through embodiment but is currently open to visuality, although this visuality does not give up her power - rather, it renders her power immediate and present.

The description of the Queen given in these two chapters is necessarily never complete. If I had set out to give a description based entirely on (remaining) historical sources, it would perhaps have been possible. The living, contemporary discourse of the Queen is something that changes and develops in each conversation, disagreement, or mediation. I have supplemented and contrasted historical sources with anthropological work and with my own research in order to give a more complete picture of this ambiguous, enigmatic, and obscure figure.

# 4. The Ritual Site at Parangkusumo

*Figure 7: The entrance of the Cepuri enclosure (with green roof). 2019*

Focusing in on Parangkusumo, one ritual place central to the Queen, the rituals performed there confront us with immense variety and difference, like the Queen in the popular imaginary. This variety does not merely extend towards the practices, but also encompasses the intended goals of these practices and even who they are addressed to. These rituals, often characterized as a request, are not even always addressed to the Queen, nor indeed addressed to a single force. In fact, what is perhaps most striking about what is on first glance "the Queen's place" is how far from all practitioners are concerned with her, how she is sometimes considered a side issue. Is there even such a thing as "her rituals," or are there simply "rituals," to which she *can* be a central figure? This potentiality - *can be* - seems to be central:

the rituals at Parangkusumo are in no way prescribed or doctrinal. Rather, they represent a potential ritual option that people may choose to engage in. What way they choose to do so is similarly open, as the diffuse conformity at the heart of the diversity is informed by tradition, imitation, and efficacy - there is no “correct” way to perform any of it. This is the context in which we must situate the practices at Parangkusumo.

I will first sketch the geographical and ritual context in which Parangkusumo’s ritual sites are placed, before describing different aspects of the rituals performed here, and how they relate to different valuations of the figure of the Queen, her role in these rituals, and what these rituals are.

**Parangkusumo**

Parangkusumo is a small village on the southern coast of the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Situated in the sub-district Kretek in the regency of Bantul, Parangkusumo lies some 30 kilometers south of the city of Yogyakarta proper. Parangkusumo is conjoined with the neighbouring town of Parangtritis by the main road Jalan Parangtritis, which crosses the Opak River to the north and is the main road from Yogyakarta to these villages. Most of Parangkusumo and Parangtritis lies crowded in between the Jalan Parangtritis and the sea; north of the road, wooded hillsides rise into the rough hills that give the bordering regency of Gunung Kidul (Southern Hills) their name. This regency borders Parangtritis to the east and

*Figure 8: The cliffs of Gunung Kidul as seen from Parangkusumo beach. 2019*

slightly engulfs it from the north. The sand beaches of Parangkusumo, Parangtritis, and Parang Endog are always in sight of the magnificent cliffs of Gunung Kidul that stab into the sea towards the east. The beaches themselves are gentle slopes and lead to a more gentle landscape. Away from the hills towards the west the landscape is marked by sloping dunes, and beyond turns into flat expanses of irrigated fields surrounded by villages.

Parangkusumo's neighbour, Parangtritis, is a tourist hot spot. Every day its beach is crowded with domestic tourists enjoying the sea and the many tourist attractions the beach offers. There are swimming pools (the sea itself is too violent to swim in beyond a casual paddle), people build sand castles, have picnics, take a ride in a carriage or even on a horse, rent quads and take them for a spin, or engage in photography; the group foto, the selfie, the nature photograph. The boulevard that stretches from slightly east of Parangkusumo, across Parangtritis, before terminating just before Parang Endog, is absolutely brimming with *warung makan*, all offering the usual dishes and snacks (*nasi goreng, mie ayam, bakso, kelapa muda*), but often also advertising parking spaces, washrooms with fresh water to wash off the salt, prayer rooms, and sometimes selling swimming clothes[51] or beach balls.

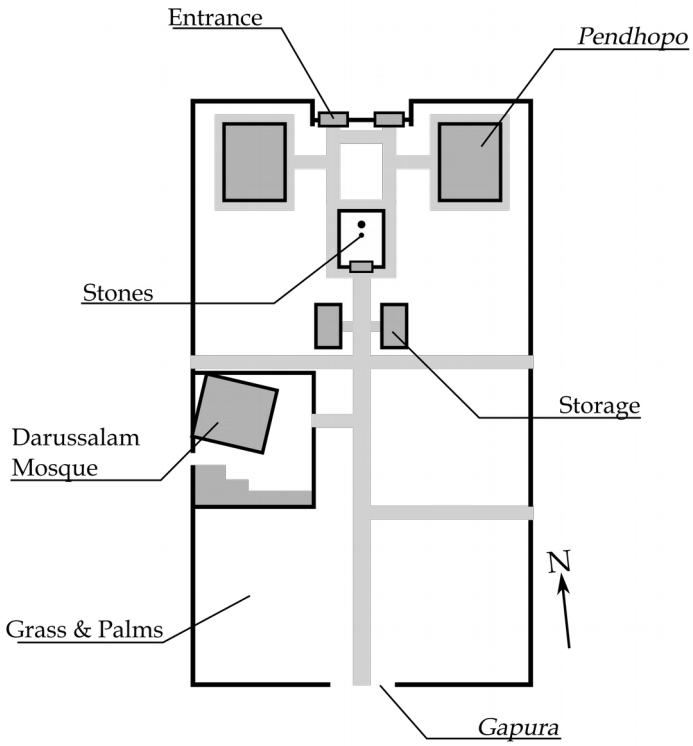
The tourism industry is obviously a large part of the economy of Parangtritis and its neighbour, Parangkusumo. Parangkusumo shares in the visitors of the beach, but also offers the Parangkusumo sand dunes, which draw people for the strangeness of their landscape and for the sandboarding they offer; and the nearby Parangwedang hot springs. However, 70% of Bantul's territory is used for agricultural purposes, and this would seem to be true for Parangkusumo as well (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2019). Many inhabitants work on the fields, or own small *warung kopi*, *warung makan*, food stalls, or shops. Many of these shops are also part of the tourism industry.

Parangkusumo and Parangtritis are officially separate towns. Writing in 1998, Judith Schlehe (1998, 166) notes that Parangkusumo and Parangtritis have almost grown together, and today there is no discernible border between the two towns. Schlehe also writes that the two towns have retained their different characters with Parangkusumo being more quiet, and this is still noticeable - most notably on the beaches. Besides this it also has certain attractions of a more spiritual bent; the graves of the saints Syech Bela Belu and Syech Maulana

51 "Swimming clothes" here indicating not swimwear, but general use t-shirts and trousers.

Maghribi, a miniature recreation of the Ka'abah which is used for practice runs of the *hajj*, and the Cepuri Parangkusumo.

*Cepuri Parangkusumo*




*Map 2: An outline of the Cepuri*

The Cepuri (J. "masonry wall around a house or garden" (Robson and Wibisono, 2002)) is a walled shrine complex and walled park. It is rectangular in shape, roughly 120 meters long and 90 meters broad. It is surrounded by low white walls. The inside is carpeted with grass and dotted with palmyra palms, the dry leaves of which rustle in the sea wind, and which

drop their inedible fruit with sudden *thuds*. The entrances to the Cepuri are guarded by imposing gate guardian statues. On the south side, towards the sea, the Cepuri has one massive gate. The Cepuri also houses several buildings: two large *pendopo*'s or pavilions, two smaller storage buildings, an inner wall which surrounds a much smaller space which is sacred (*suci*), and the Darussalam mosque.

Often, the word "Cepuri" refers to the inner walled area. This rectangular space is blocked off by white walls pierced through with a pattern of square holes. To the south the wall vaults upward into a roofed gate, its tiles bright turquoise-green, its wooden swinging doors painted deep green. Walk through the gate, up its steps and down again, and you step into grey sand from the beach. This sand is often brushed smooth, its surface broken by only a few footsteps. At the further end of the inner Cepuri five smaller palms sprout up from the sand. Somewhat to the left when entering a small Indonesian flag is stuck into the sand. In the middle of the sand are two black, irregular rocks, the northern one larger than the southern one. These rocks are the object of numerous ritual activities and are popularly known as the *batu cinta* or love rocks. They are usually covered with a coat of blazing pink rose petals and are surrounded by tufts of startling red colour sprouting from the sand - the remains of *dupa* (incense sticks). The rocks are relics of a time gone by: they are the places where Panembahan Senopati and the Queen of the Southern Ocean first met, when he drew her attention with his ascetic energy (*tapa*).

The Cepuri also holds the various objects the *juru kunci* may use in order to accommodate visitors; usually a woven mat of pale yellow and green colours lies upon the sand, facing the rocks, along with several *anglo* incense burners, matches, and a plastic water bottle filled with flammable liquid.

Exiting the stones' enclosure, a tiled path stretches southward towards the southern gate, which is wide and roofless. Remarkably, its gate guardian statues face *inward*, towards the stones. They guard not what lies in the Cepuri but what lies beyond its southern gate: the sea. Exiting the Cepuri and crossing the road, we are on a boulevard that rises in terraces or steps up and up until it hits another road beyond which the Parangkusumo beach slopes downward to the sea.

*Figure 9: The Cepuri interior with mat, anglo, and other juru kunci implements. 2019*

*Figure 10: The path from the stones' enclosure to the Cepuri exit and the sea. 2019*

*Pantai Parangkusumo*

Pantai (beach) Parangkusumo is a small stretch of beach directly in front of the Cepuri. On the east it is bordered by Pantai Parangtritis and on the west by Pantai Barghan. The sand of the beach is grey, volcanic, and the sea is a bright green-blue. All along this stretch of coast, the waves are a violent roar and the currents strong. Swimming is not allowed, and there are no vessels that take to sea from here; fishing or otherwise. Fish and crabs are caught, but only by dragging nets by foot through the surf. No boat can enter through these waves. The wind, the absence of trees and plants, the volcanic sand, and the pale green-blue of the sea lend to the area, as Schlehe (1998, 167) puts it, “a for a tropical country extraordinary sparseness,” which is as impressive and strange for an Indonesian visitor as for a foreigner.

Pantai Parangkusumo is always less crowded than Pantai Parangtritis, where - especially on weekends and holidays - masses of tourists mill about, but sometimes a few wander across Parangkusumo beach, or ride over it in horse carriages or rented quad bikes.

While the beach nearest to the sea is relatively clean, the dunes near the boulevard are strewn with garbage which floats down the Opak river, which flows into the sea to the west, and the sea washes the garbage back ashore. Some of the plastics are not new to being garbage - they are fragmented and rounded, brightly coloured among the coarse grains of sand. But more than regular river trash dots the sand - one can also distinguish the remains of the rituals performed here.

**The Ritual Ecosystem**

The Cepuri and the beach are embedded in larger contexts that should be explored if we are to fully understand them. They are embedded in the larger, Java-wide praxis of pilgrimage to ritual places and embedded in the local ecosystem of these ritual places.

*Ziarah*

*Ziarah* (Arabic زيارة *ziyarah*) is pilgrimage to a sacred site, usually the grave of a saint or *wali*, a “friend of God.” In Java, ziarah pervades the life of the majority of the population, although it is somewhat hidden behind “the screen of everyday life,” being “performed in small cemeteries, in village places, on remote hills or inside modest shrines” (Chambert-Loir

2002, 132). The visitation of sacred tombs is a well-worn practice in the wider Islamic (specifically Sufi) world, where the veneration of the graves of great masters is a road to *barakah* (blessings or "spiritual-power" (Ahmed 2016, 20)).

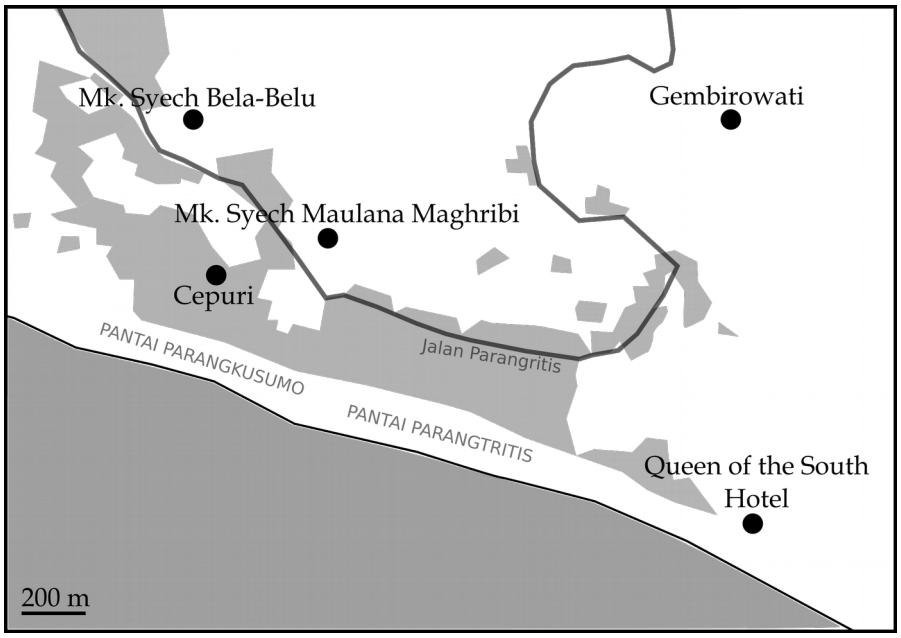
A *ziarah* visit can be individual (sometimes with family) or in a group tour, which has become more popular in recent decades. Individual visitors will often ask for something, pray, and make offerings such as flower petals, perfumed oil, or incense, and take something with them, such as water, earth, rice, ashes, or pebbles. A thanksgiving ritual called *selamatan* will be performed if the request has been granted. Others meditate, and some stay multiple days, usually praying through the night. The group tours always include multiple sites and are remarkably quicker, giving pilgrims little time at each site (Chambert-Loir 2002, 134-5).

Javanese *ziarah* practices limit themselves neither to saints nor to graves. Kota Gede and Imogiri - popular destinations - are not the grave sites of saints, but of kings. Even President Soekarno's grave is a popular *ziarah* site (Chambert-Loir 2002, 135). But as we have seen, in the Javanese conception of reality, miraculous power and royal power are the same kind of power - a concrete force held in the body of the king. The "economy of barakah," as Ahmed (2016, 78) calls it, is mapped onto the Javanese economy of power. The power by which a saint performs miracles (*keramat*[52]) and the power by which a king rules are seen as the same kinds of power, and as equally capable of being transferred by visiting the grave of the saint/king in question. This power is contained in the body of its wielder, which is why there are no home shrines to Javanese saints: to receive the power, you must go to the grave. "However," Chambert-Loir writes, "when visiting graves of so-called Muslim saints in Java, one realises that in a great number of cases the 'saint' has no name, nothing is known about his life and deeds, the grave sometimes is notoriously empty, and it even happens that the site is not a real grave but something shaped into a grave" (2002, 132-3). Furthermore, many *ziarah* sites are not even graves. Many *ziarah* sites are instead *pundhen*, sites where guardian spirits are worshipped, "dressed up in Islamic form" (Chambert-Loir 2002, 133). Chambert-Loir's characterization smacks of the old syncretic view - something else with the veneer of Islam - but it does point to the dynamic assemblage of such places. For example, near

52 In Java, *keramat* or *kramat* is also used as an adjective to describe potent or sacred places regardless of (Islamic) saints. A number of Muslims told me that if I liked the Cepuri, I should visit Bali, because they had many *keramat* places.

Parangkusumo one such place of power, Sendang Mbeji, is not a grave but a spring. This Islamization and what might even be called *sepulchrization* of Javanese places of power and revered beings also extends to the Queen: in Pelabuhan Ratu, some 400 kilometers east of Parangkusumo, a grave adorned with green hangings is identified as the grave of Nyi Roro Kidul.

It is in the network of *ziarah* destinations and pilgrims that we must situate the Queen's cult at Parangkusumo. Although different from the majority of *ziarah* sites in Java by virtue of it not being (presented as) a grave - it fits in a minority of sites known as *petilasan* or traces - it functions within the *ziarah* ecosystem and the actions of practitioners are strongly in line with *ziarah* habitus. There is another aspect to *ziarah*: its relationship to Javanese group identity, but I will discuss this aspect further on.




*Map 3: Cepuri Parangkusumo and surroundings*

*Local Context*

The Queen's cult is not only situated in the cultural context of *ziarah*, it is also situated in the spatial *ziarah* context, the ecosystem of places, visitors, and caretakers. This ecosystem is dynamic and subject to change; Schlehe (1998, 170) mentions a master thesis from 1968, which states that an area to the east of Parangtritis known as Glinggang Sari was seen as the meeting place of Ratu Kidul and Panembahan Senopati, which had in the 80's already faded from public consciousness. These disappearing and appearing sacred places are in a sense in competition with each other; they survive by virtue of visitors and pilgrims, of which there is a limited amount with a limited amount of time and money to spend. Schlehe (1998, 172) writes that she had met multiple visitors and *juru kunci* at different places who all assured her their place was the entrance to the realm of Ratu Kidul, or the site where Ratu Kidul and Panembahan Senopati first met.

The most immediately relevant of the *ziarah* sites surrounding the Cepuri are Makam (grave) Syech Bela-Belu and Makam Syech Maulana Maghribi,[53] because of their proximity and popularity. These graves are located on the wooded hills to the north of Parangkusumo, and the concrete stairways leading up to them - often filled with beggars and peddlers of food and snacks - start directly on the Jalan Parangtritis main road. Makam Syeh Bela-Belu even has a large parking space next to its stairways for the many cars and tour buses that come to visit it. The large toll gate on Jalan Parangtritis advertises Parangtritis' "*wisata religius,*" religious tourism, referring to these tombs - and perhaps the Cepuri.

Besides these two graves, there are the Parang Wedang hot springs, also situated right next to Jalan Parangtritis, which are held to have healing qualities. The Parang Wedang complex was renovated in the nineties and has been an important pilgrim site according to older literature, visited for healing or relaxation and also often the site of prayer and offerings. It has no relation to the Queen (Schlehe 1998, 169).

To the east and along much smaller roads through forests and rice fields is another spring, Sendang Mbeji, where the nymph (*bidadari*) or goddess (*dewi*) Nawangwulan was snared in marriage by the mortal Joko Tarub, who took her clothes as she bathed. Schlehe (1998, 46-48) sees an earlier incarnation of the Senopati-Queen story in this myth, and one interlocutor mentioned that Nawangwulan might be the Queen of the South.

53 This is the same Syech mentioned in Chapter 1, who the Queen gave permission to bring Islam to Java and tried to seduce.

Nearby are also the ruins of Candi Gembirowati, an old temple on a hillside. Though temples of Java's Hindu-Buddhist past dot the landscape, they are tourist attractions more than ritual sites, ranging from popular with local sightseers such as Gembirowati[54] to the huge and famous tourist hot spots of Borobodur and Prambanan.

Closer to the sea and Parangtritis are the springs of Sendang Pepe, which in local news media was held to be a place where visitors attempt to procure a *tuyul*, a type of child-like spirit that steals money from one's neighbours, and of which in 1990 a newspaper wrote that human sacrifices were performed at the site. Both wild stories, which are vehemently denied as slander by the local caretakers who maintain that the spirits at Sendang Pepe hold the respectable title of *haji*, having been on pilgrimage to Mecca (Schlehe 1998, 170).

Further east in the hill-dotted regency of Gunung Kidul is Goa Langse, a cave in the sheer cliffs plunging into the sea, which is also associated with the Queen of the South. This cave is a popular site for meditation and offerings, but can only be reached by a precarious climb along the cliff's edge. This climb is considered dangerous and has on occasion been fatal; in 2014, two visitors fell and one of them died (Widadaya 2015). An attendant at the Cepuri told me that only those with a pure heart could safely make the climb; similarly, only those with a pure heart could be sure of their safety on Parangkusumo beach. Inhabitants of Parangtritis told me that the cave's caretaker, Mbah Ijem, an old woman in her seventies, recently took to living in the cave together with her dog, because she is growing too old to make the daily climb.

These sites are the local peers and competitors of the Queen cult in Parangkusumo. Some visitors may visit the graves and skip the Cepuri, whereas others might travel from Goa Langse to the Cepuri and continue further eastward for the next Queen-related site. In this regard, like businesses, the presence of nearby other *ziarah* sites can lead to competition but also to larger amounts of visitors to all.

54 I visited Candi Gembirowati in May 2019, and although there were no other sightseers, a hollow tree in the forest behind the temple was filled with burnt-out incense sticks and adorned with a *pelangkiran*, a small wooden altar or shrine, that, as far as I am aware, is of Balinese origin. However, when I asked a woman working in the fields nearby if she knew why the incense and *pelangkiran* were there, she shrugged and said, "*Kejawen*." Clearly Gembirowati is still a place for Javanese rituals in addition to sightseers.

**Rituals at the Gates of the Underwater Kingdom**

To say that the Queen's cultic site at Parangkusumo is a ritual site, then, runs the risk of merely implying the obvious: that it is a place where rituals happen to be performed. The site at Parangkusumo is more than that; it functions as a node in an ecosystem of powerful places, through which the economy of power and/or *berkah* flows. In this way, the Parangkusumo site is not merely a place where rituals happen, but a ritually *potent* site - a site *suitable* for rituals, and *attracting* rituals. We shall also see this reflected in how some practitioners treat the Queen as a secondary issue when it comes to ritual. Perhaps this partly explains why the site is home to a large number of different rituals - ranging from collective to individual, from royal to village-organized to family-organized, from calendrical to everyday, from annual to monthly to bi-weekly, from Islamic in style to Hindu festivals, from requests to meditative ventures to thanksgivings.

Of the annual rites, some notable ones are:

- the Surakarta *labuhan*, or the Surakarta court offering performed in the name of the Susuhunan of Surakarta.
- the Yogyakarta *labuhan*, the same but performed in the name of the Sultan of Yogyakarta
- Upacara Melasti, a Balinese Hindu purification festival performed by Hindu's living in central Java. This ritual is performed on the beach. Schlehe (1998, 168) writes that she sees no connection between Melasti and the Queen, although I think the very presence of this ritual at this specific place means we should not immediately dismiss the relevance of this ritual.
- *bersih desa* (cleaning the village), a Javanese yearly festival in which the village is physically cleaned as well as cleansed of evil spirits, which includes offerings to the village's *dhanyang* (guardian spirit). The fact that this ritual occurs at the Cepuri suggests that the Queen is both the Mataram *dhemit* state-level guardian and the more local *dhanyang* guardian spirit.[55]
- Satu Suro, the first day of the month Suro and the first day of the new year. An especially *keramat* and potent day, Satu Suro has the potential to be auspicious or

55 We must also not discount the possibility of Senopati being relevant to such communal rituals even if he is not formally the *dhanyang*, especially in light of his central historical role and the sacred aspect of history described in *ziarah*.

supernaturally risky. It is a day fit for meditation, prayer, reflection, and the cleaning of one's kris - the court *pusaka'*s at Surakarta and Yogyakarta are also cleaned during this time. Given that Satu Suro is such a potent day, the Cepuri and beach draw large amount of visitors in the night of Satu Suro.

Of these annual rituals, I was only able to observe the Yogyakarta *labuhan*. However, since I am interested in broad discourses and practices of non-producing contradiction, producing contradiction, and harmonization and these struggles are more likely to be pronounced in everyday engagements rather than the elite engagement of the Sultan, whose power and prestige is likely to dissuade debate on the subject. For this reason, the lion's share of this chapter will revolve around individual rituals, performed by individuals or small groups. Such rituals can occur on any day, although certain days tend to invite more visitors. During the full moon, much more visitors come. Also during the bi-monthly auspicious days of Jumat Kliwon and Selasa Kliwon, visitors come in droves - there is music, a market, and sometimes *wayang* performances. Jumat Kliwon and Selasa Kliwon occur twice a month, when Friday (Jumat) or Tuesday (Selasa) coincide with the fifth and last day of the Javanese week, Kliwon. These are held to be especially auspicious days to perform rituals or pilgrimages. All the same, the relationship between the Queen, the place, and the Sultan is still important to the meaning of the place to individuals, and as such I will first examine the yearly Yogyakarta *labuhan*.

*Labuhan*

The Yogyakarta *labuhan*[56] is an official and formal ceremony which includes offerings at Parangkusumo, at Mount Merapi, Mount Lawu, and every eighth year an additional offering in Dlepih at Kahyangan, where Senopati is said to have received the *wahyu* of kingship. In

56 The Javanese word *labuh* denotes anchor or the act of dropping anchor; the word for port (*pelabuhan*) derives from it. Labuhan then, seems to denote the act of casting into the water - in this case offerings. However, *labuh* also denotes the time of the first rains, the switch from the dry to wet season (Robson and Wibisono 2002). Drawing on this meaning and connecting it with the Puger (coast tradition) *labuhan*, which seeks to placate the Queen's desire for human lives, Wessing postulates that the *labuhan* may also be a plea for rain, since most fishing accidents occur due to low water levels at the end of the dry season (1997a, 114). The practice of casting offerings into the sea is practised on numerous places along the south coast of Java, not always under the name *labuhan*, but also as *sedekah laut*, literally "sea alms."

this regard the *labuhan* shows obvious continuity with the Mataram cosmology of the realm, in which the spirit monarchs of the southern ocean, the Merapi, and Lawu are its guardians. Though parts of the offering at Parangkusumo are prepared by the royal family, the Sultan himself does not perform or attend the offerings at Parangkusumo.

On the 30th of Rajab 2019,[57] or the 9th of April, the morning sun already blazed down relentlessly at the Cepuri Parangkusumo. Already some spectators like myself milled about, taking pictures, talking amongst themselves - many of them not Javanese. Most of them were young people who had come here from Yogyakarta, and many were students. Strikingly, a substantial number of them were from outside of Java, including Sumatra, Sulawesi, and Bali. In one group, the students came from a variety of places, but lived and studied in Yogyakarta. Many of them took pictures of the stones in the Cepuri, either with cameras or smartphones. They were one of the many examples of how the categories of practitioner and that of sightseer or tourist are not easily separated from each other.[58] It seems that for them this was a type of entertainment, of cultural tourism, without reducing the matter to mere cultural invention. Numerous Yogyakarta *abdi dalem*[59] dressed in their ceremonial clothing were also standing around near the pavilion and by a registration table near the entrance to the Cepuri. Empty folding chairs around the pavilion and empty woven mats inside it awaited occupants. The gamelan played its booming harmonies, fell silent, then played again.

The western-most *pendopo*, on the right when one enters, was the initial centre of the proceedings - inside were two long woven mats, woven bowls with fruits, and piles of plant matter of which the litters carrying the offering were later constructed. Four *abdi dalem* were already sitting cross-legged there. Next to the *pendopo*, a small roofed podium had been set up, on which the gamelan ensemble was installed, amplified by speakers.

Eventually, the procession arrived - a marching group of soldiers in ceremonial outfits (*bregada*, presumably from Dutch *brigade*) with flutes, drums, and spears, and spearheaded by men on horseback stopped outside the Cepuri as more *abdi dalem* carried in a house-like

57 The Javanese calendar is essentially the same as the Islamic lunar calendar, except that it does not start the count of years at the Hijra, instead keeping the numerical years of the Indian/Hindu Śaka calendar, as decreed by Sultan Agung in 1633-34 (Javanese year 1555) (Ricklefs 2006, 41-42).

58 The same is the case for the individual rituals. Many visitors come to enjoy the atmosphere and watch the rituals rather than join in them.

59 Courtiers or persons in employ of the Kraton, translateable as “servants of the house,” “servants of the interior,” or “servants of him”.

construction of painted red wood, in which the offerings were carried - the *gunungan.* The *gunungan* is accompanied by a bamboo parasol. Inside the *pendopo*, the *gunungan* was opened (accompanied by a flutter of camera shutters from spectators) as each offering – many of them different types clothing of varying fabrics and pattern - was taken out, held up, and announced; many of these were different types of *batik* cloth and clothing. A man next to me told me these *batik* all had different meanings and that they were to be given to “the woman (*wanita*) in the sea.” Several men take the microphone, giving short speeches on the value of culture (*budaya*), the Sultan and Senopati, and the place of Java in Indonesia. All join in prayer. Bare-chested litterbearers, having constructed litters from bamboo, then carried the offerings to the inner enclosure of the Cepuri, where the black rocks are. The red umbrella came with the offerings, a symbol of reverence and power. Here, litterbearers and *abdi dalem* sat down in the sand, lighting incense and sprinkling flowers onto the rocks. A wooden box containing the Sultan’s hair and nail clippings was brought and buried in the potent sands around the rocks. After silent prayer, the litters, their bearers, the *abdi dalem*, and the many spectators made their way to the sea in a giant throng flanked by the *bregada* soldiers. For a final time, the *abdi dalem* and litter-bearers sat down on the beach burning incense and offering a prayer. Then, past the rows of photographing spectators, the litter-bearers marched their quarry far into the sea. Most of it would later be washed back, and good fortune and blessings follow those who managed to take one of the gifts home.

This, in a nutshell, is the annual Yogyakarta *labuhan*, the royal offering.

*Figure 11: Abdi dalem carrying the gunungan. 2019*

*Figure 12: An abdi dalem shields the offerings from the sun before they are cast into the sea. 2019*

*Figure 13: A wooden box containing the Sultan's hair and nail clippings is presented to the stones. 2019*

*Aspects of Labuhan*

It should be obvious that the *labuhan* sits right at the crossroads of royalty, the spirit world, and the natural world I described previously. The *labuhan* is also a ritual of legitimacy, as it performs the sultan's descendance from Senopati. The *labuhan* is also perceived as something inherently Javanese: one *abdi dalem* I got to chatting with introduced me to his friend, who was dressed like an *abdi dalem*, but who turned out to just and observer, and Catholic as well. Because so much of the *labuhan* was surrounded with Islamic elements (Arabic benedictions, prayer in the Islamic style), I was surprised. But the first man said: this has nothing to do with *agama* (religion). This is about *Jawa*. We are all one family (*keluarga*). The *labuhan*, then, operates not only on the realm of royalty, but also the realm of Javaneseness; a performative ceremony of Javanese identity. These realms are not entirely separate, since the sultan is perceived as central to Javanese identity, an exemplar of Javanese values. As we shall see, this relationship with Javanese cultural identity will turn out to also inform certain individual rituals.

## Circumscribing Individual Rituals

What immediately stands out about the individual rituals, by which I mean rituals performed by private persons and families, rather than collective rituals performed by governmental or village institutions, is the immense diversity and variety in practices as well as explanations. Whereas the *labuhan* is performed according to a certain script and at a set time every year, an individual ritual may be performed in a variety of different ways, using different implements, for different reasons, and at different times. I will go through all these aspects of the individual rituals.

Despite the immense variety in practices and implements, performers draw upon a broader Javanese ritual infrastructure of embodied and material techniques, which form a diffuse core of shared practices which are most commonly performed at the Cepuri, around which the higher variance of ritual revolves. This diffuse stereotypical ritual performed on an ordinary day is as follows.

A person or persons visit the Cepuri, often later in the day or after dark. They buy *sesajen* (offerings) and often *dupa* (incense sticks) from a vendor sitting outside the Cepuri. The

*sesajen* consists of different types of flowers wrapped in a banana leaf. At the Cepuri, the practitioners are received (often after waiting while the unofficial helper of the *juru kunci* fetches the one on duty) by the *juru kunci*, who will unlock the Cepuri gates. The practitioner(s) and *juru kunci* sit down on a woven mat in the sand facing the two rocks. The *juru kunci* can aid the practitioner by instructing on the ritual, informing a visitor of the history (*sejarah*) of the place, which is often volunteered as the prime reason of the site's importance. This alerts us to the importance of history, and to some characteristics of history that differ from its English language concept. The *juru kunci* always uses the *anglo*, a small brazier/incense burner made of pottery, in which he uses flammable liquid as a firestarter and *kayu jati* (teak wood) as fuel. The *anglo* is used to burn *kemenyan*, small crystalline pebbles of incense. It is in the heat of the anglo that the *juru kunci* will light the dupa sticks of the practitioner, if they so desire. Other times, the *juru kunci* will take the *sesajen* and move it in a circle three times through the coiling incense fumes rising from the anglo, suffusing the flowers with it. In the lighting of the dupa and the baptism in incense fumes of the *sesajen*, the *juru kunci* will often speak in a soft murmur. The language used is Krama Inggil, a highly formal variant of Javanese, which many Javanese today, especially young people, do not speak. One *juru kunci* explained, however, that they pass on the wishes of the practitioner to the Queen and to Senopati, while another simply stated that they passed them on "ke atas" - to above. This shows that the importance of the Queen to the ritual can vary. It also shows that the *juru kunci*-administered Cepuri is perhaps more focused on other notions, such as the royal ancestor Senopati or God, whereas the beach to the south is generally much more explicitly and exclusively linked to the Queen.

Some practitioners elect to skip by the *juru kunci*, seeing him as little beyond the literal meaning of his title, the "keeper of the keys" who is there to unlock the holy site, but not relying on him to make the ritual more efficacious. Either way, the practitioner then makes his way to the potent rocks. The larger rock, which is further away from the entrance and is considered to be the seat of Panembahan Senopati, is often visited first. Here the practitioners light their *dupa* sticks if the *juru kunci* has not lit them in the *anglo* already, and plant them in the sand close to the rock, in bundles or in a staggered circle around the entire rock. Some rose petals from the *sesajen* bundle are taken and sprinkled over the rock in the ritual act called *nyekar*.

It is common for practitioners to spend some time kneeling near this rock or sitting cross-legged, in an act of ritual silence or ritual speech which different interlocutors describe in different ways: prayer (*berdoa*) or meditation (*meditasi* or *semedi*). Sometimes practitioners will lay one hand on the rock, head hanging and seeming entirely focused on the touch of the stone. If there are more elaborate offerings, like big baskets of foodstuffs, they will be placed on the rock during this time. Practitioners repeat this process again at the second rock, the seat of the Queen.

Almost all practitioners perform some type of silence (be it meditation or prayer), and most perform it at the rock. However, some, after placing the dupa and performing *nyekar* on the rocks, return to the *juru kunci*'s woven mat and perform it there, sometimes with the *juru kunci* leading. Afterwards, the practitioners will leave, but not before thanking the *juru kunci*, almost always with a monetary reward, which, in both its informality and the subtlety with which the bills are handed over, hidden as they are inside the giver's hand during a handshake, is much more akin to gift-giving than a clinical financial transaction.

Most visitors continue their ritual at the beach after leaving the Cepuri, but crucially not all. Similarly, there are those who do not engage with the Cepuri at all, going immediately to the beach.

At the beach, practitioners will cast their *sesajen* in the sea. Often, this is prefaced with some more prayer/meditation where visitors sit down in the sand, facing the sea to the south. If they have dupa (practitioners usually do not plant all their *dupa* at the Cepuri), they will light it, often having some difficulty due to the strong winds. Afterwards, they will walk up to the surf. Some make the approach of the sea also into a formalized act, standing in line with their fellow visitors, holding hands, bowing to the sea and walking away from it backwards. Standing anywhere from ankle- to waist-deep in the surf, the practitioner then casts the *sesajen* in the sea. For those with the most common *sesajen* of flowers wrapped in a banana leaf, this is performed in a variety of ways: from dropping the bundle wholesale into the water to handful-by-handful sprinkling of the flowers into the waves.

**Aspects of Individual Rituals**

These are the common core that accords in greater or lesser degree with the majority of all individual rituals. However, specific aspects of this core deserve closer attention. In directing

this attention, I am paying attention to dynamics of religious assemblage, specifically the (non-)production of contradiction. I also pay attention to the material aspects of the ritual, being careful not to assume inner or belief-driven explanations before examining material elements. Explanations or information than offered or sought from practitioners will be used to supplement and frame these observations, but keeping in mind the dangers of fine answers to the wrong questions, the circumstances of these explanations - whether they were spontaneously offered or in response to specific questions will be taken into account. What information is foregrounded could, after all, be an important clue as to the characteristics of local understandings of religion, non-religion, and ritual.

Some of the aspects I will touch upon include the materiality of blessings, the role and workings offerings and incense, the role of space and authority, the role of gender, as well as tthe presence of criminality and prostitution.

*The Materiality of Blessings*

Many practitioners express that they are looking for *berkah* or *barokah* or *berkat*, from Arabic بركة *barakah*. Usually translated as "blessings," *berkah* is understood to be a positive influence and power, comparable to the Javanese concept of power in that it is held to be concrete and contained in material reservoirs such as objects, places, and people. *Berkah* can even be transmitted digitally. *Berkah* is to some extent dependent upon bodily action, as is evident from the many ritual actions designed to procure it, although inner purity is often affirmed as a prerequisite for the efficacy and safe performance of the ritual. While *berkah*-seekers affirm that the *sesajen* are destined for the Queen, they rarely find it relevant to describe the relationship between the Queen and *berkah*; however, if questioned, they rarely identify the Queen as the *source* of this *berkah* - it is God who is the source of *berkah*. This is an interpretation that seems closely linked to the term *berkah*, as other words used to describe the positive influence of the ritual are sometimes attributed to the Queen, as we shall see. This interplay the Queen and *berkah*, and *berkah* and God suggests that the Queen is experienced as a conduit to God or divine blessings - that the Queen, in this understanding, is the product of a mapping of Islamic pilgrimage onto the Javanese economy of power as well as a mapping of the Javanese economy of power onto Islamic cosmology.

*Figure 14: Senopati's stone on the night of Jumat Kliwon. 2019*

*Figure 15: Senopati's stone covered with flowers. 2019*

The *berkah* attained by these rituals is often contained within objects, such as the rose petals on the rocks. *Nyekar* - from Javanese *sekar*, "flower" (Robson and Wibisono 2002) - is a type of ritual genre usually performed at gravesites (of family, ancestors, and saints), but also at the Cepuri. This continuity is so great that the *sesajen* sold at the foot of the stairway to the grave of Syech Maulana Maghribi are identical to those sold at the Cepuri. On a busy night, the rock is so densely covered in rose petals that its black surface is scarcely visible. From this layer on the rock, some practitioners take some petals with them because they are thought to impart *berkah*. This gives the *nyekar* practice here a reciprocal aspect; one receives *berkah* by taking some flower petals, but one also places new petals there which can bring *berkah* to the next visitor.

This reciprocity of *berkah* related through flowers is also visible at the beach; while the offerings that get washed back by the sea are often auspicious, such as the clothing of the labuhan ritual or fruit of larger *sesajen*, one particular flower is especially sought after because of the luck it imparts. This is the *kantil*, a large white magnolia-like flowerbud of the white champaca tree (Indonesian *cempaka putih*, Javanese *kantil*). Throughout Java, the *kantil* has associations with the unseen; it is thought that the *kuntilanak*, a terrifying type of ghost, inhabits the *kantil* trees, and that the *kantil* has potent love magic (*pelet*) effects.[60] This

60 It is perhaps worth noting that the Javanese word *kantil* can also denote a bed, and that this word is used to describe the Queen's golden bed in which she lays as she notices the disturbance of Senopati's meditation in the *Babad Tanah Jawi* (Olthof and Sumarsono [1941] 2002, 159). This may be nothing more than a coincidence, but the connection of the *kantil* with love magic, the Queen's inherent erotic aspects, and the fact that Senopati and the Queen had famous, kingdom-creating sex in that very *kantil*

fragrant bulb is a constituent part of the *sesajen* flower mix, and is sometimes left on the rocks but more often cast into the sea. While by and large locals do not perform the rituals at the Cepuri, they *do* often take a profound interest in picking out the white *kantil* among the startling pink lines of flower petals in the sand, because they impart that *berkah*-power-luck force. During the more crowded nights of Selasa or Jumat Kliwon, the waterline shivers with the poking, swivelling beams of flashlights from people who come with the express purpose of searching for the *kantil*. One such searcher expressed the power of the *kantil* as it being "sticky" (*lengket*). The *kantil* was *terikut*, which is a passive construction of the word *ikut*, "follow," but the prefix *ter-* is a specific type of passive prefix which expresses accidental action. In other words, the *kantil* is followed, but not on purpose on the part of the follower. He said that if he took the *kantil* with him, money and beautiful women would come onto his path. At the same time, this lucky quality of the *kantil* is not entirely inherent in the flower - after all, no one goes to the *sesajen* vendor to save the trouble and competition of searching for a *kantil* on the beach by just buying them. It is by being offered that the *kantil* becomes lucky, and worth searching in the dark. This mirrors the reciprocity of the *nyekar* flowers; the practitioner pays for the *kantil*, renders it lucky by offering, and leaves it for others - but like the *nyekar* flowers, one cannot derive *berkah* from one's own contributions. The lucky *kantil* is there for others, not for those who performed the ritual.

However, practitioners do sometimes take something else with them: after the casting of the *sesajen*, they often take water from the sea and/or sand from the beach. Brought home in everyday plastic water bottles, this water has various beneficial properties. If one washes with it, it has healing effects. If one pours it out on the floor of a shop, factory, or other business, costumers and success cannot stay away. The water is only capable of this after an offering; one cannot just take it. Unlike the term *berkah* implies, the power of the water is comparable with the neutral power of *kesaktian* and does not restrict itself to health and prosperity: one regular conversation partner said it could be used to drive unwanted trespassers away. If you flicked the water at them with your fingers, they would be forced away. When I asked him what gave the water this power, he ventured that perhaps the water's molecules (*molekul*) were changed if the water had been prayed (*berdoa*) over. This explanation, particularly the way in which it was offered - as an educated guess - echoes the other uncertainties we have seen displayed by both practitioners and opponents, such as on the notion of the Queen's

may be noteworthy, in a *kerata basa* sort of way.

existence or the uncertainties concerning the details of the Queen, the *patih*, and the daughter. The knowledge of what the water can be used for is more immediate and more important than the understanding of how the water acquires those properties. This will find its reflection in the local concepts of religion and non-religion, as we shall see in Chapter 5.

*Essence of Offerings and the Opening of the Spirit World*

While most *sesajen* are cast into the sea, some are left on the beach, or if the practitioners do not go to the beach, left at the Cepuri. Although the *sesajen* are not given to the waves, these are still completed rituals. Practitioners who do cast their *sesajen* into the sea often express some confusion about those that do not. However, one spectator, who did not on that occasion perform the ritual but had done so before, explained that the matter of the offerings is not what is consumed by the Queen; rather, it is the *sari* that is given. Here is continuity between Javanese and Balinese terminology, as Balinese offerings also operate with this concept of *sari* or "essence," which is wafted to the divine recipient by waving it upwards with the right hand thrice (Eiseman 1990, 218). In Bali, after the performance of an offering, when the *sari* has been accepted, the matter of the offering is reduced to ordinary food,

*Figure 16: An especially lavish offering. 2019*

perfectly fit and appropriate for human consumption. In another example of gift-giving, this food is usually not consumed by the one who made the offering, but left on the beach for others or given to the *juru kunci*.

It may seem that there are two different types of offerings; those given entirely and materially, and those of which the *sari* is given and the foodstuff eaten. But this is too strong of a divide, as the sea inevitably throws back what it has received. Apples and other types of food that remain edible after being drenched with seawater are often taken and eaten by (local) bystanders, often the same people who search for *kantil*. The washing up of these gifts in no way implies that they have not served their purpose. As such, the difference is not so much the offering of the *sari* versus the offering of the food materially, but the difference between whether the casting into the sea is necessary for a successful offering or not.

In Balinese understanding of *sari*, the smoke of incense plays an important part, as it is through this incense that the *sari* is transported upward (Eiseman 1990, 219). In the case of Parangkusumo, although incense plays an important part - both the *dupa* sticks and the *kemenyan* crystals - this seems to be a matter of orthopraxy rather than any kind of intellectualized model of what purpose incense serves in the ritual. One *juru kunci*, who told me that more *dupa* is always better, just smiled and said he did not know when I asked him why this was the case. All the same, when I asked the man who had spoken of *sari* whether incense also had *sari*, he said no, "that is just to open the *alam gaib*" (*itu hanya untuk membuka alam gaib*). For him, the incense was a type of tool, a means to an end for connection to the unseen. Given what we have seen in the previous chapter, that the smell of *dupa* is closely associated with the presence of the Queen or of unseen beings in general, it seems that *dupa* is both a tool for the connection with the unseen that is simultaneously so entangled with the unseen that the smell of *dupa* is synonymous with its presence.

*Space, Place, and Authority*

Although it seems as if Parangkusumo has (or is) one single ritual centre related to the Queen, I have already described how technically, the Cepuri and the beach are two different but closely related ritual sites. While for most practitioners, the Cepuri figures as antechamber to the beach, with both being important stations in the ritual progress, for others this separation of space is inviolable. To some, the sea is of primary importance, the entrance

to the unseen realm of the Queen, whereas the stones at the Cepuri are mere rocks. To others, the stone seats at the Cepuri are of vital importance, the sea can be ignored.

Both spaces come with particular demands on behaviour. On the beach, one is not advised to wear green, a taboo that if violated will invite the Queen's anger.[61] The beach is also a liminal space between the human world and the *alam gaib* - one must always be polite on the beach to anyone one meets, because any of them, especially old ladies, could be the Queen's *prajurit* (soldiers) in disguise. Similarly, when I attended a ritual performed by a family from Solo, the father was emphatically telling me that if someone would ask me to come with them, I should decline. Requests for more details were ignored, and the alternative to declining was left unspoken, but would presumably entail entering the undersea kingdom never to return. At the same time, there are enough tourists who roar by on their quad bikes; enough people strolling wearing green, explaining that the taboo is just a myth.

The space inside the Cepuri enclosure of the rocks is less risky. This space is clearly separate from the surrounding park: a roofed gate with two wooden doors is the only way inside the walls, and the passage through this gate is slightly elevated, requiring one to walk up and down three steps, creating an even more thorough separation of the Cepuri space and the outside. Furthermore, whereas the Cepuri is surrounded by grass and tiled paths, the inside of it is entirely covered by the loose grey sands of the beach, the kind in which your feet sink away and walking requires slightly more attention and effort than on solid ground. Even something as prosaic as walking in the Cepuri a different action from walking outside it.

The separation inspires a certain habitus in some visitors. They take off their footwear, leave them on the steps of the gate, and enter barefoot, as one enters a mosque. Some practitioners actually go to the nearby mosque to perform *wudu*, the ritual ablutions one performs for prayer before entering the Cepuri, indicating the non-production of contradiction. Islamic ways of ritual cleansing are fitting for this ritual. Is this because the concept of religion differs in its borders or content, or because the ritual is seen as Islamic?

When practitioners approach the stones, they walk hunched over, respectful, as if bowing. All actions in the Cepuri gain a meaning, a significance: sitting down, standing up, planting

61 The aversion to a colour sometimes associated with Islam does not necessarily point to a dislike of Islam, as the Queen is herself clothed in green. The more common explanation I have heard is that the Queen does not want anyone else to wear her colour.

*dupa*, the act of *nyekar*; they are all performed slowly and deliberately. Some practitioners even seem nervous, self-conscious in the enclosure. The fact that one is scrutinized in the Cepuri adds to this; the chest-high walls are easily (and often) looked over by curious spectators and bystanders. Especially on such busy nights as Jumat Kliwon or Selasa Kliwon, there is always some amount of people looking at you from over the wall as you perform the ritual. All this makes the Cepuri a separate space, a charged space. *Juru kunci* are perhaps the most relaxed in the enclosure, performing their duties seriously but otherwise well willing to chat or relax.

*Figure 17: The Darussalam mosque. 2019*

The mosque and the Cepuri adhere to different spatial regimes. Though they do not compete - the *juru kunci* on duty on a given night will often be found performing his evening prayers in the mosque before returning to the Cepuri - the two structures are skewed, in conflicted angles (see Map 3). Whereas the Cepuri is aligned on the sacred Mataram cosmological axis that goes from the Merapi, through the city, several landmarks, before ending up at the sea, the mosque is aligned with the *qibla* and points to Mecca. The Cepuri

points to the center of the world, which is the royal palace, and the mosque points to the center of the world, which is the Ka'abah. This creates a conflict of angles. At the same time, the *juru kunci* on duty on a given night will often be found performing his evening prayers in this mosque before returning to the Cepuri. A spatial conflict is the only conflict present, as to most visitors, the presence of the mosque in the Cepuri park does not register as odd, and tourists visiting the mosque are rarely even aware of the Cepuri's significance. Poetically, the gap produced by this conflict is filled with a decorative pond.

The spatial division between the Cepuri and the beach is complicated by the difference of authority among the people there. The Cepuri is permanently staffed by the *juru kunci*, experts who can help a practitioner with their ritual, by passing their wishes on "to upstairs," informing them what practitioners usually do to those who are unsure what to do, or inform interested parties about the story of the site. The *juru kunci* is also quite literally what the title translates to: the keeper of the keys. The green doors of the Cepuri gate remain locked without him. Through the *juru kunci*, the Cepuri is further entangled with the more clearly Islamic sites of Makam Syech Maulana Maghribi and Makam Syech Bela-Belu, as in total 31 *juru kunci* rotate between the Cepuri and the two graves in groups of three. Every week after Friday, the *juru kunci* on duty shifts at a given site, and every Jumat Pon,[62] the three groups shift, from the Cepuri to the grave of Maulana, from the grave of Maulana to the grave of Bela-Belu, or from the grave of Bela-Belu to the Cepuri.

*Juru kunci* are a specific subset of *abdi dalem*. Although *abdi dalem* is often translated as "courtier," this refers only to a subset of *abdi dalem*, as many do not necessarily live in or near the palace, nor is *abdi dalem* their job. For the *juru kunci* at Parangkusumo, the position of *abdi dalem* is a ceremonial occupation and a great honour, traditionally passed down from father to son. They receive no salary and have other "day jobs" so to speak, although they do receive monetary gifts from visitors. However, the *juru kunci* are nonetheless under the direct administration of the Kraton, and as such the authority and expertise they wield is both invested by the political (and cosmological) power of the sultan, as well as does their expertise and presence at the Cepuri reinforce the sultan's power and expertise over the *alam gaib* and landscape, because they perform their duties under his auspices.

But the well-worn description of *juru kunci* as the "caretakers of sacred graves and sites" does not do justice to the contestations that are rife at Parangkusumo. Other experts operate at

62 The Friday that overlaps with the Javanese day Pon.

the beach. On Jumat Kliwon and Selasa Kliwon, the fires of innumerable non-sanctioned experts dot the beach, who offer similar services to the *juru kunci*; the passing on of their wishes, desires and prayers to the Queen. Generally referred to as *perantara* or intermediaries, they offer *juru kunci*-like services, passing on wishes and prayers, without the authority of the Kraton, and, obviously, in a different ritual space. Other alternative experts said to operate on the beach are *dukun*, a type of traditional healer and spirit expert.

I met two men on the beach who may have been (working for a) *dukun*. Although they did not say so, they made a lot of fuss about the *uang gaib* (supernatural/unseen/spirit money) they had received through their ritual, and which they would perform a thanksgiving ritual for that evening. One man showed me pictures of this money on his phone: stacks upon stacks of bills under a kris and surrounded by rose petals. When asked how this money came to him, he said that it just appeared everywhere you looked. This ritual could only be done with a *dukun* to open the *alam gaib*, who had done so for them - they had seen the Queen's white horses in the waves. The ritual could only be done once, and only when one was in true financial desperation. Relaying this story to some other regulars, most of them affirmed that this was a nonsense story, designed to reel me and others into business with their *dukun*, who would demand exorbitant sums and then take off. The men themselves however, claimed a true *dukun* would not ask for payment, whereas the *juru kunci did*, which indicated that *they* were frauds. I did not see these men again, although they claimed to be locals.

I also once witnessed a beach-based ritual in which a large family from Solo was led in offering and wading and washing the sea by an expert who spectators identified as a *paranormal* (short for *orang paranormal*, "paranormal person," comparable to a psychic). The man, dressed in flowing black robes, wearing a white turban and sunglasses, exuded a charismatic authority as he laid hands on and splashed the beneficial water on his clients; bystanders sniggered at how this "fraud" touched the women in the group. Similarly, once a group of men came and began to fill large water bottles with water for a visitor. When I asked this man why he took all this seawater he said he was collecting the healing water for an Arab family who lived in Semarang and of whom one woman was ill; following the advice of popular TV *paranormal* Roy Kyoshi who had apparently expounded the healing qualities of seawater (in general; not specifically at Parangkusumo).

*Juru kunci* are obviously aware of these contested authorities and of the potential for frauds. One *juru kunci* warned me not to be too trusting of non-locals I met near the Cepuri; another, responding to the claims of those who said they had seen the Queen, said he had been *juru kunci* for thirty years, and he had never seen the Queen: a sudden wind, a fragrant smell, and the tinkling of bells, that was how she made her presence known. Those who claimed to have seen the Queen were *ngaku-aku* (J., pretending, making a false claim).

The contested efficacy and authenticity of different experts also extends to the very efficacy of the different places. One man who regarded the beach as a potent and powerful place, good for meditation, said of the Cepuri that "rocks can't do anything," and that the saint's graves where similarly powerless.

One practitioner (the same who claimed he had received *uang gaib*) said something that complicates the division of the Cepuri and beach into two ritual sites even further. He claimed that if you performed the ritual on the beach in the front of the Cepuri, you would reach Ratu Kidul. But the beach on either side he called *jahat*, evil, saying that those who performed the ritual there would contact Nyi Blorong. Nyi Blorong can give much more than Ratu Kidul; she can make you a millionaire, but once you have received what you want, you must pay the price. People who make a deal with Nyi Blorong sacrifice their children, their wives, or other family members. They do not do this visibly; they cut the throat of a goat on the beach; but the next morning their child will be dead, or their wife will have had a car accident. Or perhaps they themselves will die within the year. This story is similar to accusations of witchcraft: fortune, magically attained, at the cost of misfortune to others. In this regard the sacrifice to Nyi Blorong is comparable to the procurement of a *tuyul*, an infant spirit who steals from his master's neighbours. It seems likely that the story is far more widespread than the practice, if it is done at all. I have certainly never seen anyone sacrifice a goat, nor have I heard anyone else describe this "evil" part of the beach.

### *A Female Spirit*

Looking at individual rituals, there is a marked tendency among the beach-performed rituals by groups of people (families, extended families, friends) to be led by one particular person. This person may perform such acts as lighting the incense, leading the prayer or meditation or being the only one to engage in it on behalf of the group, casting the *sesajen* in

the sea, bottling sea water. On numerous occasions, these group representatives were women. This is interesting, because the religious denominations of most visitors seem to be overwhelmingly Islam, with Catholicism as a sizeable minority; two traditions in which women can generally not perform rituals in such leading positions. The Queen cult - unregulated, not institutionalized, and marked by variety, mimesis, and creativity in its ritual expressions - is open for women to be on the forefront of a ritual interaction towards God, because as we shall see, for many practitioners this ritual is ultimately addressed towards the Almighty. In one family, a husband said that his wife had, after years of trying, become capable of seeing the Queen. What this means in practical terms is ambiguous; that his wife had a type of access to the Queen that he did not is most relevant here. She later expressed that God and the Queen were inseparably connected, saying that there is no Queen without God. Thus, her ability to connect with or see the Queen is directly related to the divine.

This can be read as an absence of contradiction, in which the Queen and Islam are entirely suffused by each other in an ontological sense. There are no attempts to unite difference; the reality of God entails the reality of the Queen. The implications for the Indonesian concept of religion will be further explored in Chapter 5.

The Queen's own femininity is important here as well. For detractors, who perceive the Queen as an evil and dangerous spirit, her femininity turns her into a kind of witch-like figure, who tempts people into committing the great sin of *syirik* and who snares men for her insatiable sexual appetite. Practitioners value the Queen's femininity in different ways. Several referred to the Queen as a "mother" (*ibu*), including *ibu ratu* (mother queen) and *ibunda kita* (our mother), casting the Queen not only in a positive female archetypal role, but also drawing a connection of kinship. The Queen's femininity in relation to sexuality and eroticism is also noteworthy, given how the sexual encounter of Senopati and the Queen is the bedrock on which the sacred monarchy is founded. The most powerful man is so powerful by virtue of having (sexually) "subdued" the most (sexually) powerful woman; a theme found in other Javanese myths (Smith and Woodward 2016, 320). Yet for all this talk of "subduing" women, this theme expresses that women *can* possess immense power, by *virtue of their femininity*. In their study of female *kesaktian*, Smith and Woodward (2016, 320) found that while on a surface level, women are seen as incapable of gathering mystical power, deeper analysis reveals a deep anxiety about the immense power women can wield. The Queen is

such a woman, and her cult can empower such women. Yet other practitioners tend to de-emphasize the Queen's sexuality, where she takes on a serene, benevolent, Mother Mary-like aspect, in which sexuality of the story of Senopati and the Queen is emphasized as being an intense, spiritual connection and alliance.

This aspect of femininity revolves not only around gender and about the inability of women to obtain positions of influence in mainstream religions; it also echoes the role of the concept of power as described in the previous chapter. While the sultan has as one of his sources of power his wife the Queen of the South, this power is, in the individual ritual, also open to other women. For women who lead the rituals and a few men (those who emphasize the importance of sex for the ritual, see below) it is not just the power of the Queen that is relevant to this rituals - it seems as if it is precisely the gender of that power and its origin that makes it so powerful.

*Criminality and Prostitution*

At the Cepuri are also other women who are far from empowered: sex workers under economic pressure. The area directly surrounding the Cepuri is such a prostitution hotspot that some people who were aware of my keen interest and regular visits to the Cepuri became suspicious of my motives. Sex workers usually lounge around the entrance of the Cepuri, where men slowly cruise by on their motor scooters, browsing for a woman who piques their interest. On busy nights such as Selasa and Jumat Kliwon, tarp tents are set up in the vacant areas next to the boulevard leading to the sea, where sex workers and clients retreat to after negotiations. As a ritual site, so spatially entangled with prostitution, the Cepuri brings to mind the now infamous Mount Kemukus, another *ziarah* site where sex with a stranger was an integral part of an effective ritual. Cepuri visitors and practitioners, opinions differ on whether the prostitution is or ought to be related to the ritual, or whether its presence is incidental. The majority view seems to be that the Cepuri being a hotspot for sex workers is a coincidence. Two entirely unconnected men used the phrase "*ada madu ada semut*" (where there is honey there are ants), implying that the large crowds (of men) were the reason for the sex worker presence. I have spoken to two practitioners (who were, to oversimplify the contested authorities, firmly in the *dukun* and anti-*juru kunci* camp), who said that sex with a sex worker would make a given ritual extra strong (*lebih kuat*). One of them explicitly

connected this with the sexual encounter between Panembahan Senopati and the Queen, suggesting that for (a very select) subset of practitioners, intercourse with a sex worker is a ritual mimesis of the foundation of the realm, and as such, very powerful. Senopati had sex with the Queen, and he founded the most enduring Javanese dynasty. Clearly, there is power in such sex. However, even for those who regard sex with a sex worker as a ritual engagement, no sacrality is imparted to the sex workers for their role in the ritual: these specific men sniggered about them, and many I spoke with tended to objectify them.[63] As a man, a potential client, and a foreigner at that, access to the perspective of these women was very difficult. The one woman I managed to have a conversation of substance with told a sad tale; how her husband leaving her began a financial deterioration that led to her current occupation. While everyone is aware of this sex worker enclave, the police only crack down around Islamic holidays.

By far the majority of Cepuri visitors do not engage with the sex workers in any way. However, there are alternative perspectives. One man described the sex workers as a temptation surrounding the Cepuri that ensured that only the pure of heart could enter - the others would be distracted by sensual pleasures. This same man, who I spent some time conversing with, later, with some delight and excitement, pointed out a sex worker, saying to my surprise, "*Nyi Blorong, Nyi Blorong.*" When I asked him why he called her that, he said that that was just a local name for sex worker. This is hard to explain, but this identification of a sex worker with one of the sea-dwelling spirits lends some weight to the notion that sex with sex workers can be used ritually because it mimics the sex of Senopati and the Queen, where the client mimics Senopati and the sex worker stands in for the Queen.[64] The connections between Cepuri sex work and the Queen rituals, though perhaps tenuous, go beyond mere accidental coexistence, but the scope of fieldwork required to unearth the connections lie outside the aspirations of this thesis, and would perhaps be better served by a female researcher.

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63 This may also have been because as a European foreigner, I am outside of Islamic, Javanese, and Indonesian norms of decency, and am therefore a novel and attractive conversation partner for tantalizing subjects that may be taboo otherwise.

64 Of course, Nyi Blorong is almost always identified as another being than the Queen, Ratu Kidul. This makes the conclusion less straightforward, but it still suggests that the sex workers are not *accidentally* working around a ritual area associated with sexually powerful women.

Presumably because of the Cepuri's large group of sex workers - offering a service outside of the law and thus outside of the law's protection - there is also a criminal element. On two separate occasions I was warned to be wary of specific men, though the exact risk was left unexplained: I simply better watch out.[65] This echoes the warning given to me by one of the *juru kunci*. Schlehe, in 1998, described Parangkusumo as serene and peaceful. It seems that the growing popularity of the shrine and the sex work industry, and the people and money this attracts has compromised this serenity, bringing with it criminal elements.

Javanese *preman* and *jago* (comparable to "macho," literally "(fighting) rooster") culture is notably deeply embedded in the Javanese concept of *kesaktian*, and *jago* will frequently make claims to having such powers (Nordholt 1991, 76), such as being invulnerable - one young man told me in 2016 that there are rough men that, if you stab them with a knife, have no wound when you withdraw it. He connected these abilities with great rituals held at night on the beach. It may be that a specifically criminal practitioner base exists at the Cepuri, but it is equally possible that the criminal presence is a matter of there being ants where there is honey.

### *Incense Entangled: Rhizomatic Intricacies*

The use of incense at the Cepuri seems straightforward, but this practice is actually a prime example of a complex material rhizomatic network that spans across multiple so-called religions. Approaching incense as a ritual infrastructure,[66] or, indeed, an infrastructure of mediation, allows us to illuminate the complexity of this network. The omnipresent *dupa* incense, for example, was described by one conversation partner as something "from China"

65 One night, as I was speaking with a young Catholic from Yogyakarta about the Cepuri and about Senopati, an unsmiling man came and sat next to us; the young Yogyakartan suddenly stood up, said "Well, let's go back to Yogya *mas*!" as if we had come together. He very politely bade the unsmiling man farewell, and made me come with him. Outside the Cepuri he explained, very seriously, that this man was a preman: a gang member, someone in organized crime. He obviously thought I was in danger and had pretended to be my travelling companion for my security. I asked how he had recognized the preman and he said anyone could tell. After he established to his satisfaction that I could get home safely, we went our separate ways.

66 I take my notion of ritual infrastructure from Jörg Rüpke, who in his book *Pantheon* (2018) takes a material approach to Roman and Mediterranean religion, tracing the development of such mainstays as temples as the product of gradual developments in ritual infrastructure. (Perceived) efficacy and mimesis of others is the selecting force in this process. This allows for the development of new trends, techniques, and registers of behaviour to become adopted and, indeed, the new standard.

(*dari Cina*), whereas the true Javanese incense was the crystalline *kemenyan*. Whether this is truly the history of *dupa* on Java is another matter; *dupa* is nonetheless cheaper and easier to light than *kemenyan*: it does not require an *anglo* or an open fire, an ordinary cigarette lighter will do the trick, and it can be planted in the ground, which *kemenyan* cannot. *Dupa* has become the preferred ritual infrastructure likely because it produces the same effect as *kemenyan* (a fragrant smoke) but is easier to use.

The *dupa* used at the Cepuri connects the Queen rituals and their practitioners to a wide material, economical, and visual network that is not limited to the borders of one religion. *Dupa* sold by the vendors at the Cepuri comes in packages that boldly show images of Krishna, the Chinese wealth deity Caishen, and Dewi Kwan Im, the Indonesian name for the bodhisattva Guan Yin, here identified as a *dewi* ("goddess"). The packages with Caishen and Kwan Im describe their contents as *hio harum*. *Harum* translates to "fragrant"; *hio* and *dupa* both describe incense sticks; but *hio* derives from 香 *hion* in the Hokkien language, the historical lingua franca of the Southeast-Asian Chinese diaspora.


*Figure 18: Image of Kwan Im on a dupa package. 2019*

The Kwan Im package describes the contents also as "joss sticks." "Joss," an English-Chinese term which derives from Portuguese *deus*, "god," denotes a Chinese deity statue: "joss stick," then, is a "Chinese deity stick." Both *hio* and "joss sticks" illuminate the Chinese (popular religious, Taoist, and Buddhist) origin of this specific ritual infrastructure. Yet both packages show the names of two prominent mountains in Bali: Gunung Kawi and Gunung Agung. Where this *dupa* are manufactured is unclear, but it is clear that they are not geared towards an Islamic or "*kejawen*" audience; rather, they seem geared towards ethnic Chinese inhabitants of Java.

A third package, the brand name “Sri Kresna,” the Indonesian spelling of Krishna, displays a big image of Vishnu in the contemporary Indian style, complete with his four attributes and *naga* cowl on the front and back. This package proclaims *dupa harum* rather than *hio harum*; the Indonesian word *dupa* derives from Sanskrit धूप *dhūpa*. This *dupa* is produced in Surabaya. In Eastern Java and closer to Bali, this *dupa* may be partially intended for export to Bali: a Sanskrit word, a Hindu god, a Balinese market.

It seems that the types of incense sold and used at the Cepuri, are materially, visually, economically, and linguistically entangled in the Hindu history of Java, Hindu *present* of Bali, and the popular religious, Taoist, and Buddhist practices of the Chinese diaspora in past and present - and all are used by Muslims (and others) in the performance of categorically ambiguous rituals to an ambiguously Islamic Javanese sea deity.

These entanglements transcend notions of culture and religion, and combine to form an assemblage in which the ritual tool of incense is situated, the complexity of which along common-sense barriers of religion, culture, and indeed language highlight the immensity of the failure of the syncretic view to grasp the complexity of the relations, developments, and borrowings that occur across multiple borders at the Cepuri and sites like it. The syncretic view reduces the Queen to a binary: a Hindu-Buddhist relic surviving in an Islamic world. The incense network also highlights the role of Protestant bias in the perception of the syncretic view. These entanglements of incense are rarely mentioned to frame the Queen as syncretic, because they do not concern cosmological belief or doctrine. While an assemblage, it is clearly not salient, because while it crosses the borders of individual religions, it does so in material, visual, linguistic, and economic ways. While the existence of this religious assemblage is just as important to understanding the Queen as the assemblage of cosmological notions - such as the existence of the Queen in an Islamic cosmology - the syncretic view is unable to perceive this assemblage because it is not related to belief, worldviews, and doctrines. While my main argument in Chapter 1 was that the syncretic view fails as a way to approach assemblage because it selects for specific types, we see the other side of this issue here, where a clear assemblage has been hidden by the blinders of the paradigm of religion.

**Motivations: Smooth Sailing and Sacred History**

Why do practitioners put in the time, effort, and money to perform a ritual? Why do some of them spend hours travelling to this site? Different practitioners voice different reasons. Generally, it seems most ritual motivations can be divided into three groups: requests for well-being, specific requests, and participation in sacred history.

Requests for well-being are the most common reason described by practitioners, despite outsiders or detractors generally describing *specific* requests, such as for money. I have already touched upon the word *berkah*, blessings. Similarly, many state that the aim of their ritual is *rezeki*.[67] This term derives from Arabic رِزْق *rizqi* and denotes sustenance, daily bread, a living.[68] Another word that comes back in the statements of countless practitioners is not a concept like *rezeki* or *berkah*, but an adjective: *lancar*, smooth. A desire for *hidup lancar*, a smooth life, the ritual to secure *kelancaran hidup*, "smoothness of life"; smooth sailing. What does that practically mean? It means that the children will do well in school, that my brother-in-law will find work, that we will all stay healthy. Almost all practitioners are concerned with well-being of this low-key sort, not with attaining spectacular riches. One man told me that if I were to perform the ritual, or if I meditated on the beach, surely I would finish my studies quickly. It is comparable with *slamet*, a word which one practitioner also used to describe the intended consequence of the ritual. In his seminal work *The Religion of Java*, Geertz (1960, 14) notes that the state of *slamet*, the aim of the *slametan* ritual, is defined as "nothing is going to happen (to anyone)." Similarly, it seems that *berkah*, *rezeki*, and *kelancaran* at Parangkusumo imply that the ritual is not so much intended to secure extraordinary good fortune; rather, it is intended to secure the *absence of problems*.

At the same time, the ritual can be a thanksgiving ritual for the *berkah* and *rezeki* received. For many, the ritual is a request and a thanksgiving simultaneously. One family performed the ritual once every year, as a request for the coming year and a thanksgiving for the previous year. Similarly, one German man, a convert to Balinese Hinduism, and who performed the ritual with his Balinese wife and their children, stated that the purpose of their visit was to ask for *rezeki*, which he translated as "luck," and to give thanks for the *rezeki* already received.

67 Also spelled *rejeki*.

68 Food stalls and *warungs* often carry names like *berkah* and *rezeki*, as a kind of linguistic amulets, wishes for the success of the stall, a kind of practiced *nomen est omen*.

Rituals with *specific* requests, such as money, material wealth, or love, are described often by spectators and outsiders, but very rarely by practitioners. The men who claimed to have received *uang gaib* were called frauds by other practitioners and experts. The term for rituals such as these performed at Parangkusumo (and elsewhere) used by outsiders is *pesugihan*, from Javanese *sugih* "rich." They are seen as rituals to attain wealth without putting in the work. One local, when explaining why he was not interested in performing a ritual, said he was only interested in *rezeki halal*, not taking the easy route, implying that these ritual can attain *rezeki*, but that this *rezeki* is not *halal* somehow hollow on virtue of it not being earned the right way. Even so, the continued existence of these rumours of specific requests and of the ritual experts that ought to provide them suggests that there are people who seek such specific boons. One *juru kunci* said that he sent people away if their desires were improper, implying that such people do visit.

A third substantial group of practitioners falls outside of these categories. They perform the ritual, but have no goal, no result that they desire. Why do they come, then? *Budaya*, "culture," or as one man said: "*menghormati budaya,*" honouring culture. One even directly questioned my very assumption that there had to be a "goal." What makes the ritual worth performing, given the time and effort required, if there is no goal outside of the ritual itself? It is here that we must turn back to the concept of *ziarah*.

Although *ziarah* often revolves around *berkah*, it is also inseparably connected with history. Albertus Bagus Laksana (2014, 28) writes: "pilgrimage to potent historical sites is an act of making connection to a sacred history through its traces." In this context, the Cepuri is not relevant because it is a doorway into the *alam gaib*, but because it is a *petilasan* (trace) of Javanese history; specifically Panembahan Senopati. The concept of history for Javanese pilgrims, is not so much one of "factual and objective events of the distant past," but as "a collective memory that defines their identity" (Laksana, 2014, 28). The past is "sacred" because it is "the moment of foundation, the beginning of the community" (28). From this perspective the Cepuri is perhaps the most sacred site in the Yogyakarta area, since it is, as one practitioner described it, the place where the first king (*raja pertama*) founded (*berdiri*) Yogyakarta. We can see in the anachronistic name, Yogyakarta to refer to Mataram, how this sacred history becomes immediate; or, perhaps, how the present is sacralized into the past. Approached in such a way, the value of the ritual lies not in any outcome but inside the ritual

itself: the participation in and communion with history, which is not a dead, factual account of past events, but a sacred, identity-forming communal memory. In this sense, the Queen is relevant not because of her active power to help, but as both a historical figure central to the foundation of the community, as well as the "landscape agency" or *dhemit* who sanctioned that very community - more relevant for what it means to be Javanese (or even Indonesian) than she is as an active unseen force.

*Figure 19: This roof tile, seemingly with a message on it and washed up by the sea, could be part of a ritual. If so, it represents a way of performing the ritual I have seen only once. As a ritual infrastructure, marginal practices such as this could become the norm through mimesis. 2019*

**Conclusion: A Sea of Possibility**

We see that these rituals are marked by a high degree of variety in practice, goal, and interpretation. Some come to visit the Queen only, others are interested in reaching Senopati

as well, and yet others visit for reasons they do not entirely articulate. Some come for the stones, others go to the beach; some come with large offerings, some only with offerings. Some come alone, some come in groups. Some come regularly, some come infrequently.

By examining the material aspects of the rituals of the Queen, we see that these rituals are assemblages of Islamic Sufi styles of pilgrimage in which the economy of blessings is mapped onto the Javanese economy of power. The power of the black stones, the visitation of which is likely not Islamic in origin, is incorporated into a ecology of powerful places that equates Sufi and Javanese notions of power. Islamic practices are employed in the rituals as well, as seen in those practitioners who cleanse themselves in Islamic fashion or those who cross themselves to prepare for the ritual, a clear indication of the non-production of contradiction.

In these assemblages, it seems that for practitioners, the rituals and their religion are neither entirely equated, nor are they entirely separate. For example, the rituals and the Queen are in some sense Islamized, as reflected in the statements that the Queen is a conduit for the blessings of God, or indeed that there would be no Queen without God. At the same time, the presence of Catholics, Buddhists, and Hindus seems entirely unremarkable, which suggests that the Queen is not Islamized in any sense meaningful in the paradigm of religion. Then there is also the statement that the site and the Queen are important not because of any religion, but because of her relationship with Javanese identity, transcending all religions. But clearly this is also not the end of it, since Sundanese, Balinese, Sumatran, and, indeed, even Germans also come to visit these rituals, and this was never seen as remarkable or surprising in the way it would have been if that was core aspect.

There are no sweeping statements to be made that do not have exceptions, but what is interesting for our purposes of trying to be attentive to local conceptualizations, is that none of the exceptions are treated as red dots in a white field. Despite the Javanese aspect, the presence of non-Javanese is not salient, nor is the presence of non-Muslims salient despite the Islamic aspect. No one is surprised. This has implications about the local understanding of religions, because if this was the same as the paradigm of religion, the presence of Catholics at an Islamic ritual site would have salience, and something similar must be the case for ethnicity, because otherwise the presence of non-Javanese would have salience. Either both

these concepts function differently than their English-language counterparts, or there is some other consideration central in the understanding of this ritual.

A clue may lie in some of the people who fall outside the three categories of motivation sketched above, who force us to grapple with the limits of our analysis. I will focus on two examples here. One was a Muslim man who believed the Cepuri and beach rituals were all *syirik*, that the Queen did not exist, and that those who did the rituals were wasting their time and insulting God. But still, this man often went to the beach to pray, because it was a good place for prayer. One's prayers were more *lancar*.

The second was a man who said that the offerings were useless and wasteful, and that the Cepuri stones were rocks without power (*kekuasaan*). Yet he too came to the beach regularly, to meditate. The beach, as a space where earth and sea meet, was a charged space, and meditation there can provide peace of mind. This would yield *dayacipta*, concentration. With *dayacipta* did Musa (Moses) part the sea, because he and God had united (*menyatukan*). If those who came and brought *sesajen* took the time to meditate here, they would not need *sesajen* to get what they want. From meditation arises *ilmu pengetahuan*, a special type of knowledge, that is not intellectual only and cannot be explained in words, which, among others, brings awareness of God's presence. I asked this man what his religion (*agama*) was. He answered: *Jawa.*

It is time to explicitly examine local terminology of religion and non-religion.

# 5. Words of Power

> A telling instance is that of a Javanese Christian in Mojowarno who wants to "*ngatoeri nabi Mokammad,"* i.e. dedicate a meal to the prophet Mohammed. [...] The missionary Hoezoo explains that this is not possible, now that he has become a Christian. The man answers that he knows this, but that he would not be at ease, if he would neglect the practice.
>
> Van den Boogert (2015, 238)

In Chapter 1 I argued that the problems of the syncretic view arose because it served to label those phenomena that transgressed the logic of the religion paradigm, and that it could not be improved or replaced because the problems were not inherent to its conceptual content, but to the function it fulfills: labelling assemblage contradictory to the religion paradigm rather than assemblage in general. I also proposed that since the issues with the syncretic view arose out of our concept of religion, the way to move forward would be to pay close attention to local conceptualizations and to remain aware that the contradiction signalled by the syncretic view is in the eye of the beholder. In other words, the role of conceptualizations in the production or lack thereof of contradiction is essential to understanding the dynamics of religious assemblage. Throughout this thesis, I have from time to time touched upon the implications with regard to local concepts, but in this chapter, I will focus entirely on the concepts and categories used at Parangkusumo, examining their conceptual content, history, and usage.

## Categories and Appropriateness

While no practitioners at Parangkusumo conceive of their religiosity as "syncretic" or "hybrid," they have opponents who contest the appropriateness of the rituals in relation to one's religion. The idea of religion at Parangkusumo differs from the world religion paradigm, and its borders are drawn differently, but borders there are. Opponents do not frame practitioner's religiosity as a combination of two religions that creates syncretism, but as a combination that creates "*syirik*."[69] The usual way of conceiving of *syirik* is as the opposite of *tawhid*, the unity of God. *Syirik* is then making something equal to God or to split God up into multiples. *Syirik* and syncretism are obviously different concepts with different meanings and function in very different paradigms, but they are both terms used almost exclusively by outsiders to denote a transgression of religious normality, a contradiction that damages the integrity of one's "religion."

It is not enough to examine what concepts allow for non-contradiction. We must also examine what concepts lead to the perception of *syirik.* We cannot assume the perception of *syirik* arises in the same way as the perception of syncretism.

## *Agama* and Its Others

> When someone says, "Which is better, the religion of Islam or the religion of Java?," that is unbelief.
>
> Javanese manuscript (14th to 18th century) translated by G. W. J. Drewes (1978, 34-36)

At the Cepuri, the Indonesian concept *agama,* usually regarded as a cognate to the category of "religion," is crucial in its absence. While people rarely use this term to describe the practices, all terms that *are* employed derive their meaning in contradistinction to *agama*, and the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the rituals are defined by their relationship to

69 For detractors of the ritual, *syirik* is the usual term - a slightly rarer criticism is that the rituals just do not work.

*agama*. Although *agama* is often translated as "religion," it is a different concept in a number of ways, primarily in how essential it is for citizenship and how strictly it is defined. Swazey summarizes it as follows:

> [*Agama*] is essential to the Indonesian concept of citizenship, as until recently all citizens must declare a religion on essential civil documents in order to receive the services and civil rights guaranteed by the state. However, the Indonesian state only officially recognizes six religions: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. (Swazey 2017, 3)

The state has no official criteria for when something is *agama* (although, as we shall see, there are unofficial criteria that guide policy). The state *has* expressed that this list does not contain all *agama* in the world, but those are not officially acknowledged by the state. Effectively, something is *agama* if the state acknowledges it as *agama*, and it is not *agama* when it is not. In this regard, *agama* functions like "religion" - its meaning determined by politics of use more than by coherent definition, but its borders are drawn much more tightly. Practices and traditions that skirt very close to the conceptual field of *agama* (such as the Cepuri practices or the indigenous religions of Indonesia's many ethnic groups) but are not on the list are labelled with other categories. They are seen as "not (yet) having a religion" (*tidak/belum beragama*) (Maarif 2017, 2), a classification which portrays them as lesser and primitive compared to those who do have *agama*, and which harkens back to the evolutionary concepts of religion as developing out of pseudo-religion and animism as developed by Edward Burnett Tylor (1872).

The classification of non-*agama* also leads to discrimination of these minority religions. *Agama* introduces an institutional discrimination, which is simultaneously obfuscated by the self-evident nature of the concept. Effectively, only the six *agama* recognized above guarantee full citizenship, forcing adherents of indigenous religions to affiliate with an *agama*. Only as recently as 2018, the Supreme Court overturned this decision, now allowing minority religions on civil documents - however, not as *agama*, and only as secondary option if the primary option of filling in an *agama* is declined. While a Supreme Court ruling does not guarantee smooth implementation, it is a step forward in terms of the rights of indigenous religions as they are no longer subject to institutional discrimination - but the new ruling does

not overturn the analytical separation between *agama* and its others. This means that while the practical aspects of institutional discrimination have been mitigated, the concepts that facilitated it remain unchanged.

*Agama's* others are many and varied, and although they all describe different identifications, bodies of practice and knowledge, and imply different associations, they are all primarily similar in that they are not *agama*. The noticeable others of *agama* invoked at the Cepuri are:

- *adat*, originally, non-Islamic tradition practiced by Muslims; by extension, non-*agama* tradition practiced by people alongside their *agama*. From Arabic عادات *'adat* - "customs."
- *budaya*, culture, including the arts, customs, lifestyles - by extension, a habit.
- *kepercayaan*, belief. From *percaya* - "to believe," "to trust."
- *tradisi*, tradition.
- *kebatinan*, "mysticism," inner situation, inner knowledge; literally a noun formed from *batin* - "inner."
- *kejawen*, a supposed Javanese mystical tradition, sometimes seen as "syncretic religion," sometimes seen as a type of Islam (Islam Kejawen); literally a noun formed from "Java" - "Javanism."
- *kearifan lokal*, "local wisdom."

It cannot be overstated that *agama* and the terms listed above are used in ways that directly imply each other. Together they form a semantic field in which they co-constitute each other. This is due to the specific historical development of *agama* and its others.

**A History of Power**

The word *agama* derives from Sanskrit, in which it designates:

> ...'a traditional precept, doctrine, body of precepts, collection of such doctrines'; in short, 'anything handed down as fixed by a tradition'; it is, moreover, the name of a class of works inculcating the so-called tantric worship of Shiva and Shakti.

> In Old Javanese it could apply to a body of customary law or a Dharma-book, and to religious or moral traditions, and the words *sang hyang* 'the divine, holy' often preceding it emphasize its superhuman character. The term is, moreover, used to signify the religious knowledge of a brahman ... , and also that of a high Buddhist functionary (Gonda 1973, 499-500).

How this word came to be a cognate of "religion" is not exactly understood. It seems that the *Shaivagama*, the sacred texts of the Shaiva-Siddhanta order in South India, highly important in medieval Java and Bali (Becker 2004, quoted in Picard 2011, 4), are at the root of the word's development. Later Javanese and Balinese textual traditions use *agama* as a general term for texts dealing with "moral, religious and legal sanctions and practices" (Creese 2009, 242).

Picard surmises that drift of *agama* from a textual genre towards a concept similar to "religion" started with its adoption by Islam, but he does not clarify how this could have happened or what *agama* could have meant at this time.[70] However the specific development went, eventually the term that once described a genre of texts had become similar enough to the concept of "religion" to be used as a translation during the period of Dutch colonial governance, which is where the twist and turns of the history of contemporary *agama* and its others really begin. This process begins with Dutch policy sharpening the distinctions

70 We know, for example, that during the early 18th-century First Javanese War of Succession and the Surabaya War certain lords among the self-styled Islamic rebels used the title *panatagama*. Ricklefs (2006, 210) translates this as "regulator of religion." Having established the problems both with the universality of the term "religion" and the translatability of *agama* into "religion," this translation must invite questioning. It seems nigh impossible that *agama* in 18th-century Java could line up straightforwardly with the contemporary world religion paradigm. As far as I am aware, it is as yet unknown whether the function of *agama* among the Islamic kingdoms (predating the Dutch nationalization of VOC colonies) functioned similarly to the contemporary concept of "religion." I do not know if *agama* could be pluralized to describe different *agama*, or whether it described only Islam. Perhaps it functioned more like *adat*, describing a more general notion of "tradition," as Van den Boogert (2015, 193-98) argues, or even decency or piety – respect to unseen forces. If the meaning of *agama* prior to its religionization is indeed unknown, one reason for this could be the self-obfuscating aspect of the religion paradigm as self-evident and universal. It would by extension show the impact of Christian concepts on the priorities of academic knowledge production.

between two social and religious strata in society, the *abangan*[71] Muslims and the *santri*[72] Muslims. These divisions, though somewhat simplified, would be central in the development of *agama*.

*Agama* and its others went through mutually constitutive processes that religionized *agama* while culturalizing its others. This history is complex, but because it is relevant to the categories employed at the Cepuri, I will briefly summarize it per category. While some are comparable to the others of "religion" - such as *budaya,* "culture," and *tradisi*, "tradition," others have a specific meaning and history that has no cognate in the English language.

*Adat - "customs"*

*Adat* is today used to describe a concept of traditional practices that are often closely tied to ethnic groups. In some parts of the archipelago, such as Papua, the concept of *adat* overlaps with what an English speaker would call indigenous religion. In other areas, such as Java, "indigenous religion" would rarely be invoked to describe what is considered *adat* there, including the Cepuri practices.

In relation to *agama*, *adat* has a particular meaning, denoting a wide variety of practices and objects that are perceived as being both old (in this case, pre-Islamic) as well as analytically separate from "religion." The term was brought to the archipelago and south-east Asia by Islam. Pre-Islamic practice was not discarded, but reframed with the Islamic concept of *adat*. In this construct, *adat* are those traditions that are not Islamic in origin, but that have also not been denounced or abandoned by Muslims. Outside observers might consider *adat* as (semi-)religious, but for a practitioner of *adat*, *adat* is fundamentally different from Islam and not in conflict with it. Significantly, *adat* is perceived as being closely related to ethnic groups. If something is *adat Jawa*, it is inherently tied to the Javanese ethnic group or *suku* (clan, tribe, people).

71 Litt. "the red ones." Groups and people who espouse the traditionalist kind of Islam the *santri* saw as corrupted with all kinds of heretical notions, including the veneration of guardian spirits and the performance of rituals such as *bersih desa* and *slametan*.

72 The term used to describe groups or people with orthodox reformist ideas and agenda. The term originally means (religious) student and had no bearing on orthodoxy. Also called *putihan*, the white ones, in contrast with *abangan*.

Today, the term is a general concept, contrasted with *agama* in general, rather than with Islam only; a Javanese Catholic engaging in *adat* practices would also employ the term.[73] The genealogical origin of *adat* in a conceptual pair with Islam (and later *agama*) has negative consequences for indigenous religions labelled as *adat*, since *adat* is seen as necessarily complementing an *agama.* Since indigenous religions are seen as *adat* and do not have an *agama*, the implication arises they are fundamentally incomplete and out of balance.

The polarization of *adat* and *agama* was introduced by Dutch policy. Before this policy, *adat* was considered a positive addition and an enrichment to Islam (Maarif 2017, 12-13). In order to weaken the influence of anti-colonial political Islam, *adat* was institutionalized (Maarif 2017, 11). The influence of these *adat* groups would help curb orthodox Islamic anti-colonial sentiment. This institutionalization created not only a relation of animosity between *agama* and *adat*, but also pioneered a conceptualization of *agama* and *adat* as incommensurably different concepts.

This culturalization of *adat* was mainly facilitated through what we could call "legalization," where *adat* was equated entirely with customary law. As colonial authorities developed an interest in indigenous law in order to govern "ethically," the academic study of indigenous law practices or *adatrecht* (Dutch: "*adat* law") was born. The overemphasis on *adat* law led to the identification of *adat* with law alone.[74] In this way, a wide field of traditional practices and beliefs was reduced to nothing but law (Maarif 2017, 14). The colonial favour for *adat* law angered the *santri* and *ulama*, who saw the interest for *adat* law practices as a scorning of Islamic law (Madinier 2011b, ch. 2), yielding further polarization of the relationship between Islam and *adat*. Both developments led to the conceptualization of *adat* as animist, not religious; as cultural, not religious; as law, not religion, and as opposite to Islam.

This conceptualization differs from contemporary understandings of *adat*, which is seen as outside of but compatible with *agama*. This actually works to the benefit of practitioners at Parangkusumo, as we shall see.

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73 The extent to which *adat* can or can not cohere with *agama* is a hot button theological issue in many Indonesian Protestant churches. This discussion also shows the ambiguity of the border between the two. As we shall see with the Cepuri practices, the culturalization of such practices actually offers them a space that they could not have if they were not seen as culturalized.

74 To this day sources such as the Encyclopedia Britannica (2015) describe *adat* as "customary law."

*Kepercayaan - "belief" and Kebatinan - "mysticism"*

*Kepercayaan* represents a good example of the differences between *agama* and religion, because *kepercayaan,* which is definitely not *agama*, translates to "belief" - a staggering reversal of the centrality of belief to the world religions paradigm. Through specific historical events and usage, however, the term has become less general, and refers to a specific type of non-*agama*. A rough approximation of the nuances is that whereas *adat* is roughly similar to "indigenous religions," the term *kepercayaan* is more often used to describe what one would call "new religious movements," although there is considerable overlap in the use of the two terms.

More interchangeable with *kepercayaan* still is *kebatinan*, and indeed the two terms were used somewhat interchangeably historically. *Kebatinan* can be translated as "interiority" and derives from *batin*, "inner" in regard to emotions and feelings - in Sufi tradition also the hidden inner meaning of conventional outer (*lahir*) statements. For this reason, Picard (2011, 14) translates it as "the science of inner being," but more often the term is translated as "mysticism." A notable difference, however, is that the English word "mysticism" almost always describes a specific tradition that is a subset of a specific religion - Christian mysticism is Christian, Islamic mysticism is Islamic. *Kebatinan* as a concept is less often combined with such adjectives - precisely because it is not *agama*. As a concept, *kebatinan* could be approximated as "non-denominational mysticism," as practices labelled as such – like the Cepuri practices - can be engaged in by people of different *agama*.

*Kepercayaan* made its debut on the discursive stage on the 13th of July 1945, when a draft of the constitution was composed which stated that the state would be founded on faith in God (*Ketuhanan*), and that those who embraced that *Ketuhanan* would be required to follow the *shari'ah*, but also that the state would guarantee any inhabitants to embrace and practice in accordance with "their religion and belief" (*agama dan kepercayaann*ya) (Maarif 2017, 19). The second clause was introduced by the opponents of orthodox *santri.* These *santri* themselves spearheaded the inclusion of *shari'ah*. Their opposition, such as *abangan* groups and religious minorities, who had a seat at the table, realized that *agama* would be used as a tool of control by the *santri*. In order to defend themselves against this, they would need to identify as *kepercayaan,* which, although undefined, obviously referred to those practices of theirs that were not encompassed by the narrow scope of *agama*. *Kepercayaan* was now a

category protected by the constitution (Maarif 2017, 19-20). Whereas the requirement for Muslims to follow *shari'ah* was removed from the constitution, the phrase guaranteeing freedom of *agama dan kepercayaan* remained and has been a source of contention to this very day. Does the constitution's usage of *kepercayaan* refer to beliefs that are part of *agama*, or does it refer to beliefs in addition to *agama*? The latter interpretation would force the state to safeguard non-*agama* practices.

*Kebatinan* and *kepercayaan* became almost synonymous. Throughout the 1950's, shortly after the foundation of the Ministry of Religion (which was throughout history largely under the control of Islamist groups and a tool for their reformist agenda), numerous groups were founded that resisted reformist notions, which eventually resulted in the formation in 1955 of the *Badan Kongres Kebatinan Indonesia*[75] or BKKI. In response to the formation of these many groups, the Ministry of Religion had already formed *Pengawasan Aliran Kepercayaan Masyarakat*[76] (PAKEM) which operated as a watchdog for these groups. We can see that *kepercayaan* and *kebatinan* are used interchangeably to refer to the same groups. It seems that the use by proponent or detractor did not imbue these words with a sense of approval or disapproval - they are both still used somewhat interchangeably.

Despite *santri* attempts to purify Islam on Java from traditionalist notions by culturalizing *kepercayaan* and *kebatinan*, they found little success. The second convention of the BKKI, held in 1956, was attended by two thousand representatives for an estimated two million people throughout Indonesia (Mulder 1978, 5). The first general election in 1955 also showed that only 30.3 per cent in Central Java and only 24,5 per cent in Yogyakarta voted for an Islamic political party. In this period, few people seemed interested in *santri* orthodoxy and political Islam. Traditionalist understandings of Islam remained the mainstream, and new formalizations of those understandings in the shape of *kebatinan*, *adat*, and *kepercayaan* groups was the way most Indonesian Muslims understood and engaged with Islam.

The *kebatinan* groups continued their congresses, at which the defining of *kebatinan* in relation to *agama* continued. At the second BKKI it was affirmed that *kebatinan* was not a (new) *agama*, but that it improved the quality of religious life (Mulder 1978, 5). On the fourth convention (1960) it was resolved that *agama* and *kebatinan* were equal; *agama* revolved around ritual, while *kebatinan* revolved around inner experience and the perfection

75 The Organizing Body for the Convention of *Kebatinan* in Indonesia.

76 Supervision of *Kepercayaan* Movements in Society.

of man. This characterization differentiated the two in terms of content, while equalizing them in terms of value. They were both necessary.

*A History of Violence*

*Agama* was a powerful tool in the hands of reformists in their discursive struggle against traditionalists. They valorized and legitimized *agama* while recognizing only a narrow group of traditions as such. The defense of traditionalists seems not to have been to attempt to claim the label *agama* for their practices, but to give the labels they had more weight. Terms like *kepercayaan*, *kebatinan*, and *adat* lend some legitimacy as culture, tradition, "local beliefs," and mystical experience. The BKKI also made official attempts to give those categories similar rights to *agama*.

Even so, non-*agama* suffered stigmatization. In the years following the second BKKI convention, opponents of the *aliran kepercayaan*/*kebatinan* pushed the government to ban *klenik* (translatable as heresy, black magic, or occultism). The groups retorted at the fourth convention that they were not *klenik*, but *ilmu putih*[77] and purely spiritual. *Kebatinan* entailed seeking harmony with the self, with humanity, with nature, and with *Tuhan Yang Maha Esa*. Although *kebatinan* groups received some equal status with *agama* in the realm of education, in 1961 a new act from PAKEM warned against "*kepercayaan* groups that can endanger the community and the state" (Maarif 2017, 33). Such stigmatizing warnings continued throughout the sixties.

Religious and economical conflict rose throughout 1964-1965 (Ricklefs 2012, 109), until a failed (not entirely understood) coup provided the spark for years of hardening boundaries and growing suspicion along religious, social, and political lines to explode into "widespread, still almost inconceivable, slaughter" (Ricklefs 2012, 110). The seeming involvement of PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia, the communist party) in the attempted coup, led to the mass killings over 1965-1966 of communists, alleged communists, and ethnic Chinese. *Kyai* (religious leaders) called the extermination of the communists a holy duty, and years of culturalizing *kebatinan*, *kepercayaan*, and *abangan* practices and groups now took on a very grim aspect, as these non-*agama* were now seen as atheist - and therefore communist. Peasant *abangan* were overrepresented among the communists, but *abangan* in general were not seen

77 Literally "white knowledge" as contrasted with "black knowledge," meaning black magic.

as Islamic, and pressured to show that they were proper Muslims by reciting the *shahada* (Ricklefs 2012, 111), and even this was often not enough to save their life. After the killings many people affiliated themselves with a recognized *agama* (not necessarily Islam) in order to get rid of this dangerous association (Ricklefs 2012, 133).

This history of violence is part of the reason why the problematic implications of the syncretic view as mentioned in Chapter 1 cannot be solved by taking self-description of "Muslim" as being paramount. If we argue that the Queen of the South is an Islamic or Islamized figure because the people who engage with her self-identify as Muslims, we overlook the fact that self-description is not a detached analytic appraisal, but a discursive act. During the mass killings of the sixties and the New Order afterwards, this was a discursive act necessary to survive. In addition with how *agama* is something inherited more than individual belief, and is thus inherited by generations born afterwards, it is obvious that this history of violence - of which both perpetrators and family of the victims survive - must still have reverberations in religious self-description. The universalism of *agama* as something everyone has, ought to have, or will have, is thus not only enforced by bureaucratic structures of government, but has in part also been constructed through large-scale violence and the threat of it.

The construction of *agama* and its opposites, the formation of concepts and the drawing of their boundaries, can be seen as inextricable from Indonesia's development as an independent nation-state. Throughout colonial history, anti-colonial sentiment was strengthened in relation with Islamist discourse: during the VOC era, rebels generally accused the sultans of cavorting with infidels,[78] and during the Dutch government administration era, anti-colonial sentiment often argued the Dutch ought to be resisted because they were infidels. The Dutch deliberately attempted to promote and institutionalize traditionalist modes of Islam to maintain their hegemony, and in this way introduced the first split between traditionalist Muslims (and practitioners of indigenous religions) and orthodox Muslims. When Indonesia attained independence, it was obvious to the *santri* that without infidel rule, Indonesia would be free to become a modern, Islamic, self-determining state. This did not happen, and most developments and struggles to draw the borders of *agama* and its others listed above ultimately derive from this Islamist agenda as expressed through a secular state's policies (Maarif 2017, 11-33). Many peculiar aspects of *agama* - how it is defined and the privileges it

78 Such as during the Surabaya War (Ricklefs 2006, 87-91).

enjoys - are due to this agenda. The developmental history of the terms of *agama* and non-*agama* is not a discursive or etymological issue, but a history of national politics.

In this narrow discourse, the Queen of the South is not *agama* simply because she is not on the list of *agama*. Ritual, belief, offerings, and veneration do not make any difference, because in contrast to religion, *agama* is not defined in relation with such things. It is defined by the list, which is in turn defined partly by familiar notions of world religion, partly by Islam.

## The Mirror of Christianity and the Model of Islam

In 1952, the Ministry of Religion proposed an official definition of *agama*.[79] None were officially accepted, but those definitions remain implicit in determining what is and is not *agama* and guide policymaking to this day (Maarif 2017, 25).

It is obvious that the contemporary concept of *agama* reflects to some extent the paradigm of world religions. Tomoko Masuzawa (2004), among others, has shown how this widely accepted concept only seemingly decentralizes and de-eurocentrizes the term "religion." Before this paradigm shift, "religion" referred only to Christianity. The seeming decentralization of world religions in fact preserves this European universalism, because it categorizes the entire world through the concepts and concerns of post-Enlightenment Christianity. Something is a "world religion" if it has certain aspects that, in the post-Enlightenment world, are held to be central to Christianity, such as sacred texts, inner conviction, clear doctrines of belief, formalized institutions, and a central founder. "World religions" are in this sense defined on Christianity's terms; seeing the world through the world religion paradigm means seeing the world reflected through a Christianity-shaped mirror. What does not resemble Christianity is not deemed "religion." So the concept of world religions, while appearing pluralized and universal, encompassing as it does the religions of "the world," preserves the universalism of Christianity, because its plurality is based on Christian notions of what makes Christianity "religion."

79 The Ministry of Religion had become the centre of political power for *santri* groups to exert their influence after the initial failed attempt to enshrine Islam in the constitution. Using the Ministry's power, they attempted to curtail heterodox movements and privilege orthodox Islam. Their two attempts to officially define *agama* served this purpose (Maarif 2017, 25).

The definitions of *agama* proposed by the Ministry of Religion both mimic and differ from the world religion paradigm. The first definition, in 1952, was as follows: an *agama* must have a prophet (*nabi*), a holy book (*kitab suci*), and international recognition. The second, which was put forward in 1961 and which Mulder (1978, 7) characterizes as having "the purpose of denying [*kebatinan*] its place in the Indonesian sun," was as follows: a religion should have a holy book, a prophet, recognize the absolute lordship of *Tuhan Yang Maha Esa*, and have a system of law for its followers. We see that Islam does for *agama* what Christianity does for religion; it is on its terms, through its concepts, and following its concerns (prophets, a central text, monotheism, and religious law) that *agama*-ness is determined. This definition - despite not being officially accepted - worked its own "religionization," or in this case perhaps "agamazation," in for example the case of Balinese Hinduism, in which the unity of all deities became more and more emphasized in order to conform to the monotheist commitment of *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*.

This brief definition does not actually define, but functions only to adjudicate between *agama* and *non-agama*. It works within an assumed familiarity with the issues at stake and those already firmly settled. In this regard *agama*, like "religion," is so self-evident as to be unexplained, its actual definition fragmented, obfuscated, and in a sense, irrelevant. One knows it when one sees it. But while that may be true of religion, it was apparently *not* self-evident in regard to the differences between *agama* and non-*agama*. This definition definitively separated what would become *agama* and its many others.

Though *agama* is comparable to "world religion," and functions almost exactly in the same way, Islam is substituted for the model religion, as the universal by which all is measured. The concept of *agama* is itself an assemblage. *Agama* still functions almost exactly like "world religion," and the (proposed) definition by the Ministry does little but change the language to more Islamic terms and introduce an increased focus on religious law. Though *agama* was in this sense Islamized, the degree to which *agama* wholesale reflects world religion shows that Christianity's influence on world religion remains so invisible that it maintains itself even in the Islamic language of Islamic legislators.

**Types of Non-*agama***

In the brief overview of the history of *agama* and its others, I have already touched upon the concepts of *adat*, *kepercayaan*, and *kebatinan*. I have also mentioned the more recognizable concepts of *tradisi* and *budaya*, and the difficult concept *kejawen*, which skirts around the edge of *agama*. These terms essentially fulfil a similar primary function in that they label non-*agama*, and many are used interchangeably, but it is worth noting that they can imply different things.

*Adat*, *kepercayaan*, and *kebatinan* very much skirt against the realm of *agama*. *Adat* is seen as what indigenous people who do not have *agama* have in *agama's* stead, *kepercayaan* can refer to both new religious movements or religious belief, and *kebatinan* is often translated as "mysticism." While they are definitely not seen as *agama*, they are in many respects quite close to it.

*Tradisi* and *budaya* - tradition and culture - *seem* much more straightforwardly distanced from *agama*. While the first group of concepts may describe ritual activities and mystical experiences, "tradition" and "culture" seem divorced from such things, revolving as they do around art and ethnic and cultural identity. But practitioners at the Cepuri sometimes use these words in contexts that suggest a much stronger overlap with the *agama*-adjacent concepts. For example, one practitioner told me that he came to the Cepuri only in order to pay respect to or to honour the culture (*hanya untuk menghormati budaya*) and not to ask for anything material or for *berkah*. But later, he mentioned having been called to the Cepuri by the Queen and that his grandfather had had a special connection with her. After making his offering, he inspected the waves to see if his offering had been properly accepted, and the arising of a big wave made him smile. This shows that *budaya* is a different concept than "culture" - "culture" is a secular category in contradistinction with "religion," and a ritual performed for "cultural" reasons suggests that its value is inherent and lies in the cultural or ethnic sphere. It would not lead one to understand that the practitioner believes in the reality of the addressed figure or in the efficacy of a ritual. It is clear that *budaya* and "culture" are not really analogous, and that *budaya* relates to *agama* in a different way than "culture" to "religion."

Another practitioner spoke of *kebudayaan* as something that was vanishing, but now, because of its vanishing, it came back in "the smallest ones" (*yang paling kecil*). Sometimes

young children will know things they have never learned, or they know what will happen in the future. These children are *mistis*, an important adjective in describing the invisibly powerful, mysterious aspects of non-*agama*. Such a statement also shows that *kebudayaan* is not (only) analogous to "culture" - as a category of human behaviour - but that it (also) describes a type of actual invisible force or reality that is perhaps entangled with "culture." This relationship becomes more intelligible when seen from the perspective of power and agency as delineated in Chapter 3.

One category frequently used at the Cepuri is *kejawen*. What this term should apply to is hotly contested among the Javanese as well as scholars of Java. A common-sense description (and indeed the one most easily found online) is that *kejawen* describes the "original" religion of Java, which is a syncretic mix between Buddhism and Hinduism. Others emphasize the uniquely Javanese quality of this mix, expressing that *kejawen* is more Javanese than Buddhist or Hindu. Yet others see *kejawen* as interchangeable with "syncretist Javanese Islam," and some claim the term is an empty category, meaning that what it pretends to describe does not really exist. *Kejawen* is also used to describe Javanese traditions, identity, and traditional practices.

At the Cepuri, *kejawen* expresses first and foremost the *Javanese* nature of the rituals. In this way, *kejawen* is somewhat interchangeable with *adat Jawa*. As mentioned in Chapter 4, one *abdi dalem* said that *agama* did not matter here at the Labuhan and the Cepuri, because they "were all family," because they were all Javanese. In this way, the ritual is a performance of and *for* Javanese unity. This is also related to the sultan's role as the figurehead of Javanese culture and identity, and the practice of pilgrimage as an engagement with sacred history, which is, after all, sacred because it relates to the community's foundation. *Kejawen* emphasizes these aspects, but clearly does not encompass all aspects of the Cepuri, as seen by the many non-Javanese practitioners. *Kejawen* as a category for the Cepuri highlights specific practitioners and motivations and emphasizes the connection of the Cepuri with Javanese history and identity.

The difference in association between different types of non-*agama* are subtle, and they are often used interchangeably. *Adat*, *kepercayaan*, and *kebatinan* imply a certain spiritual, mystical practice, whereas *tradisi* and *budaya* denote practices of sacred history and cultural

identity (even though *budaya* can imply the mysterious as well), and *kejawen* emphasizes the Javaneseness of the ritual.

### The Concept of A*gama*

The hegemonic universalism of *agama* means that a person always has *agama*. In this regard it is a very different[80] concept from the contemporary concept of "religion" as something one could conceivably not have, by being atheist. It is accepted as a truism that Indonesia is a "more religious" state than secular, West-European states. People who do not have *agama* are seen as strange, incomprehensible. The common-sense explanation for this is that "religion" is so normal in Indonesia that non-religion is a novelty, strange because of its rarity and suspect because of its link to communism. But if the characterization of *agama* as something teleological that all people have, will have, or ought to have, is correct, then bewilderment at non-religion is not just a response to a violation of normativity, but a violation of what it means to be human. Not having an *agama* is more like not having a name than not having a religion. An *agama*-less person cannot be parsed, it violates established concepts not just of citizenship, but of personhood. Not having *agama* is considered as "primitive" in the case of Indonesia's indigenous religions, and as suspect or dangerous if it entails atheism. All people always have *agama*; if not, they are either "primitives," or regarded as a kind of aberration. It simply is not - or rather should not be - possible.

A practical consequence of the universality of *agama* is that non-engagement or lack of personal enthusiasm for religious practices is not followed by disaffiliation. A term sometimes used in self-description of one's *agama* is "*Islam KTP*," "identity card Islam." Describing oneself or another as *Islam KTP* affirms Muslimness while implying less than regular mosque attendance, or no qualms with alcohol. *Islam KTP* shows that in the *agama* paradigm, identity comes before practice. Put another way, it shows that the paradigm separates *agama*-as-part-of-personhood from the personal engagement that its religionization implies.

80 Although very similar to "religion" as used in the colonial era.

*The Perks of Not Being Recognized as Agama*

With *agama* being so narrowly defined and such a prerequisite to state and bureaucratic recognition and support, it is somewhat ironic that at the Cepuri, practitioners *profit* from the classification of their practices as non-*agama*. What is for an indigenous religion a delegitimizing stigma serves paradoxically as legitimation for the Cepuri practices. The terms *adat*, *tradisi* (tradition) or *budaya* (culture), are harmful to indigenous religions, in that they grant less than full citizenship and characterize them as "not yet having *agama,"* as incomplete and "primitive." But these same terms give the Cepuri practices a discursive home. It gives them a legitimacy and a way to argue their value that is framed in terms of cultural identity, history, and personal spirituality rather than *agama*-ness.

Furthermore, the classification of non-*agama* - though it historically served to stigmatize practitioners and even mark them for violence - gives contemporary practitioners a strong argument in defence of the appropriateness of their practices against accusations of *syirik*. How can something that is not *agama* be *syirik*? Again and again practitioners told me, when they sensed the general tenor of my questions, that of course there is nothing contradictory about their *agama* and the Cepuri, because the Cepuri is merely *budaya* (culture) - or any of the other terms. The radical separation between *agama* and its others, although it has historically worked to disenfranchise and delegitimize heterodox groups and minority religions, now is appropriated and adopted by practitioners of the Cepuri practices. Although the Cepuri practices share many characteristics with traditional *abangan* practices, the discourse that once hurt *abangan* Javanese is now mobilized to argue that their *agama*, which they have and affirm, is in no way impacted or sullied by this practice. How could it? It is *adat*, *budaya*, *tradisi*, *kepercayaan*, et cetera.

*Syirik and Agama*

We can see that *syirik* as a category in relation to *agama* functions somewhat differently from *syirik* as an Islamic theological concept. The most important difference is that one is capable of committing *syirik* when one is of another *agama* than Islam: Protestants and a Catholics can commit *syirik* against their own *agama*. One Catholic woman told me a ghost story about Catholic nuns encountering a ghost and attempting to placate it, and had the abbess say: "Stop it, stop this *syirik*!" This is not a matter of a Muslim parsing non-Muslim

concepts of idolatry through Islamic concepts: this was a Catholic woman narrating a Catholic abbess. It is clear that in this usage *syirik* is a general category, not a transgression only Muslims perceive or care about - but this means that this *syirik* cannot be reserved for violations of *tawhid* or other Islamic theological concerns. So what transgressions does *syirik* describe?

One frequent visitor told me that *syirik* is *keduanya* ("two," "the two," also "both"), not in theological terms - ascribing an equal to God - but as engaging in two *agama*. In this way, *syirik* arises not out of a certain practice or worship of another than God, it arises when the prescribed singularity of an *agama* is transgressed. It should not escape our notice that this characterization of *syirik* is remarkably similar to the syncretic view. *Syirik* in this sense is to *agama* what syncretism is to religion, the only difference being that *syirik* is unambiguously negative. But as syncretism is dependent on the concept of religion, *syirik* is dependent on the concept of *agama*. In this way, the characterization of the Cepuri practices as *adat*, *budaya*, or other non-*agama directly entails their appropriateness*, and offers a great defence against accusations of *syirik*. After all, engaging in non-*agama* in addition to one's *agama* poses no problems.

Of course, this is not the end of the story, because this is not the only meaning of the word *syirik*. The same visitor who described *syirik* as *keduanya* went on to use his lighter as an analogy. Holding his lighter up to me, he said that if he were to ask God for wealth *lewat* (via or through) the lighter, that was not *syirik*. But if he were to ask wealth *of the lighter itself*, that would be *syirik*. This could be seen as more in line with concerns with *tawhid*, and more revolving around theological definitions of *syirik* rather than notions of category and concepts. However, it still keeps open an obvious discursive defence to accusations of *syirik* - this ritual is ultimately addressed to God.

Yet other statements show that *syirik* is or can be more than just the combination of two *agama*. One man was of the opinion that of course the Queen existed, but that he had never done the ritual because he was unwilling to run the risk of committing *syirik*. Statements such as these - and of course statements by strong detractors, unambiguous in naming the practices as *syirik* - show that while the total separation of *agama* and *adat* is a well appropriated tool in the discursive arsenal of practitioners, it is not the case that the boundary between these concepts necessarily means that *adat* can never be *syirik*. For some, if the ritual is performed

in a particular way - such as asking the Queen directly, instead of treating her as a conduit for God - the practitioner risks committing *syirik* even though the ritual is not *agama*.

Detractors claim that practitioners seek the favour of the Queen, which would be *syirik* by this definition, but very few practitioners describe their own actions in this way. Overwhelmingly, they affirm that this ritual and the *berkah* that derives from it are ultimately from God, with the Queen and Senopati figuring as intermediaries, divine agents, harmonizing the ritual with Islamic (monotheist) notions of appropriateness.

Summarizing, we can say that broadly, committing *syirik* is avoided, and the accusation of it deflected, through two different ways. Firstly, the ritual and its purposes are performed in line with Islamic (more broadly monotheist) notions of appropriateness, by arguing that the ritual is ultimately addressed to God. Secondly, the ritual is not *agama,* and therefore cannot impact one's *agama*. There is a tension here: maintaining a strong conceptual border between *agama* and non-*agama* is at odds with arguing that the ritual is addressed to God, because the religionization of *agama* implies that matters divine fall under *agama*. This tension is likely due to the two statements being responses to two different meanings of *syirik*: the accusation of engaging in two *agama*, which is countered with the conceptual border between *agama* and non-*agama*, and the accusation of appealing to or worshipping something other than God, which is countered by affirming that the final addressee of the ritual is God. These two strategies may *seem* paradoxical when we take into account the religionization of *agama* - how can a ritual addressing God not be (interfering with) *agama*? - but many practitioners espoused a view of *agama* that differs from "religion" in yet another crucial way.

**The Effective Versus the True**

> He is tolerant about religious beliefs; he says, "Many are the ways."
>
> Clifford Geertz on *abangan* religiosity (1960, 127)

A common theme at the Cepuri that is quite revealing is the notion that all religions (*agama*) are inwardly similar, or that they are all equally valid. This does not mean that they are considered culturally or legally valid, as a Dutch atheist might call a Dutch Christian's

faith "valid," where the atheist does not believe Christianity to be true or its practices effective. The notion that all *agama* are valid differs in that it holds all *agama* are *equally effective*. This finds its reflection in two different metaphors that reveal two different aspects of this unity.

*Religions Are Like Clothes*

The first is the statement "religions are like clothes" (*agama seperti pakaian*), a statement used by many of my interlocutors at the Cepuri. In *kerata basa*-like fashion, this statement is a play on words between *agama* and *agemen* - Krama Javanese for "clothes." The wordplay is lost in Indonesian, but the implications are the same. It implies that the outside of *agama* is not the same as the inside. When I put on different clothes, I do not become a different person underneath. The same way, while multiple *agama* appear outwardly as different and diversified, they are inwardly the same. This understanding of *agama* shows that the differences between different *agama* are not understood in the same ways as the differences between religions. This quality of incommensurability, of being mutually exclusive, which is such a core aspect of the concept of religion and the cause of the syncretic view seems not to be inherent to the concept of *agama*. *Agama* are not essentially different from each other. In fact, they are essentially *the same*. The borders - which are only outward borders - are not a deeply internalized *analytical attribute of the concept of agama*, but are instead enforced by policy.

To illustrate, one Protestant man argued against mixing *agama* as follows: he said that if one was to go to a Protestant church on this day, to the mosque on that day, and to a Catholic church on another day, Jesus would be mad. The way he argued this point suggested that Jesus was primarily concerned with that one picks a single *agama*, and that picking Protestantism was a secondary priority. While different *agama* and different religions are both not to be mixed, for religion, this is inherent aspect of the concept. Mixing *agama* is conceivable but inappropriate; mixing religions is like dividing by zero. This is directly related to the notion that *agama* are all effective, as expressed by the other metaphor.

*Religions as Bridges*

The second metaphor that reveals the nature of the unity of all *agama* is that of bridges and other implements for reaching something. At the Cepuri, proponents often describe different *agama* as being different ways (*cara beda*) of achieving the same goals (*tujuan sama*). This is a type of reception of religion that is quite old in Java. So a character in the *Babad Pangeran Diponegoro* states: "'The aims (*maksud*) of Islam and Buddhism are equally good, what differ are the rules of ceremonies of these religions. But this does not matter'" (Aboebakar 1957, quoted in Feillard 2011, 48). In this regard, the concept of *agama* could not be more different than the concept of "religion." Whereas "religion" is often used to describe a specific structure of belief, *agama* describes not theoretical knowledge but a *method*, an *effective practice*, the effectiveness of which is not diminished by other effective methods. If "religions" relate to each other in terms of a disagreement between two people of whom, by necessity, only one can be (entirely) correct, different *agama* relate to each other as a boat, a bridge and a ford relate to each other as different ways to cross a river. They are undeniably different, but the existence of one does not impede the other's ability to cross the river.

In fact, the comparison to a bridge was made by multiple interlocutors, and crucially not only in the realm of *agama*. They claimed that the Cepuri was a bridge (*jembatan*) to God. Another term used in this context was *lantaran.* This term, Javanese for "intermediary" but more literally "a means for reaching something" (Robson and Wibisono, 2002), can describe such prosaic implements as poles or hooks to lift buckets out of wells, but was used by interlocutors to describe the function the Cepuri served. It was "a means for reaching" God, and what is more, it was one of many of such *lantaran*. From this perspective, non-*agama* and *agama* are functionally identical, and this is reflected in how non-*agama* practices like those at the Cepuri are still understood to be a *lantaran* to the object of *agama,* God. This shows that there is another distinction between *agama* and "religion."

*Ways of Knowing*

Whereas the concept of "religion" is held to contain cosmological postulates such as the reality of God, the understanding of *agama* as a means for reaching God *presupposes* God. The reality of the divine *Tuhan Yang Maha Esa* is an axiom, accepted as pre-ideological, self-evident. But we might be mistaken in approaching the situation as if "belief in the Divine"

predates *agama,* as if belief predates action. It is precisely the *efficacy* of *agama* that is emphasized by its "means of reaching" conceptualization, not *beliefs*. This efficacy is not based upon systems of "belief*,"* although it does operate in a certain understanding of reality. It has long been theorized, for example, that the early spread of Islam in Indonesia was facilitated by how it was understood as new way to engage with supernatural power.

*Agama* as a "means of reaching" may not necessarily imply a pre-ideological axiom of the divine because, as Van den Boogert (2015, 181-213) suggests, it may be that the differences between *agama* and "religion" arise out of different modes of knowledge. Religion, he argues, concerns theoretical knowledge, a structure of postulates that cohere with each other. A logical incompatibility entails total incompatibility, and the coherence of the knowledge system depends on its internal structure - it cannot be mixed with another religion without compromising that coherence. For example, the Islamic postulate that God is not begotten and does not beget cannot cohere with the Christian postulate Jesus Christ is the only-begotten son of God. But *agama*-as-bridge shows a different kind of knowledge, a knowledge-to-act, knowledge that is relevant not for the sheer sake of it being true, but relevant for how it informs *action*. The mode of knowledge underlying "religion" is one that strives for a true theory, whereas the mode of knowledge underlying *agama* is one that strives for efficacy of action.

In this regard, the metaphor of *agama* as a bridge or "means of reaching" emphasizes this idea of action, of agency, of using a tool to achieve an end. This explanation may also serve to explain the prevalence of the understanding that all *agama* are essentially valid. This is hardly a maintream idea within "religions." The most one might go is that another religion is *partly* true. How then is it possible that so many practitioners at the Cepuri argue that all *agama* are good, that they are all inwardly the same? If "religion" revolves around knowledge-as-true-theory and *agama* revolves around knowledge-guiding-effective-action, it follows that different "religions" are essentially incompatible, because when two statements are in logical contradiction, only one statement can be true - but where there are two effective techniques, they can both be effective. The most incompatibility that could arise between multiple "means of reaching" *agama* is the claim that one is *more* effective than the other - and this is precisely what historians think may have characterized the spread of Islam.

The idea that a specific knowledge and the Indonesian "religious" landscape could be related is suggested by other terms, such as *ilmu hitam* and *ilmu putih*, literally black and white "knowledge," but terms which roughly refer to "magical" practices that help or harm. The Javanese word, *ngelmu*, also denotes a type of special powerful knowledge. The *ngelmu* taught by prince Mangkunegara IV in his work *Serat Wedhatama* is even described as the *agama* of the king (cited in Van den Boogert 2015, 226). The most successful Catholic missionary on Java, Franciscus van Lith, was understood as a *guru ngelmu* (teacher of (spiritual) knowledge) (Madinier 2011, 33).

This struggle between exclusive belief and inclusive knowledge is an interplay (as well as a fertile ground of misunderstanding) between missionaries and missionized throughout not only Indonesian but world-wide encounters between Christianity and native inhabitants, as well as in much earlier historical periods, including the ancient world. It may be that the knowledge-as-guiding-efficacy-of-action is the more common way-of-knowing, whereas knowledge-as-true-theory is specific to post-Enlightenment Christianity and modernity, mistakenly taken as universal.

*Mapping Agama at the Cepuri*

When attempting to map the discourse of category at the Cepuri, we are confronted with complexity that far outstrips notions of syncretism/anti-syncretism. On the one hand, there is religionized *agama*, which is essentially self-contained and exclusionary. It mirrors both Islamic and Christian concerns in that it is concerned with doctrine and lawfulness. On the other hand, there is *agama* as means-to-an-end, which is not essentially exclusionary and in fact affirms the essential sameness and efficacy of all *agama*. At the same time, this notion of *agama* still affirms the exclusivity of one *agama* vis á vis another, which is in all likelihood the result of religionizing discourse and law. Non-*agama*, on the other hand, remains efficacious as well as appropriate for adherents of all *agama*. While the Cepuri is not *agama* and thus not exclusionary, it *does* resemble *agama*-as-means-to-an-end in that it is an effective technique; one that many practitioners claim is addressed ultimately towards God.

But matters are more complicated: it might *seem* as if there is a discursive binary with "religionized" *agama* on the one end and means-to-an-end *agama* on the other, as follows.

| | Non-*agama* are... | Other *agama* are... |
|---|---|---|
| For religionized *agama* | *syirik* | essentially separate |
| For means-to-an-end *agama* | additional techniques | equally valid |

But this binary does not describe the full complexity of reality: I have spoken with detractors who denounced the Cepuri practices as *syirik* while maintaining that all *agama* were *baik* (good) or had *tujuan sama* (the same goal). Such a position suggests an understanding of *agama* as effective techniques, because a religionized understanding would tend towards an incommensurability rather than sameness. This would line up with an understanding of non-*agama* practices as other effective techniques - but in reality, non-*agama* practices were *not* accepted and branded as *syirik*. Here, the judgement of *syirik* might arise out of theological discourse, of an understanding of *agama* as effective ways of reaching God, and non-*agama* practices also effective, but effective ways *of reaching someone else*, and therefore *syirik*. The position of recognizing the inherent sameness or validity of all *agama*, then, does not *necessitate* a similar appraisal of non-*agama*.

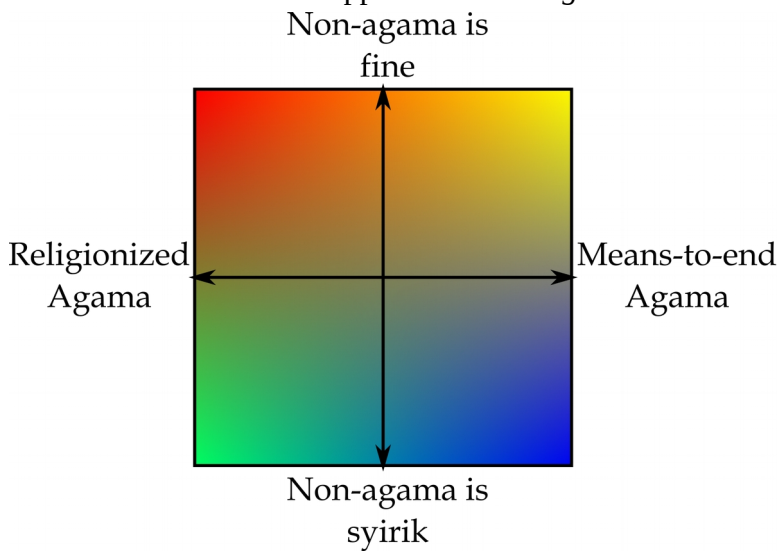


*Figure 20: Depiction of the possible discursive positions to take concerning agama at the Cepuri.*

At the Cepuri, *agama* is a concept under not one, but multiple tensions. The tension between religionized *agama* and means-to-an-end *agama* is one, but the tension as to whether

it is appropriate to combine *agama* with non-*agama* does not clearly line up with the first one. It seems that the tensions of the concept are not captured by a binary of "religionized" *agama* against means-to-an-end *agama*, or even a spectrum between the two, but a gradient characterized by two axes; one between the two different concepts of *agama*, the other between the appropriateness and inappropriateness of practicing non-*agama*.

**A World of Efficacy**

On three different occasions, Muslims who regarded the Cepuri with apprehension and as inappropriate for a Muslim, compared the Cepuri with Balinese Hindu places. One told me that if I was interested in the Cepuri, I should go to Bali, because they had a lot of places like this. Two other women told me that they had visited a place like the Cepuri on Bali once, and advised me to be very polite. They had visited Bali themselves and had followed such prescriptions - not merely out of sensitivity towards another *agama*, but because of the *true importance of these prescriptions*. The practice of politeness at sacred places has a certain apotropaic value, it is an *effective practice*, and it is shared and socially reproduced because of that efficacy, *not* because of its coherence with a theoretical body of knowledge.

This shows that the border between non-*agama* (the Cepuri) and *agama* (Agama Hindu Bali) can be incredibly porous even for non-practitioners. The behavioural prescriptions of a Hindu sacred place were followed by Muslim women - not merely out of sensitivity towards another *agama*, but because of the *true importance of these prescriptions*. Who knows what might have happened otherwise? This is why they shared this knowledge with me. The practice of politeness at sacred places has a certain apotropaic value, it is an *effective practice*, and it is shared and socially reproduced because of that efficacy, *not* because of its coherence with a theoretical body of knowledge.

The efficacy of practices is not predicated on large intellectualized structures, it is not an article of "belief." It is simply the way things are. I suspect that it is because of this reason that the efficacy of practices resists being subsumed under the process of religionization: it is not perceived as something that can be disagreed upon. It figures in the wider background economy of power, which could equally be reframed as an *economy of efficacy*, or even be reframed as a specific mode of knowledge that selects primarily for *effective* knowledge and secondarily for *true* knowledge. It appears that the notion that some things - places, people,

actions, objects, words - have an inherent efficacy is an implicit axiom behind contemporary Indonesian lived religion. It is an implicit axiom in that it is experienced as pre-ideological, obvious reality, not part of any *agama* or articulated philosophy, but a direct aspect of how reality is experienced and interpreted in Java.

*Acting Islamically*

The notions of knowledge-to-act and efficacy facilitate assemblages impossible in the religion paradigm. It seems that in so-called syncretic Javanese religiosity, *agama* is a concept superimposed over an economy of efficacy which functions in a mode of knowledge-to-act. To these people, *agama* is something one has, but which hardly relates to doctrine or belief. It is more of a body of knowledge with a group affiliation, with little bearing on how one engages with the wider economy of efficacy. If so, many of the more difficult aspects of Javanese religiosity suddenly become more intelligible.

Returning to the example of the lighter, for example, where it is *syirik* to ask something of the lighter but acceptable to ask something of God via the lighter, things begin to fall into place. I will take a related quote concerning amulets from Ricklefs to illustrate this:

> Abdurrahman also provided a veneer of orthodoxy with regard to supernatural amulets by saying that one could believe in them so long as one regarded them as tools by which God's grace flowed to the Prophet, then to the saints, then to the gurus and thence to oneself. (2012, 123)

Ricklefs' use of the metaphor of veneer is somewhat ironic given its historical associations with Islam on Java being only skin deep. His phrasing can be read as echoing the notion that Javanese Muslims know they are damaging the integrity of their Islam, but do not care - not because Ricklefs wants to say this, but because his concept of religion allows nothing else. This is similar to my own characterization of such explanations as "defences" against accusations of *syirik*. It treats such statements as little white lies, which people utter with a motive and not because they believe they are true.

But within the mode of knowledge-to-act, the statement becomes intelligible beyond an attempt to force a non-Islamic idea into fitting into Islamic doctrine. The statement is an

example of the integration of an effective practice with the belonging and knowledge of *agama*. It is not a justification of contradiction. If the efficacy angle is accurate, the efficacy of the amulet requires no justification or doctrine. As Anderson (1990, 23) wrote about power, “Power is.” It justifies itself. In other words, the statement does not *attempt* to paint a doctrinally alien practice over with the veneer of Islamic doctrine (which we can only parse as dishonest, because either something is in line with doctrine or it is not). Abdurrahman is not *trying* to convince Ricklefs that a non-Islamic practice *is* perfectly Islamic or *becomes* Islamic if performed in this manner. Rather, he is emphasizing the importance of using the (neutral, axiomatic) efficacy that is there *Islamically*.

Following this line of thought, a myriad of other things suddenly come into sharp focus. The existence of *kebatinan* as a non-denominational mysticism, for example, is taken for granted by many authors, but the very concept should raise eyebrows in the paradigm of religion. How is it possible that people from different religions engage in the *same mysticism*? Yet through the lens of knowledge-to-act, it becomes clear that “mysticism” may be a misnomer. *Kebatinan* is undifferentiated across *agama* because the ordering principle is not theory (to which different doctrines would matter), but efficacy (to which they do not). It is a practice to attain *ilmu* (J. *ngelmu*), knowledge. This *ngelmu* is, like power, just there, independent of any *agama*. *Ngelmu* is simultaneously both knowledge and spiritual power. *Kebatinan* is a body of effective practices to attain spiritual knowledge-to-act – *agama* has nothing to do with it.

It also explains the disagreement surrounding *who* is actually approached at the Cepuri: is it the Queen, Senopati, God, or God working through them? That is the wrong question. Knowing the ritual means knowing how to do it and what for. Knowing *who* is addressed is secondary. *That* it addresses is what is important. This is reflected in the *juru kunci* saying he passes up people’s petitions *ke atas* (upward), just in a general direction. God rules over all either way, so whether it is the Queen who recognizes God or God working through the Queen or God Himself is splitting hairs. It is an irrelevant question. This also puts into perspective what I wrote in the beginning of Chapter 4, that the Queen sometimes seems a side issue in the Cepuri rituals.

It would also explain why disagreement on the Queen and the Cepuri rituals revolves mainly about appropriateness and efficacy, rather than correctness. These two types of

disagreement can be seen as a religionizing impulse in the filter of knowledge-to-act, having two different effects. People who decry the rituals as inappropriate for a Muslim or a Protestant do not think to question its efficacy. They decry the practice on the basis of doctrine, which is the product of religionization. Yet the importance of doctrine is parsed within the frame of knowledge-to-act: knowledge you are not by doctrine *allowed* to act on is still knowledge-to-act. It works, but do not do it.

The reverse effect is when people object to the rituals because they are ineffective. They call practitioners deluded because, they say, what power is there in these rocks? None. This argument is usually made by people of a reformist, *santri* bent, who regard it as superstition. But this line of argument also suggests that this inefficacy is what is wrong with the practice. In other words, if it *was* effective, it would not be wrong. It argues against the practice on the terms of knowledge-to-act, saying not that it is *false* (improper theoretical knowledge), but that it is *useless* (improper practical knowledge).

It illuminates why so many local spirit sites are “dressed up in Islamic form,” as Chambert-Loir (2002, 133) says. They are not “dressed up.” That conclusion can only be drawn on the basis of doctrine, theory - they are not Islamic because they are not a postulate of Islamic doctrine, but they have been dressed up to *appear* Islamic. It is the very reverse of the “religions are like clothes” idea. Again, the phrasing suggests a little white lie. But through the lens of efficacy, we see that this dress-up is not dress-up at all. Rather, it is a sincere way, born of a commitment to Islam, to engage with a world suffused with efficacy in an Islamic manner.

It explains why my interlocutor, mentioned in Chapter 4, was entirely confident when explaining that the seawater could be used to drive away trespassers, but when I asked why this was, he had to venture an educated guess. Knowing the water is knowing what the water can be used for. Knowing why it can be used in that manner is secondary. Who cares? I was asking the wrong question, a knowledge-as-theory question.

It explains how Pakubuwana II could come to Sunan Lawu without having been “converted” to “belief” in that spirit. It explains why, to Wessing’s surprise, religious leaders do not say belief in Nyi Blorong is forbidden.

To come to our central point, it explains why the Queen rituals and *abangan* religiosity in general is not contradictory and therefore mischaracterized by approaching it from the

syncretic view. That is to say, all contradictions are imagined by observers. The *abangan* religious assemblage is predicated on an economy of efficacy and a mode of knowing that prioritizes effective action. Like all other religious phenomena, it is an assemblage. But its salience derives from borders that are only there for outsiders. It is an assemblage that is in harmony with practitioner concepts. Through the action-centered mode of knowing and the economy of efficacy, the world religions paradigm takes on the shape we find at the Cepuri. In this frame, the categories of world religion function as group-bound bodies of knowledge passed down through the generations. They are more akin to associations than "religions."

If Javanese salient religious assemblages are facilitated by a mode of knowledge that selects for useful knowledge above correct knowledge, and by a economy of efficacy that operates within that frame, all these examples are made intelligible in a way they never are in the syncretic view.

*Knowing Disagreement*

At the same time, I want to emphasize that we should not overgeneralize Javanese religiosity. If one thing is clear in this thesis, it is that disagreement and contestation among Javanese people on these rituals abound. The central point of this thesis, however, was not to describe Javanese religiosity, but to find out whether those seemingly contradictory aspects of it could not turn out to be not contradictory from local perspectives - the only other explanation being ignorance or hypocrisy. This perspective of efficacy allows us to reconceptualize the so-called syncretic aspects of Javanese religion - and religion in general - but it should not lead us to see Javanese religion as a monolithic whole, predicated on this foundation. As I have shown, some disagreement results from religionizing discourse as filtered through the knowledge-to-act foundation, but other forms of disagreement really do focus on incoherence and on *syirik* as a theological category rather than one of *agama*.

However, the perspective of efficacy allows us to understand religious difference in Java not as being waged between reformist *santri*'s (stereotyped as overzealous and intolerant) and syncretic *abangan* (stereotyped as ignorant and hypocritical) but as between people who act in accordance primarily with what is correct and those who act in accordance primarily with what is effective. But of course both considerations can be important to the same people. Just as it is important not to essentialize Javanese religiosity, it is important not to essentialize

reformists and traditionalists, because these ways of knowing, while facilitating different types of religiosity, are not mutually exclusive.

For example, one detractor who considered the Cepuri practices to be wholly *syirik* centred his argument not on the inappropriateness of the practices, or how offensive they were to God, but rather on how *useless* they were, how empty of efficacy. This detractor later went to the beach to pray. This was an entirely Islamically appropriate prayer, not addressed to or concerned with the Queen in any way. However, he went to the beach because of the *efficacy* it would afford his prayers: it would make them more smooth (*lancar*). Though he rejected everything else, the efficacy of the space of the beach remained with him, an obvious, self-evident truth. Clearly, this man knew *why* one should not perform the Cepuri rituals, but also knew *how* to make his prayers more effective. The efficacy of the space was still an unremarkable, obvious reality. In contrast to how it would be approached from the world religion paradigm, the efficacy of the beach remained entirely unmarked for transgression or inappropriateness, but rather the background onto which he mapped his Islam, the soil through which his Islam grew. This shows how resilient the notion of efficacy is, and how easily they can be part of the assemblage of an otherwise rather religionized and exclusionary understanding of *agama*.

*Figure 21: A juru kunci waits for the next visitors next to a flaming anglo. 2019*

**Conclusion: Power itself**

We see that generally, the concept of *agama* and non-*agama* (especially as used by practitioners) differs vastly from "religion," and that this seems to be related to the non-arising of the contradiction that so bewilders colonial overseers, missionaries, and contemporary detractors. In this chapter, I have examined two kinds of power: the political and discursive power wielded by categories of *agama* and non-*agama*, and the power of efficacy, the inherent efficacious power of certain acts, places, and people. This idea far outpaces the actual use of the word *kesaktian* and its translation by Benedict Anderson as "Power" (1990). I have argued that *agama*, described by practitioners as "like clothes" or "like a bridge," implies the same understanding of *agama* as an effective practice, and that for practitioners, non-*agama* is analytically a similar effective practice, only discursively different from *agama*.

In the conceptual field of *agama* and non-*agama*, as used by practitioners, an ecology of rituals and a system of belonging exist side by side. A practitioner's *agama* is that to which they belong, and they would not engage in rituals of another *agama.* Even so, the practices denoted by non-*agama* remain an option to them - as a way to expand their own agency in specific matters; to ask for specific boons or general well-being; or to sacralize the present through engaging with sacred history. The guiding principle of the Cepuri practices is their efficacy in attaining certain goals. Whether this is accomplished by the Queen, Senopati, or God, is less relevant than its efficacy (and to some extent, the inherent value of engaging with sacred history).

So, approaching the matter by way of the syncretic view, assuming a contradiction and trying to untangle it essentially misses the point, because the Cepuri practices are not an *intellectual* matter but an *effective* one, and as such cannot *have* contradiction, only competition. One elderly *juru kunci* said that ever since the Queen had helped Senopati in his quest to become king, the site of the Cepuri had come a "place of asking" (*tempat permohonan*). It is the *asking* that is primary, not the intellectualizing structures that may surround or incorporate it. We see that even for detractors the beach remains a potent place of asking. As such a place of asking, it is one of many "means of reaching" available to inhabitants of Java. Because practitioners inhabit a world of efficacy and engage with it primarily on the basis of knowledge-to-act, the Cepuri and places like it do not conflict with

their *agama*, but are entirely separate from it, because *agama* is something to belong to, and non-*agama* are ritual options. The Cepuri is a non-*agama* way of asking something of God.

# Conclusion: Hearing What Is Said

I began this thesis with a question about a question: how we were to approach the Queen of the South and "her" ritual site at Parangkusumo and the relationship of these with religion *at all.* I argued that old notions of syncretism and more contemporary notions of hybridity are not concepts that can support worthwhile questions. I proposed that we need a new conceptualization of religion, which is of course a gargantuan task. While I believe the rhizomatic perspective as employed by Oostveen (2020) can be a fruitful metaphor for such a new conceptualization, much work remains to be done to move beyond the world religion paradigm. My more pragmatic approach relied on the rhizomatic perspective largely because it allows an out of the syncretic trap. It allowed for the Queen to be *both* in some sense relevant to religiosity *as well* as in essence different from and therefore not by necessity in conflict with Islam. It meant that the religiosity of the practitioners at the Cepuri could be seen as an assemblage that is in no way qualitatively different from the religious assemblage of those who call them idolaters. This pragmatic approach was to keep open the option that the contradiction that is flagged and labelled by the syncretic view does *not* arise. Understanding why there is *no* contradiction for practitioners would be crucial in helping our own thinking and perceiving beyond the paradigm of religion. To this end, I argued we should pay close attention to local concepts and the borders they draw.

From this perspective I went on to describe the Queen of the South, this discursive and variegated being, marked by ambiguity and disagreement. I sketched the history of Mataram and her connection with royalty and the current day sultan, and the dynamics of Islamic realm-making and identity with a pre-Islamic figure. I have argued that the figure of the Queen cannot be separated from the Javanese conception of politics, nature, and the unseen, which are realms so closely connected as to be almost undifferentiated. Certainly, in terms of power and agency, they are one, with power flowing freely between them. This is how the Queen is relevant as what I called a "landscape agency," a political agent (and tool), and a powerful spirit being simultaneously. The Queen is mediated largely through embodiment and through natural occurrences such as wind or waves, but has become open to visual

depictions, although this visuality does not give up her power - rather, it renders her power immediate and present.

The rituals performed at the Cepuri Parangkusumo and the beach to some extent confound expectations based on understandings of the Cepuri as "a space sacred to the Queen" in that the Queen, though invoked by the majority, is not *necessarily* a central part of the rituals. Though often important and almost always relevant, the very existence of practitioners who do not engage with her shows that these rituals are not limited to her per se. The varying importance of Senopati, God, and indeed *no one*, with some actions being effective simply *because they are*, points to the Queen as a figure functioning in a wider interplay of dynamics of ritual than simple requests directed to a simple being. The power of *kesaktian* and *berkah* are central to these dynamics and the Queen's role in the rituals.

The notion of power would eventually return in my examination of the categories used by practitioners to describe the rituals and to defend themselves from accusations of *syirik*. From this examination I have argued that *agama* and non-*agama* are concepts fundamentally different from religion and non-religion. Grasping this difference is instrumental not only in studying the religious assemblage at the Cepuri (which even an inquiry launched from the syncretic view could do, developing a somewhat valuable answer to the wrong question) but understanding the *rules of assemblage* that underlie the actual phenomena. In other words, as I said in my introduction, it reveals why these practices *are not* syncretic. This is because both the rituals and the figure of the Queen herself do not function as *violating the integrity* of a given practitioner's *agama,* but instead function in a paradigm in which the fundamental quality of both *agama* and non-*agama* - perhaps even knowledge is general - is *efficacy* rather than *coherent theory*. The rituals and the Queen are just realities that may be potentially beneficial in addition to one's *agama*. This is precisely what, in my view, approaches of hybridity or syncretism overlook by examining how contradiction is harmonized: the perspective of efficacy reveals us how contradiction is *not produced*. The local category of contradiction, *syirik,* is similarly both different and similar to its observer counterpart, syncretism.

Once we perceive this efficacy aspect of the concept of *agama* and its role in relation to the Queen, we see it in every aspect mentioned so far. We see it in how most disagreement on the Queen centres on appropriateness rather than reality. We see it in how the Queen's agency

expresses itself in landscape, politics, and spirit world. We see it in how much disagreement there is about the Queen's precise nature, name, or character. We see it in how Wessing notes that people who could tell little about the Queen knew exactly what to do in a Queen-related crisis. We see it in how he notes that surprisingly no-one mentioned Nyi Blorong was forbidden by religion. We see it in the preoccupations with *berkah* and *slamet*, and in the vagueness with how these related to the Queen or indeed to God. Precise theory or ideation of *how it works* is secondary to knowing *what works*.

I have suggested that this aspect of *agama* may not be unique to Java but may indeed by far more widespread, both geographically and historically.

While the importance of efficacy is clearly a hugely important aspect of Javanese religiosity, especially when considering salient religious assemblages and why they are not salient to their practitioners, it is not the magic bullet for understanding the Queen of the South and those who bring offerings to the Cepuri. Especially the minority of practitioners who have no clear external goal - neither concrete boons nor abstract *berkah* - but who come to engage with *budaya* remain mysterious from both the syncretic view as well as the efficacy angle. Clearly, the engagement with traces of history central to their cultural and ethnic identity has an inherent value, but they seem not to be informed by the notion of efficacy. Their statements show that the differences of *agama* and religion I have attempted to tease out in this thesis are not the only differences obfuscated in easy translation, because *budaya* and culture clearly imply different things which are not explained by the perspective of efficacy.

I opened this thesis with three quotes. These quotes encapsulate the theoretical arc of this thesis. In the first, Mangkunegara IV exhorts his pupils not to attempt to imitate the Prophet too much, as since they are Javanese, a little is enough. I chose this quote because it perplexes the world religion paradigm. Mangkunegara draws a clear - and to a reader within the world religion paradigm, unintelligible - implication of being Javanese for how to practice Islam, already hinting that the underlying understanding of religion must be different. At the same time, Mangkunegara's warning to not emulate the Prophet on the basis of Javaneseness while clearly revering "our lord" the Prophet is an example of the perplexing contradiction so much Western scholarship has perceived in Islam on Java. The conceptual borders of the world religion paradigm ensures that Mangkunegara's statements are seen as not straightforwardly

Islamic. This quote represents the part of this thesis where I argue that the syncretic view is untenable because it assumes contradiction is out there, while the contradiction, in this case of warning youngsters not to emulate the Prophet too much while considering oneself a pious Muslim, seems not to exist for Mangkunegara.

The second quote does not concern the Javanese context, as it is from the 2014 novel *Annihilation* by Jeff Vandermeer, but encapsulates the suspicion of boundaries I attempted to cultivate. It represents the part of this thesis where I argue that the syncretic view depends on and only has meaning in relation to the borders of religion, which we should not take as universal realities. It also emphasizes that while there is difficulty in attempting to move beyond the world religion paradigm, because we still tend to notice only those assemblages that cross its borders, our way forward could lie in paying close attention to *why* these assemblages are salient to us, and why they are not to others. In other words, we should cultivate suspicion in response to borders, never take them at face value.

The third quote is from Clifford Geertz describing *abangan* religiosity. This, of course, refers to the influence of knowledge as knowledge-to-act in the perception of different *agama*: “Many are the ways.” But it also shows how far we have come. Geertz, after all, realizes that *abangan* say there are many ways, but characterizes this as “tolerance” in their “religious belief.” This is misleading. Tolerance suggests that relationship that I described in the final chapter: of a Dutch atheist calling a Christian’s religion valid. It implies a cultural and legal validity, a sense of “to each their own,” and perhaps even a personal appreciation, but not the actual efficacy of the Christian’s practices. Geertz’ use of “religious belief” shows the same, namely that he interpreted the *abangan’s* statement through his own notion of religion as a system of symbols, which is very close to the notion of religion as a structure of theoretical knowledge in its intellectualized nature.

It is only when we take those very notions of religion as the centre of the issue and regard their borders with suspicion that we see what has been hiding in plain sight all along. The *abangan* said, “Many are the ways.” Listening before interpreting, what does that mean? It does not concern itself with belief, religious or otherwise, nor with tolerance of it. It means *that the ways are many*. There really are multiple ways that differ but that are all ways to get there. It is somewhat bitter that *abangan* have in all likelihood been saying that since much earlier than 1960, when Geertz published the book, but that no one has ever been able to hear

it, with very few exceptions.[81] Contemporary scholars desire nothing else than to listen, and struggle actively - as I did in this thesis - in an attempt to comprehend what seems so much like contradiction. They try to treat this contradiction delicately or talk about it as little as possible, not wanting to disparage the people they write about (as their colonial forebears did). But they are disparaging them by treating it as contradiction at all.[82] The reason so few have been able to hear what Geertz' *abangan* is saying is a testament not to a refusal to listen, but to how entrenched the world religion paradigm and its focus on coherent, mutually exclusive structures of beliefs really is, as well as the continued influence it has on our perception of contradiction and salient religious assemblage, even among those of us who are aware that its claims to universalism are false.

It may seem that in the final two chapters, we have lost sight of the Queen. While it is true that these parts are less concerned with the figure of the Queen and the details surrounding her, the question I started with was not really *about* the Queen. It was about what the Queen could tell us about how to approach her and phenomena like it, what the impact is of the figure of the Queen and practitioners on the syncretic view and how we should move beyond it. While our conceptualizations will always be a crutch, a context-dependent tool, rather than a perfect mirror of reality, I believe the examination of the Queen and practitioners shows us the value of allowing the context to inform our tool. In turn, we must take this understanding of the role of knowledge-to-act and the economy of efficacy and allow it to broaden our horizons when confronted with other phenomena which seem contradictory.

As to the Queen herself and the Cepuri, we may remember the *juru kunci* who called the Cepuri a place of asking. This characterization really says it all: the Queen is important, but not central. It is the asking, the *action* that is central to the place. It is a place *fit* for asking. Who you are actually asking something of is a matter of debate, and, in the end, not of ultimate relevance to visitors. In the end, God rules over all, and the Queen is either an

81 Van den Boogert (2015), for example. I do not know of anyone else. Woodward's (1989, 2011) refusal to engage with syncretic discourse shows that he considers focusing on contradiction a mistake, but does not yet approach the efficacy angle.

82 As stated before, we should not assume contradiction is *not* there, either. My examination of local constructions of contradiction in the shape of *syirik* is included in the previous chapter because the point is not that perceptions of contradiction should be ignored, but that *local perceptions* should be instrumental in examination. In this thesis, the local perception of non-production of contradiction has been emphasized because it serves to correct the syncretic view, rather than to valorize it as the more important perspective.

intermediary for His blessings or neutral in relation to *agama*, like going to a doctor is. Those are secondary concerns to the *efficacy* of the place *for asking*, and it is this place of asking because of the Queen and her meeting with Senopati all those centuries ago. So the past informs the present, the pre-Islamic the Islamic.

*Figure 22: Practitioners hold hands, facing the waves after their offering. 2019*

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