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Ilmu lan Laku: The Arts of Praxis in Indonesian Transformative Movements

By

Megan R Hewitt

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requirements for the degree of

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in

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

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## Abstract

Ilmu lan Laku: The Arts of Praxis in Indonesian Transformative Movements

By

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Doctor of Philosophy in South and Southeast Asian Studies

University of California, Berkeley

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This research explores symbolic action and the intergenerational imagination in transformative social movements in Indonesia. Two community-based schools located in Central Java, Indonesia—Sanggar Anak Alam (SALAM, the Nature Childrens' Studio) and Komunitas Belajar Qaryah Thayyibah (KBQT, the Learning Community for Village Empowerment)—form the grounds for this study. Scholarship on social movements in Indonesia often views cultural resistance as determined by large-scale acts of protest through the actions of high-profile figures in predominantly urban sites. In the context of 20<sup>th</sup> century activism against the authoritarianism of the New Order state (1965-1998), the strength of cultural hegemony of the time made it so that these kinds of movements were easily suppressed due to their public staging and internal fragmentation. In this project, I explore movements that are not often represented in scholarship. The community schools of SALAM and KBQT also began as counter-movements to the New Order hegemony but grew out of small-scale negotiations among a diverse set of actors at the interface between rural and urban experience in Java. As they continue to organize today, what actions contributes to the sustained movements of these communities? How do they effect transformative change?

I investigate these questions through creative productions by members of SALAM and KBQT: works of literature and performance arts gathered from fieldwork conducted in Indonesia in 2015, combined with oral histories, as well as my own participation within these schools. This dissertation makes several contributions to existing social movement scholarship in Indonesia. First, it demonstrates how change takes place over long periods of time, through processual steps constituted by intergenerational communities. Second, the efficacy of transformative social movement action is shown to be contingent upon participation by a multiplicity of decentralized actors. Third, as action itself is distributed more widely, cultural resistance is transformed into cultural resilience through symbolic actions. This work reflects the ways in which the community schools of SALAM and KBQT sustain movements of transformation. By drawing from the ways in which they situate symbolic actions within intergenerational communities at the rural-urban interface in Java, this research shows how new imaginations of transformative change are constituted in scholarship and in Indonesian social movements.

To the communities of Sanggar Anak Alam  
and Komunitas Belajar Qaryah Thayyibah.

Terima kasih atas kesadaran ini.

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Knowledge  
Embedded in action  
Action effected with firmness  
Firmness means to fortify oneself  
Correct character is not to be defeated by strong emotion

*Ilmu iku  
Kalakone kanthi laku  
Lekase lawan kas  
Tegese khas nyantosani  
Setia budya pangekese dur angkoro (Harti)*

In 2012 I was invited to teach English at a community school in Kalibening, a *kelurahan* (urban village) in Salatiga, Central Java. The invitation was extended by Ahmad Bahrudin, a local community leader who also offered me a place to stay. As a volunteer, I taught middle and high school-aged students at *Komunitas Belajar Qaryah Thayyibah* (KBQT, The Learning Community for Village Empowerment) for a month that turned out to be a shaping moment for my subsequent research and the present study on symbolic action and the intergenerational imagination in civil society movements in Indonesia.

I began my first class for the students in Kalibening with a lesson I had thoughtfully prepared beforehand. It completely failed. Facing a wall of around 50 students' blank stares and painstaking silence, I was frustrated that my instruction was not working for these students. After class I asked to meet with a group of students who organize around common interests in creative writing and English. I imagined we could develop a larger English project together. As we sat together on the tile floor of the front veranda of their school, I was surprised to find the soft-spoken students I met during my previous English lesson now speaking with great enthusiasm about their ideas for a collaborative project. They were most interested in creating a film to incorporate English language learning in the process. Through this film project, the students of KBQT taught me about learning as a collaborative and creative project rooted in the surrounding community. This seemingly simple approach was yet a radically different way of learning than I had experienced in my previous teaching at a public high school in Indonesia.

Prior to volunteering at KBQT, I had taught at one of the “favorite schools” (*sekolah favorit*) in the regional capital of Semarang on a Fulbright sponsored English Teaching Assistantship to work for 10-months as an English teacher. Fellow teachers explained how their status as a “favorite school” in Semarang, meant that students tested highly on national exams and therefore received more funding from the government. However in my experience learning through a standardized national curriculum was not anyone’s “favorite” activity. As a visiting teacher, I did not have to teach the national curriculum, but it was entirely my responsibility to develop activities for English learning. Later working in Kalibening, the student at KBQT rewired my thinking about learning and I came to realize how I was conditioned to think about learning through teacher-driven instruction: an authoritative and fixed kind of knowledge transferal in which I, as the teacher, held the power.

The group I worked with to design the film call themselves the Freedom Writers Forum. I asked why they chose this English name and they explained that, in addition to wanting to learn English, they had a strong desire to become published authors. In their previous schools there was no space for creative writing. When they joined KBQT they were free to decide what

activities they wanted to incorporate into their learning. Creative writing and English language were some of their shared goals, so they created the Freedom Writers Forum. Students at KBQT designed our film project as a tool for future visitors to Kalibening to understand how their education operates.<sup>1</sup> The film would also have the effect of helping other visitors understand a style of learning that is, as the students described it, liberating (*membebaskan*).

After this I returned to the U.S. to continue my graduate degree at the University of California in Berkeley, California. At the time I was working to complete my MA thesis on Malay literature by the *Peranakan* (Chinese-Malay) of Java at the turn to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. I researched how the apparent fixity of the canon of Indonesian literature that had excluded *peranakan* authors did not reflect the ways in which these excluded authors were integral members of a multi-discursive moment of literary production in the Malay language.<sup>2</sup> Their literary productions conversed with the emergent “official” forms of Malay language literature, as well as the “informal” hybridity of Malay language in late colonial Java, both of which are foundational to the emergence of Indonesian language.<sup>3</sup> Through this project I became interested in how the circulation and uneven distribution of forms of cultural capital are reproduced most notably through educational institutions.<sup>4</sup> Reflecting on my experience with the students at KBQT, I began to think more about how films and other works of literature, music, art and performance produced by students in Kalibening were circulating more egalitarian and emancipatory forms of knowledge. Within what discursive frameworks—official, informal, or otherwise—did authors in Kalibening converse? What social and linguistic forms of cultural capital did their literatures circulate? Did the school also reproduce a set of ideologies informed by their alterity to national and religious schooling in Indonesia?

Later I began to understand more about how KBQT is linked into a wider intergenerational network of activists, educators, artists and community schools who engage with works by the Brazilian activist and educator, Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) and *Cultural Action for Freedom* (1970) circulated widely among activists and scholars in Indonesia (and around the world) in the seventies and eighties.<sup>5</sup> Bharuddin, for example, had helped his son establish KBQT in Kalibening in 2003. Prior to that he had been part of an early cohort of community leaders learning about transformative methodologies of praxis—of

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix D for a draft of the script we used for this film project.

<sup>2</sup> The intertextual connections presented in their works reflected their authors’ engagement with the works of Balai Pustaka—later canonized and made into a literary tradition for the nation—as well as more widely read popular literatures circulated within and alongside newspapers. Aside from Balai Pustaka, the *peranakan* community in Java owned most printing presses in Java, many of which were in Semarang. *Peranakan* communities circulated most print literature of the time.

<sup>3</sup> The titles to many works of *peranakan* literature reflect engagement with the “real” in literature. The work I read in close detail, for example, is entitled “Cerita Oey Se, yaitoe satoe cerita jang amat endah dan loetjoe jang betoel soedah kedjadian di Djawa tengah (1903), or “The Story of Oey Se, which is an extremely beautiful and entertaining story that really happened in Central Java” by Thio Tjin Boen. For an unprecedented collection of *peranakan* literature, including the work of Thio Thin Boen, see Marcus, A. S., and Pax Benedanto, editors. *Kesastraan Melayu Tionghoa*. Cet. 1, Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia bekerjasama dengan Yayasan Adikarya IKAPI dan the Ford Foundation, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Cultural capital is a term first coined by the French sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron. See Bourdieu, Pierre, and Jean Claude Passeron. *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*. Translated by Richard Nice, Sage, 2014. I draw the notion of cultural capital from the scholarship of John Guillory who explores literary canon formation and the ways in which the institution of the school “regulates and distributes cultural capital *unequally*”[sic.] (ix).

<sup>5</sup> *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* circulated in Indonesian translation by Roem Topitimasang in 1984. Freire, Paulo. *Pendidikan Kaum Tertindas*. Translated by Roem Topatimasang, LP3ES, 1984.



engagements with theory, action, and reflection—and of education as a form of cultural action.<sup>6</sup> Through this same network I met Toto Rahardjo, an activist-artist who was part of that earlier generation of movement leaders in Central Java. He introduced me to his wife, Sri Wahyaningsih, who had started another community school called *Sanggar Anak Alam*, (SALAM, the Nature Childrens' Studio). It was through the children of KBQT that I came to learn of an extensive rhizomal network of social movement actors in Indonesia today.<sup>7</sup> They also afforded me greater insights on the intergenerational dimension of reproduction of these networks. SALAM and KBQT are thus the two communities that inform this dissertation.

It is also through the children—first at KBQT and later at SALAM—that I began to see how the art works they create do something more than just educate these students. The Freirean formulation of cultural action as a process of conscientization—the notion that to be liberated from structural forms of oppression, one must first become conscious of them—was central to their work.<sup>8</sup> Students of SALAM and KBQT are not just cultural actors in the Freirean sense, they are also symbolic actors. They explore structural forms of oppression, and they direct their critical reflections and learning into the creation of art works. These works are then circulated outside of the schools in performances and literary publications. I use the term "symbolic action" following Kenneth Burke's formulation of the suasive and dramatistic dimensions of language that emphasizes language as action with effects in the world. Burke's arguments about language and literature began as counterstatement to ideas about literature and artistic production as "pure" formal artifacts, set apart from the "phillistine" masses.<sup>9</sup> His own rejection of the university as an institution in favor of immersion in the cultural life of the community helps to reinforce the intersection of literature, ritual, and performance with the community-grounded notion of cultural action.

I include a poem that is also a song at the start of this writing to illustrate how notions of cultural action are transformed into symbolic action as it is understood and enabled by intergenerational communities of actors at SALAM and KBQT. During my fieldwork in 2015, this song-poem helped to solidify my understanding and participation in the ways in which knowledge production relates to cultural action in specifically symbolic terms. It was performed for me by a woman named Harti in a moment of knowledge sharing, memory, and reflection. In the title of this dissertation, "Ilmu lan Laku: The Arts of Praxis in Indonesian Transformative Movements," I derive a set of Javanese words from the song-poem to foreground, in distinctively Javanese cultural terms, what scholars tend to refer to as praxis. It is worth sharing Harti's story at the start of this dissertation to show how theoretical consideration and traditional cultural practices in Java are reappropriated and transformed into symbolic action by members of SALAM and KBQT.

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<sup>6</sup> See Freire, Paulo. *Cultural Action for Freedom*. 2000 ed, Harvard Educational Review, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> I employ the "rhizomal" metaphor of Deleuze and Guattari from *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1970) in which they describe how, "A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggle" (Deleuze and Guattari 7).

<sup>8</sup> Freire also sees this process only in terms of adult education. Children are not considered.

<sup>9</sup> Burke's early articulation of the modernist notions of the relationship between "art" and "society" were published in *Counter-Statement*. See Burke, Kenneth. *Counter-Statement*. U of California P, 1968. The concept of symbolic action is further developed in later works, most importantly, see Burke, Kenneth. *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*. University of California Press, 1966. See also further scholarship on Burke's contributions to the rhetoric of art and society, including Wolin, Ross. *The Rhetorical Imagination of Kenneth Burke*. U of South Carolina P, 2001. And Crable, Bryan. *Ralph Ellison and Kenneth Burke: at the Roots of the Racial Divide*. University of Virginia Press, 2012.

From an early age, Harti remembers being surrounded by traditional Javanese arts. She grew up in an artistic family, her father a *dhalang* puppet-master of the *wayang* shadow plays of Java, her mother a *sindhen* traditional Javanese singer. Like many people from villages across Java, she moved away from her hometown to attend middle and high school, in her case to the national capital of Jakarta.<sup>10</sup> After graduation she tried to become a teacher but could not pass state exams to get a teaching certificate. She described how she felt *minder*<sup>11</sup> (inferior) compared to people in the cities. She grew up feeling disempowered in the rapidly modernizing nation of Indonesia in the seventies and eighties because of her rural upbringing. It was not until 1990 that Harti returned to Lawen to participate in a new kind of community school. She was invited to become an arts teacher and share her knowledge of Javanese artistic traditions as a medium for the children of the village to learn. She described feeling un-qualified, but returned, nevertheless. Harti taught in Lawen for two years, during which she orchestrated arts projects for the children. She described that time in her life as deeply empowering, a moment of *penyadaran*, of realization and awareness that inspired her to pursue a career as an art teacher despite never having completed her state teaching certificate.<sup>12</sup> This experience initiated a shift in how she thought about herself as it “*berubah cara berfikir*” it “changed her way of thinking” (Harti).

As Harti recounted her memories of return to Lawen, she sang this song-poem for me. It is an old Javanese *tembang* which, as Harti explained, carry layers of meaning for performers and listeners that are designed to be “peeled back” like an onion—*dionceki* in Javanese or *dikupas* in Indonesian, both terms Harti used.<sup>13</sup> This *tembang*, what I henceforth refer to as “*Ilmu Iku*,” is drawn from a late nineteenth century epic song-poem from the Javanese court tradition, the *Serat Wedhatama* (lit. *The Highest Wisdom*),<sup>14</sup> so I was struck by the contrast between this very old art form with resonance in the high courtly traditions of Java, and the new meanings Harti ascribed to it through her personal narrative.<sup>15</sup> Her involvement in this new kind of community school shifted her own sense of value and potential in society as a woman from a rural village in Java. Her experiences of teaching and of learning in Lawen instilled within her a new sense of freedom from the inferiority she once felt. As layers of meaning were peeled back and elaborated upon by Harti in our conversation, she presented “*Ilmu Iku*” as an emblem of the

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<sup>10</sup> Elementary education was the only schooling available in Lawen at that time.

<sup>11</sup> An Indonesian term derived from Dutch language, *minderwaardigheidscomplex* meaning “inferiority complex.”

<sup>12</sup> Today she works as a *guru honorer* (honorary teacher) for middle and elementary aged students. *Guru honorer* have the experience of teaching but without an official state certificate. This means that they are paid less and do not have access to a state pension. See Warwick, Donald P. “The Effectiveness of the Indonesian Civil Service.” *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, vol. 15, no. 2, Brill, 1987, pp. 40–56. In recent years the Ministry of Education and Culture have created programs through which *guru honor* can become officially recognized teachers, but this is largely a bureaucratic pipeline inaccessible to many teachers. See for example Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan. *Mendikbudristek: Guru Profesional Dan Sejahtera Kunci Pendidikan Berkualitas*. 3 July 2021, <https://www.kemdikbud.go.id/main/blog/2021/07/mendikbudristek-guru-profesional-dan-sejahtera-kunci-pendidikan-berkualitas>.

<sup>13</sup> The composition, lyrics and performance context are all sites through which meaning is created through the engagement between performer and listener. Rhythm, syntactic structure, rhyme scheme, and word play combine with the musical composition to convey mood, feeling, collective experience, and ritual.<sup>13</sup> Adaptable and flexible while providing a kind of cultural scaffolding, the classical traditions of Java coexist with the contemporary.

<sup>14</sup> It is attributed to Mangkunegara IV (1811-1881), ruler of the Surakarta Sultanate from 1853-1881 in present day Solo, Central Java. See Mangkunegara. *The Wedhatama: An English Translation*. Translated by S. O Robson, KITLV Press, 1990.

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of the ways in which the dialogue between traditional and modern realities expressed in the form, content, and context out of which *tembang* are performed, see Brinner, Benjamin Elon. *Music in Central Java: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

subtle yet revolutionary transformations she experienced as a young woman. I asked if she would be willing to teach me to sing “Ilmu Iku.” Harti then sang the *tembang* for me, line by line, having me repeat it back to her, occasionally singing along to guide me through the music. Singing “Ilmu Iku” together with Harti inspired my own reflection of participation and learning within the communities of SALAM and KBQT. SALAM is the school which Harti was invited to participate in Lawen in the nineties. It was the students of KBQT—a new generation of transformative movement actors—who led me to Harti and to an understanding of the power of these symbolic actions.

From “Ilmu Iku,” I draw out two conceptual terms to ground this research in the cultural particularities used by people like Harti and members of SALAM and KBQT to understand their symbolic actions. The first is *ilmu* which means “knowledge” in both Javanese and Indonesian. The second is *laku*, which in its most simplified form means “step,” but is a root for many other words and phrases in old Javanese and contemporary Indonesian language.<sup>16</sup> The opening lines repeats *laku* in two forms: “*ilmu iku kalakone kanti laku*,” “knowledge embedded in action.” *Kalakone* meaning “to do or to complete a task,” and *kanti laku*, meaning “in a complete way.” When Harti sang “Ilmu Iku” to commemorate her own sense of empowerment, old and perhaps more “authoritative” meanings of *laku* and *ilmu* were transformed into actionable sites of symbolic reflection. In Harti’s telling, and singing, “Ilmu Iku” was generative of a resonance of meanings through the interactions of the formal aesthetics in traditional *tembang*, and the symbolic meanings inscribed in memory, present experience, and future action. I draw from “Ilmu Iku” the notion that the search for knowledge (*ilmu* or *nglemu* in colloquial Javanese) is carried in each step (*laku*) towards understanding. This is the transformative potential of *laku*. It involves the small steps of engagement between theory, action, and reflection, in the creation of new forms of knowledge and action. Harti presented “Ilmu Iku” to me as a space within which to participate. Through my interactions with Harti, members of SALAM and of KBQT, I came to understand *laku* as a way of thinking and a way of doing.

“Ilmu Iku” and the lessons it embeds about the relationship between knowledge (*ilmu*) and praxis (*laku*), is emblematic of the ways symbolic action is enabled in the communities of SALAM and KBQT. In this dissertation, I engage with a body of art works, literatures, performances, rituals, poetry, memories, and everyday experiences produced by a variety of cultural actors: children, activists, artists, scholars, and everyday communities of the *rakyat kecil*.<sup>17</sup> In my readings and analyses of these works, a notion of symbolic action emerges which is most closely associated with the kind of “steps toward understanding” outlined in “Ilmu Iku.”

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<sup>16</sup> The word captures a sense of movement, of action, and of behavior. “Walking around” (*mlaku-laku*), “to do or complete a task” (*melakukan*), “in the manner of” (*laku-laku*), and “behavior” (*kelakuan*), are a few examples. It is worth noting these linguistic complications to understand the ways Javanese language evade exact translations. Slippages in linguistic meaning are known as *plesetan* in Javanese, and as they are commonly enabled in Javanese arts and everyday speech have an additive value in the playful slip between one meaning to another. Other uses of *laku* include evaluations of quality and authority in legal matters, for example, *berlaku* can mean “validity” or “to be valid” as well as “to be applicable.” In markets and commerce, *laku* can describe something as “sold out” or “in high demand.” Alternately its antonym means “ineffective” or “not sold” (*tidak laku*). In the Javanese wayang shadow repertoire the term *lakon* carries the *laku* root and refers to “a play, story, or act.”

<sup>17</sup> In Indonesia there are a variety of terms are used to describe everyday people of folk. I use this term because it is most widely used within social movement actors in Indonesia. *Kecil* means “small” and *rakyat* is a designation for “the people” which emerged in the formation of the independent nation of Indonesia. *Rakyat* is a term that was used most notably by Indonesia’s first president, Sukarno. During the transition to the New Order, Suharto used the term *masyarakat* more regularly, which is a generic term meaning “society” and refers to all Indonesians.

Circulations of performance and literary productions drawn from the cases of SALAM and KBQT inform my analysis of the ways in which symbolic actions shape not only the activist networks but also, and importantly, the intergenerational imagination for new generations of empowered actors.

### ***Situating SALAM and KBQT: Movements and Communities***

*Sanggar Anak Alam* was first established in 1988 as a grassroots community project in Desa Lawen, Kecamatan Pandanarum, Banjarnegara. In 1996 they discontinued their efforts in Lawen and restarted in 1999 at their current location at Nitiprayan, Jomogatan, Ngestiharjo, Kasihan, Bantul, Yogyakarta.<sup>18</sup> In name, *Sanggar Anak Alam* or the Nature Children's Studio, enables the Javanese concept of *sanggar*, a term that denotes a traditional space located within village communities where people gather to learn, especially in the practice of traditional arts.<sup>19</sup> *Anak Alam*, or "Nature Children," as they describe, is used to harken back to the natural playfulness and curiosity of childhood. Play is a fundamental aspect of the learning process at SALAM. The organization operates as an alternative to state elementary school education (*sekolah dasar*) and in 2015 provided education to over 250 students.<sup>20</sup>

*Komunitas Belajar Qaryah Thayyibah*, or The Learning Community for Village Empowerment (KBQT henceforth) began in 2003 in Kelurahan Kalibening, Tingkir, Salatiga, and continues to operate there. They reflect the local, collaborative, and emancipatory goals of community-based education in their name. They pair the more contemporary Indonesian phrase *Komunitas Belajar*, "Learning Community," with a less common transliterated Arabic phrase, *Qaryah Thayyibah*, which they translate as *desa yang berdaya* or "empowered village." They operate in a predominantly Muslim community and so their name appeals to traditional Muslim and contemporary Indonesian sensibilities. KBQT was designed initially as a free school for farmer's children to provide a tuition- and fees-free alternative to standard national middle school (*sekolah menengah pertama*) as well as Islamic educational institutions, known as *pesantren* or *madrasah*. KBQT was founded under the auspices of a local farmers union, *Serikat Paguyuban Petani Qaryah Thayyibah* (SPPQT, Association of Farmer's Unions for Village Empowerment). KBQT has since grown to include alternatives to both middle-school and high-school (*sekolah menengah atas*) education, with 45-50 students in attendance during my research in 2015.

These communities emerge from engagements with a discourse of critical pedagogies, most notably the works by the Brazilian educator, scholar, and activist, Paulo Freire. The kind of participatory, community-based, critically reflective learning process I experienced with the students at KBQT in Kalibening, and later with the community of SALAM, is called praxis in the language of theoretical scholarship. Among activists in Indonesia they refer to praxis as "teori-aksi-refleksi" or "theory-action-reflection." Among the communities themselves, they use another very different vocabulary to describe education as a form of cultural action. They enable notions of "nature" in learning and the "empowered village," to situate their movements within a

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<sup>18</sup> Yogyakarta is a city with special regional autonomy and therefore is not part of Central Java in an official administrative capacity. It is however a cultural heartland of Javanese culture and can therefore not be separated from notions of what it means to be from Central Java in cultural terms.

<sup>19</sup> The word is derived from the Sanskrit-Pali word, *sangha*, meaning "assembly", "community", or "association," typically referring to sites of Buddhist learning.

<sup>20</sup> They have since grown to include students who range in age from pre-k through high school and are even working towards the creation of a SALAM university.

more capacious understanding of learning in Indonesia. They are simply schools. It is in the seeming simplicity of their movements in which is located a subtle yet revolutionary appropriation of the terms of cultural action.

KBQT envision themselves as an *alternatif* (alternative) to state, religious, or private educational institutions,<sup>21</sup> and use more egalitarian terminology to speak about the learning process. *Guru* (teacher) is replaced by *fasilitator* (facilitator), *murid* (student) is avoided all together and a rhetoric of *belajar bersama* (to learn together) is preferred over *mengajar* (to teach). They develop their own independent curriculum, generated by and for their communities. Students learn through a wide variety art works and research projects created by community members. They work through participation with parents, community members, even people like me, to constitute an intergenerational community of people learning together. Projects in both communities include self-publication of original works of fiction, poetry, films, visual arts, music, dance, and theater which members publish, circulate online, and regularly perform at events and festivals throughout Central Java. These schools are embedded in everyday realities of life in Java as a strategy to decenter the discourse of knowledge production in Indonesia. They situate children as key actors in negotiating that process and women as key leaders in each community.

Education is rarely discussed in the body of scholarship on social movements in Indonesia, and the actions of primary school students even less so. The Taman Siswa movements of Ki Hadjar Dewantara offer a possible exception, and while this educational movement was instrumental to Indonesian national awakening, as McVey indicates,<sup>22</sup> as a movement for change it well-nigh ended with the establishment of the Indonesian nation. Taman Siswa became a basis of national schooling, made useful to the fixity of national imagining. When students are considered in scholarship of social movements, it is usually through communities of university students. This is especially the case in movements of resistance against the authoritarian New Order state which lasted from 1965-1998. The best examples come from the work of Edward Aspinall who explores how university student were effective at “undermining the legitimacy of authoritarian rule” but “failed to produce an alternative to the regime’s ideology or organizing an alternative to its leadership (*Opposing Suharto 2*).<sup>23</sup> Applying the notion of cultural capital discussed previously in this context, Indonesian universities can be seen as institutional bodies which reproduced the dominant ideologies of the New Order state, even as they attempted to resist it. During this period, any work of literature or performance arts which included criticism

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<sup>21</sup> There is also a growing number of educational alternatives that operate outside state administered education in Indonesia. Privately funded “national plus schools,” for example, are accredited by the state but teach beyond the standard national curriculum. These schools incorporate international educational models such as International Baccalaureate (IB), Cambridge International Exams (CIE), or Montessori education. They are typically located in major metropolitan areas, include coursework in English, and are prohibitively expensive for the large majority of Indonesians. *Sekolah Alam* or “nature schools” have also become popular over the last decade. While these schools situate the learning context in more natural outdoor environments, they still use standardized national curriculum and cost much the same as national schools.

<sup>22</sup> See McVey, Ruth T. “Taman Siswa and the Indonesian National Awakening.” *Indonesia*, no. 4, Southeast Asia Program Publications at Cornell University, 1967, pp. 128–49. As well as Tsuchiya, Kenji. “The Taman Siswa Movement: Its Early Eight Years and Javanese Background.” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2, [Cambridge University Press, Department of History, National University of Singapore], 1975, pp. 164–77.

<sup>23</sup> See also Aspinall, Edward. “Indonesia: Moral Force Politics and the Struggle Against Authoritarianism.” *Student Activism in Asia: Between Protest and Powerlessness*, edited by Meredith L. Weiss and Edward Aspinall, University of Minnesota Press, 2012. ---. *Student Dissent in Indonesia in the 1980s*. Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1993.

of state, or were perceived by the state as supporting socialist ideologies were banned and censored. Individuals caught reading or circulating these works would be imprisoned. The university itself in many ways prefigures the student community of activists, as already being ideologically tied to the developmentalist ideologies of New Order cultural hegemony, and so were easy to coopt by the state.

As schools—or in their formulations a “sanggar” and a “learning community”—the most apparent form of resistance at SALAM and KBQT is to centralized ideologies reproduced in educational institutions.<sup>24</sup> At SALAM they refer to themselves as a “school of life” and a “laboratory for learners.”<sup>25</sup> At KBQT, they describe their school as an “educational organization that consistently liberates learning citizens and facilitates a learning process based on mentoring and the context of life.”<sup>26</sup> These descriptive phrases locate these schools within activist discourse, but do not capture the symbolic actions students enable to learn and reflect. It is in their production of knowledge, in the symbolic action of literatures and performances, that students of SALAM and KBQT engage with and build upon the works of Freire. They join a community of global movement actors who question and critically reflect on how forms of cultural hegemony are reproduced through educational institutions, and from this they take a further step further through production in the literary and performance arts.<sup>27</sup>

Symbolic forms of cultural action are an important medium of speaking about the unequal distributions of cultural, economic, and social capital. For example, literary works by the communist affiliated cultural organization, *Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat* (LEKRA, The Institute for People’s Culture) contribute to understanding the intersection of issues concerning working class Indonesian people (the rakyat as indicated in the name of the organization) and forms of political art. The cultural debates regarding the role of art in politics, which was a major discourse in the fifties and early sixties in Indonesia, is discussed by Keith Foulcher who indicates that works by LEKRA artists reflected the struggles of working-class communities, but were not often created by those communities themselves.<sup>28</sup> This is a key departure from the grassroots communities at SALAM and KBQT that work to include communities of rakyat kecil more directly in their movements. An important takeaway from Foulcher’s work are the ways in which the suppression of leftist discourse in literary (and therefore symbolic) terms, really underscored the violent and repressive actions taken by the New Order state in 1965 which attempted to erase a prior discourse of political art. The New Order instituted a culture of silence—*budaya bisu* as discussed by activists.<sup>29</sup> Theater movements represent an important area in which activists and artists worked to “break through” that culture of silence through movements in which resistance was enacted in specifically symbolic terms. As Bodden indicates, “In the process of resisting the state’s censorship apparatus, cultural workers gained new

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<sup>24</sup> This is most immediately a bi-product of New Order authoritarianism, but neither is it limited to that context. One could look back to the ways in which colonial educational programs are embedded in the

<sup>25</sup> “*Sekolah hidup*” and “*laboratorium bagi pembelajar*,” (SALAM, “Tentang Salam”)

<sup>26</sup> “*KBQT adalah lembaga pendidikan yang konsisten memerdekakan warga belajar, memfasilitasi proses belajar berbasis pendampingan dan konteks kehidupan*,” (KBQT, “*Profil Komunitas Belajar Qaryah Thayyibah*”).

<sup>27</sup> They are also influenced by the circulation of works by Ivan Illich, namely *Deschooling Society*, which also circulated among activist in the seventies and eighties.

<sup>28</sup> Foulcher, Keith. *Social Commitment in Literature and the Arts: The Indonesian “Institute of People’s Culture” 1950-1965*. Clayton, AU: Center of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1986.

<sup>29</sup> This phrase is later picked up by the Danish filmmaker, Joshua Oppenheimer, in his 2014 film *The Look of Silence* (*Senyap*), the sequel to his 2012 film *The Act of Killing* (*Jagal*). Both films explore memories of trauma from the violence of 1965.

solidarity, found common cause with journalists, industrial workers, and other social groups, and grew increasingly bold in the subject matter their plays broached” (*Resistance on the National Stage* 1). The solidarities which formed from these engagements, as discussed by Bodden, offer an entry point into my research. Modes of cultural resistance through artistic expression operate squarely in the realm of aesthetics and symbolic engagements, two areas that are of central importance to my analysis of SALAM and KBQT. There is also a great deal of overlap in the theatrical groups of Bodden’s work and early activist engagements with critical pedagogies in Indonesia.

Finally, it is important to consider the ways in which the Indonesian nation itself instituted limitations on forms of symbolic imagination. As outlined by Anderson, a limited, sovereign and imagined as a community with “deep, horizontal comradeship” (6), in the Indonesian context, was important for unifying the people in opposition to Dutch colonial dominance in the formation of the Indonesian nation. Initially designed as a tool of liberation from the colonial extraction of land and labor, over time the nation too had limiting effects on the diversity of such an expansive archipelago. The establishment of a national language and cultural identity were mobilized to establish a free Indonesia and combat the political and economic transformations of late colonial Java. The establishment of Indonesian as the national language, a lingua-franca made official, for example, was not the native language of most people within the nation. Becoming Indonesian meant first and foremost learning the language. Today, also through language, the nation operates in the name of the people but is more often a symbolic imposition of the needs of the political elite.

A legacy of the dominance of the national imagination on ideas of community and sovereignty in Indonesia is that it also inflects much of the scholarship on social movements. The scholarly discourse of social change is most often framed by the interaction of particular sub-groups and their confrontation with nation state. Greater emphasis is placed on large scale political change than on small-scale actors. The seemingly quick eruptions of protest and public voicing of resistance which colonial and contemporary scholars focus on, are also largely studied because those movements reflect a more visible and easily traceable archive of actions set in direct confrontation with the nation-state. This makes sense because many of these movements indeed emerge as a response to cultural hegemony reproduced by state mechanisms of control. Official lines of scholarly inquiry at the national level, however, make it difficult to recuperate the voice and experiences of the rakyat kecil that operate in more sub-terranean and clandestine ways, precisely because of the history of violent suppression of dissent in Indonesia. The specter of the violence of 1965 is always looming in the background of any discourse of social movement action in Indonesia. This may account for some of the reasons why the rhizomal diversity of movements in Indonesia remain largely isolated from one another in scholarship, but more than anything it points to the needs for a more relational perspective on processes of social transformation.

In my analysis of these two community-based schools, I explore the ways in which forms of cultural resistance take place through participation by intergenerational actors. They work to transform cultural discourse and cultural action by producing and circulating art works that speak to processes of critical reflection and emancipation. Their movements are capacious, intersectional, and operate at the interface between urban and rural Java. The fact that they do not quite “fit” perfectly into previously established patterns of social movement activism in Indonesia reflects the transformational and symbolic but also the “smallness” of their movements.

## *Methods of a Participatory Scholar: Research as Learning*

What I learned from interacting with SALAM and KBQT is an extension of the telling (and singing) of “Ilmu Iku” presented at the start of this dissertation. I met Harti on a trip to Lawen over the Lebaran holiday in 2015. Lebaran is a holiday which coincides with the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. It is a time of great activity in Indonesia as people “*pulang kampung*” (return home) in an annual movement called *mudik*. Before going into the field, people warned me that my work would “screech to a halt” during Lebaran. That would have been the case if I were dealing with national educational institutions. Since I was exploring community-based education, however, this was just not the case. I only spent three days in Lawen, but it was one of the most productive moments in my fieldwork. Before arriving in Lawen, my familiarity with the scholarship on social movements in Indonesia as constructed in big actions of protest was already being reframed in terms of this mass *mudik* movement of return to homeland, a movement which millions of people make every year. I traveled with Sri Wahyaningsih and Toto Rahardjo—the founders of SALAM—and their son Bram to visit Rahardjo’s family home in Lawen. I went there to learn more about the early formation of SALAM in Lawen. There I spent time with Rahardjo’s family, met many of the students who studied at SALAM in Lawen, as well as community members who had helped to facilitate educational projects and local economic initiatives with the community school from 1988-1996. I heard many stories from people about their memories of SALAM in Lawen, all told in the context of celebrations surrounding the Lebaran holiday, and the mass *mudik* movements of return to family and homeland

I invoke the song-poem “Ilmu Iku” at the start of my writing because it represents an important moment of my own sense of understanding. A moment of *penyadaran*, to use a phrase Harti often uttered. “Ilmu Iku” came to stand for something much more than a revival of an old tradition, or even of the nostalgia of Harti’s past experiences. It is a symbolic site, enacted through the aesthetics of Javanese tradition, in which new formations emerge. It is a future oriented space within which traditions and lived experiences coincide, are reflected upon, and shape future actions. It also enabled my participation, in voice and in understanding. “Ilmu Iku” inspired my own reflections on my position as a researcher of transformative social movements in Java. It was a moment, among many I experience in the field, which blurred the dividing lines between researcher and research subject. Harti, the children of SALAM and KBQT, as well many other of my interlocutors in the field became my teachers. The small steps which led to this research and writing are generative of knowledge enacted through participation.

In the case of studying community-based organizations in which participatory learning is one of the most, if not *the* most central methodological feature of the terms by which they participate in their movements, my persona as research “observer” was quickly superseded by my role as “participant.” I was regularly invited in to participate. Not only in moments like the one with Harti in singing “Ilmu iku,” or even in projects like the film at KBQT. I was also invited to share my research questions, impressions, and observations about their community, to share what I had learned from the other communities, and to assist in student learning. It was not an option to be a “fly on the wall” observer. The observer never disappeared, she reemerged most notably in the writing process and continued reflections on these texts: recalling memories, pouring over scribbled field notes, looking back at photographs, and gaining new insights on things that I had not realized in my initial interactions. Reflecting on these experiences from afar



is a challenge and an important way of establishing perspective.<sup>30</sup> It is an important, albeit sometimes tenuous and painstaking step (*laku*), in the process of gaining critical perspective and creating knowledge (*ilmu*). My relationality within these movements—with my interlocutors and with the communities of SALAM and KBQT—is an important part of how this research was formed.

As a researcher trained in the field of Southeast Asian Studies, I draw from the notion that one must tune one's attention to points of continuity and change.<sup>31</sup> This is also a formulation that resonates with movements of transformative cultural action that are the subject of this research. Participation and reflection were already embedded in my interactions with SALAM and KBQT.

Over the course of 10-months research in Indonesia supported by a Fulbright research grant, I interacted with a diverse community of individuals—activists, artists, scholars, community leaders, educational facilitators, students, and everyday folk—who shared the affective experience of having become part of a new community of empowered individuals. Their lives were indeed transformed through engagements with symbolic and aesthetic forms of cultural action. Their stories they shared with me of personal empowerment as situated within collective experiences, are gifts that these people allowed me to learn from. My reflections of their stories and our interactions during my field work are collected here and represent an important core of the primary source materials that are the basis from which this research project has grown. As a researcher conducting “participant observation,” I also became an author in what I see as the co-creation of these texts.<sup>32</sup>

I took part in the *pergaulan* of a multiplicity of transformative movement actors. As it was explained to me by students, activists and artists in these communities, *pergaulan* implies intercommunication and conversation, a shared sense of community based on sustained relationships and interactions. My direct participation is, however, limited to ten months of field work, plus a few trips in which I returned to visit the research sites in the subsequent years. Writing has become a means to continue engaging in the *pergaulan* of transformative cultural action in Indonesia, albeit from a distance. Many of the personal stories and co-created ethnographic texts are included within the narrative of my scholarship, but not all these stories fit into the conventions of academic writing. Others inform my readings and interpretations but are situated in an appendix at the back of this work. I allow the proliferation of texts to spill over into the appendix in this way as an attempt to push back against the boundaries which divide researchers and informants, an attempt to write *with* and *alongside* the experiences of subaltern communities in Central Java. This does not mean to say that my work is meant to perform that proliferation, there are still beginnings and endings and openings for continuation that I will point to throughout my writing to ensure that I am not confining these multiplicities, but rather facilitate the continued growth of decentered sites of learning through their examples.

The oral histories about the community-based learning organizations I collected in the field, and which are interspersed throughout my analysis here, work to revive the notion of an actively changing, adapting, and growing Java, in both the physical landscape and the imagination of its culture. I combine these texts with literary and historical analysis to constitute

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<sup>30</sup> Though as an aside, I keep in touch with these communities through digital platforms. This has meant that I can continue to ask questions and solicit advice from the communities themselves. A byproduct of the changing shape of research in the digital age.

<sup>31</sup> See for example McVey, Ruth. “Change and Continuity in Southeast Asian Studies.” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1, Mar. 1995, pp. 1–9.

<sup>32</sup> See Appendix B for a full description of my research activities in 2015.

an interdisciplinary approach to the study of cultural movements of social transformation in Java. As a scholar observing the legacies of transformative social movements among rural communities in Java, participating with my voice changed my relationship to my research subjects. In the moment I wrote this passage, the song-poem “Ilmu Iku” resonated with my own participation in the memories of grassroots educational empowerment in Java as well as their contemporary permutations in Yogyakarta and Salatiga today. As my interlocutors shared memories and community histories of transformative change in Java, they also invited me in to learn from their actions and movements to explore the granular details of rakyat kecil experiences that are not typically considered in the greater scholarship of social movements as agents of change.<sup>33</sup>

I draw from the work of Anna Tsing in *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an out-of-the-Way Place* (1993) to gain critical perspective on my positionality in relation to the transformative communities who inform the body of my work. In the preface Tsing discusses the “poverty of an urban imagination which systematically has denied the possibility of difference *within* the modern world and thus looked to relatively isolated people to represent its only adversary, its dying Other.” Her research focus is on the *Meratus Dayak* people of Kalimantan who live in some of the most geographically remote forests of Indonesia. Tsing enables “the concept of marginality to begin discussions of such distinctive and unequal subject positions within common fields of power and knowledge” (Tsing *In the Realm* x-xi). Their physical marginality is, however, not a reflection of their marginality to the “world of expanding capitalisms, ever-militarizing nation-states, and contested cultural politics” (Tsing *In the Realm* xi). Her work reconceptualizes these “out-of-the-way places” as sites that are very much intertwined in the same world of global relations shared with readers of her work, a notion which I also explore in symbolic terms with the communities of rakyat kecil in Java.

The communities that are the subject of my research project are of course very different than the *Meratus Dayak*. Located in one of the most densely populated islands of the world, members of a culture that has been deployed by the nation-state as a tool of power and domination in the region for decades, the Javanese communities of my research may seem to be the farthest from “marginal” one could possibly find in Indonesia. The marginality of rakyat kecil communities in Java is constructed very differently than that of the *Meratus Dayak*, it is an internalized marginality that has been forced inward by historical violence and economic marginalization. The rakyat kecil of Java and the *Meratus Dayak* have a great deal in common when it comes to the impact of neoliberal forms of capitalist expansion implemented by the developmentalist agendas of the New Order and military strong arm of the nation-state.<sup>34</sup> While the physical threat of violence in Java is no longer as great (though it is still in many instances), it is still a symbolic threat reproduced in educational institutions and popular media. Following Tsing’s example, my project is also “a self-conscious exploration of the possibilities of living with curiosity amidst ongoing violence” (Tsing *In the Realm* xi), to explore the ways in cultural action is enabled in the cases of SALAM and KBQT as a method of symbolic liberation. I am still learning.

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33 See Appendix C for a continuation of the narrative surrounding “Ilmu Iku” which serves as an example of the ways in which fieldwork text spills over the boundaries of scholarly formulae. This text proved to be too lengthy to fit into the introduction to this work, but it is importantly included in the appendix as a source to gain critical perspective on my own methodologies and limitations of my relatively brief interactions with primary interlocutors in the field.

34 See Peluso, Nancy Lee. “A Political Ecology of Violence and Territory in West Kalimantan.” *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2008, pp. 48–67.

## *Overview of Chapters:*

The first chapter of this dissertation serves as a background to the contemporary communities of SALAM and KBQT. I begin by articulating some of the ways in which the violence of 1965 in the establishment of the New Order effectively silenced a discourse of cultural action among rakyat kecil actors. Instead, a culture of silence was instituted in the cultural imagination of the New Order nation. With the very real threat of death and disappearance, rakyat kecil communities could no longer voice public criticism of the government or its detrimental developmentalist actions for fear of death, torture, or disappearance. High-profile cultural actors began to enable cultural modes of resistance to attempt to represent the interests of the oppressed and silenced rakyat kecil. In this chapter I explore in greater detail forms of cultural resistance enacted on the national stage in direct resistance to the cultural hegemony of the New Order authoritarian state. As large-scale developmentalist expansions of global capital continued to marginalize and disenfranchise rakyat kecil communities throughout the New Order, the narratives of resistance which emerge during this period work to reconstitute the submerged and suppressed legacies of cultural action in Java. I focus on one example of New Order developmentalism in Central Java,<sup>35</sup> namely the construction of a large-scale multipurpose dam and irrigation project called Kedung Ombo, and the confluence of cultural action which emerged around its construction. I engage with three creative responses to New Order developmentalism at Kedung Ombo: the rakyat-centered poetry of Wiji Thukul, the humanitarian work of Yusuf Bilyarta Mangunwijaya, and the theatrical work of the performance arts group *Kyai Kanjeng*. I demonstrate how these artists recirculated ideas regarding the political role of art and acted as cultural tricksters to appropriate and transform the cultural hegemony of the New Order. Their works did much to bring public attention to the injustices at Kedung Ombo, and while their cultural actions did not work to stop the construction of Kedung Ombo, their failures also initiated a shift towards greater involvement of oppressed rakyat kecil actors in movements of cultural resistance.<sup>36</sup> As activists reflected critically on the failures of cultural action in the seventies and eighties, a new set of transformative movements emerged to analyze and work to alleviate the unequal social realities of the New Order period which lasted from 1965-1998. Activists began to work more specifically through educational forms of *penyadaran* (critical awareness or “conscientization” in the language of Freire) to sustain forms of cultural action by and for rakyat kecil communities that are still at play in the communities of SALAM and KBQT today.

The trajectory of cultural actions at Kedung Ombo initiated a shift towards smaller-scale forms of cultural action embedded in the lives of communities most effected by the cultural hegemony of the New Order. In Parts I and II of this work, I look more closely at communities of SALAM and KBQT, and the cultural terms of their movements that I learned through participation in their contemporary schools.

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<sup>35</sup> Central to the definition of developmentalism is the notion that there is a “transference of the conceptual framework for developed societies to underdeveloped societies” (Boddenheimer 99).

<sup>36</sup> In Indonesia a variety of terms are used to describe oppressed peoples, I choose to use the term used most widely among activists and cultural actors in transformative movements, that is the Indonesian term *rakyat kecil*. *Kecil* means “small” and *rakyat* is a designation for “the people” which emerged most notably in the formation of the independent nation of Indonesia, and which was employed most notably by Indonesia’s first president, Sukarno. During the transition to the New Order, Suharto more often used the term *masyarakat*, which is a more generic term meaning “society” to refer to all Indonesians.

Part I focuses on *Sanggar Anak Alam*. Chapter two traces down rivers and paths of memory to explore the origins of the first permutation of SALAM in Lawen from 1988-1994. From my experience traveling to Lawen over the Lebaran holiday in 2015, I met many people who shared stories of SALAM, and of the woman who helped facilitate their *penyadaran* and empowerment. Some of these people still lived in Lawen, others had moved away, but all of them came together in the annual *mudik* movement of return to their homeland. While this place was no longer the site of SALAM, for the people of Lawen it never left. SALAM held symbolic value in their minds as they reinforced that history through memory. Stories were repeated and shared over sweet tea and Lebaran snacks, in kitchens, through music, and in the homecoming rituals of Lebaran. It is through these memories and stories that I address how the small-scale movement of return to agrarian Java, initiated largely by women, come to redefine cultural action in terms of small movements situated in a physical return to a village in Java. The woman that I follow most closely in this chapter participated in actions at Kedung Ombo. As she learned from the movements of an earlier generation of activists, she also began to trace her own path of cultural resistance through small scale community organizing. In this chapter I demonstrate how following one woman's movements of return to a family homeland in rural Java reorient the terms by which empowerment projects are enacted at the height of New Order developmentalism in Java. Efforts to facilitate small economic and educational initiatives in a village in Java were radical acts of defiance to the heightened restrictions placed on movement and organizing in rural Java at the height of New Order authoritarian state control. Following the small steps of cultural actions embedded in family traditions, lived experience, and facilitated through the leadership of women, an already decentered subject position, my work demonstrates how cultural resistance is not always reflected in overt and direct confrontations with the nation-state.

In chapter three I follow the small-scale movements of return to seed transformative cultural actions in education at the contemporary community of SALAM in Nitiprayan. Cultural actions constituted by family in physical movements of return to homeland in rural Java, are today transformed into symbolic sites of return to the rural agrarian imagination of Java at SALAM. The school feels like a family and call themselves a "sekolah hidup. This can be translated as "school of life" to mean that that education is embedded in everyday life, but also as "living school." It is a thriving place in which parents, children, old and young, are excited to return each day because it activates their imaginations, creativity, a collect sense of belonging. To explore these notions, I draw from the example of a contemporary revival of rituals surrounding the rice harvest festival, called *pesta panen wiwit*, in celebration of the goddess of rice, Dewi Sri. I learned from participating in the accompanying confluence of educational, artistic and community-based activities that take place around the revival of agrarian traditions at SALAM. The small steps of rituals surrounding the Goddess of Rice in Java, Dewi Sri, are performed first and foremost for the children of SALAM. Oriented towards teaching them about the rich cultural traditions of agrarian Java, not as a political history of struggle, marginalization, and disenfranchisement, but as a playful event that fosters community solidarity and reinvigorates collective memory as it is transformed into cultural action. Traditions surrounding Dewi Sri and the rice harvest are salient symbols agrarian prosperity. In this chapter I explore how silenced cultural traditions are redeployed as sites of transformation and empowerment for a new generation of students. The symbolism of Dewi Sri as enacted in ritual is transformed into a figure of empowerment to sustain movements of transformative change and strengthen a culture, not only of resistance, but of resilience among communities in Java.

Part II focuses on Komunitas Belajar Qaryah Thayyibah in Kalibening. The physical movements of return to a village in Java and symbolic return to a sense of connection to the agrarian traditions at SALAM, are in some ways already prefigured in the community of KBQT. Kalibening is a place that was once categorized as a *desa* (village) but was administratively changed during the New Order and incorporated into the city of Salatiga as a *kelurahan*. Nevertheless, in the lives of the people of Kalibening it never stopped being a village. They call themselves a village, an empowered village, *qaryah thayyibah*, a name which reinforces an imagination of Muslim identity in the region. Unlike the activists at Kedung Ombo, they are not trying to represent the *desa* (village) or the *petani* (farmers), they are a *desa* full of *petani*, and many other things. A precursor to the formation of KBQT in Kalibening is the *Serikat Paguyuban Petani Qaryah Thayyibah* (SPPQT, Association of Farmer’s Unions for Village Empowerment). It was started in 1999 through the initiative of a local community leader who had been involved in the *penyadaran* methodologies of an earlier generation of movement activists at Kedung Ombo. KBQT was then started in 2003 as a free school for farmers’ children. In chapter four I explore the ways in which transformative methodologies are implemented to facilitate village empowerment and shift notions of traditional Muslim leadership. In scholarship, *kyai*—Muslim leaders of pesantren Islamic boarding schools—occupy subject positions typically overdetermined by representations of centralized and patriarchal patterns of leadership.<sup>37</sup> This chapter investigates the way in which a new type of transformative *kyai* figure emerges at the intersection of traditional leadership and activist movements of transformative methodologies in the nineties. I focus on the ways in which traditional notions of power and authority are used to initiate transformative change in Kalibening by facilitating greater participation of children and women in continued empowerment efforts.

In chapter five I address the contemporary school of KBQT by looking at the ways in which participatory learning is embedded in the “empowered village” of Kalibening today. Much like the community of SALAM, KBQT as a school operates like a family. The school is integrated into and alongside the family home of the village leader discussed in chapter four. The students refer to themselves as “anak QT” the “kids of an empowered village.” In their schooling they live together like brothers and sisters, some of which are from Kalibening and others who are symbolically adopted into the family of learners. One of the features I noticed most about KBQT is how the young women are central leaders in their learning community. The affiliation of KBQT with SPPQT, as well as being situated in a village, also means they learn directly from farmers and other *rakyat kecil* in the surrounding community. It is not limited to farming, but the students transform what they learn from the village community into their music, literatures, and art works. “Anak yang berkarya”, “kids who create” is phrase they often use at KBQT. They also enable the symbols of agrarian prosperity as a form of cultural capital, in the lexicon of their education and in the imagination of their creative productions. Through close reading and analysis of popular literary forms produced by members of KBQT, I demonstrate how patriarchal narratives of traditional leadership in Java as well as the more public facing cultural actions of the New Order are reimagined by a new generation of young, empowered authors and leaders in Kalibening. I show how popular genres typically associated with urban cultural forms are resituated in the rural-urban interface to rewrite popular narratives of what constitutes cosmopolitanism in Java and critique traditional cultural hierarchies from within. By embedding examples *penyadaran* within their novels for a growing audience of young women readers, these

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<sup>37</sup> See Geertz, Clifford. *The Religion of Java*. A Phoenix Book P658. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.

works move away from the centralizing tendencies of the national imaginations towards alternative imaginations which work a new generation of women authors.

The works that are considered within this dissertation create space for a multiplicity of decentered actors to shape new imaginative futures through symbolic action. I end with a quotation from one of the founders of SALAM which encapsulates the ideals of emancipatory, participatory, and intergenerational learning that takes place in the communities of SALAM and KBQT.

“Schools are like an oasis, like a shady place and a source of water in the middle of the desert in which you can unwind. Schools should be a place where people can quench their thirst for curiosity, realize their dreams and imagine their creations” (Rahardjo, *Sekolah Biasa Saja* 1).<sup>38</sup>

In this dissertation, I explore the terms by which curiosities are quenched, dreams are realized, and new imaginations are created in the cultural productions of their participants.

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<sup>38</sup> “*Sekolah lelayaknya semacam oasis, seperti tempat teduh dan sumber air di tengah padang pasir untuk melepas Lelah. Mustinay Sekolah merupakan tempat di mana orang-orang dapat memuaskan dahaga keingintahuannya, mewujudkan impian-impian dan imajinasi kekaryanya*” (Rahardjo, *Sekolah Biasa Saja* 1).

## 1 | Background: Submerged Narratives of Resistance, Legacies of Cultural Action in Java



This woodcut print portrays a group of peasant farmers standing over three unmarked graves in the Javanese countryside.<sup>40</sup> Three corpses lie underneath the dark black soil with only their large feet exposed.<sup>41</sup> Flowering panicles of rice grow above them, expressively sweeping upward towards the sky. A heavy black stream flows between the graves and rice fields in the background. Water, or perhaps blood, connects these graves in solid black ink to the agrarian landscape behind them, where laborers till the soil with hoes and prepare the fields for new planting. The figures in the foreground are carved with coarse features, muscular bodies, wearing the *caping* hats used by many farmers in Java. Two men carry the *sabit padi* (sickle), the man in the foreground grips it tightly against his chest while the man on the far right stands with it clenched in his fist, a woman stands between them a crowd of peasants gathers behind them. As they pointedly peer out towards the viewer with wide eyes and stiff bodies, their disturbed faces with somber, pained, and angry expressions reflect a sense of mourning and outrage at the graves that lie beside them. Viewers are confronted by an aesthetic tension in the peasants' expressions between mourning and resistance. The sickle held tightly against the heart, perhaps in reverence for the loss of their fellow farm laborers, also suggests that these peasants are not merely in a state of mourning but are in a state of outrage and potential resistance. The scene is set against a backdrop of two volcanic mountains, a curving clouded sky, framed by the beautiful stalks of flowering rice. Violence and beauty in the agrarian landscape of Java, a trope with a long history in the Javanese tradition.

<sup>39</sup> Image from Foulcher, Keith. *Social Commitment in Literature and the Arts: The Indonesian "Institute of People's Culture" 1950-1965*. Center of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1986, 102.

<sup>40</sup> For a detailed analysis of the history of woodcut art in leftist revolutionary discourse in Indonesia see Bodden, Michael. "Lekra Woodcuts in the Early 1960s: Socialist Realism, National Culture, and Cosmopolitan Patriots." *Indonesia*, vol. 106, no. 1, Cornell University Press, 2018, pp. 11–33.

<sup>41</sup> Large feet (and hands) are a common aesthetic in many LEKRA artworks, symbolic of manual work and connection to the earth.

Entitled “Boyolali,” this woodcut was produced in 1965 by Kusmulyo, a member of *Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat* (LEKRA – The Institute of Peoples Culture).<sup>42</sup> The incident depicted was a point of activism for the *Barisan Tani Indonesia* (BTI, Indonesian Farmer’s Front), which had their headquarters in Boyolali.<sup>43</sup> The woodcut memorializes Peristiwa Boyolali, or the Boyolali Incident, which took place in November 1964. This event, called *aksi sepihak* (unilateral action<sup>44</sup>) was a protest lead by BTI which called for the implementation of the *Undang-Undang Pokok Agraria* or Basic Agrarian Law of 1960 and was violently suppressed by the Indonesian military.<sup>45</sup> The image casts a tragic irony across the esthetic as well as the agrarian landscape as the following year massive military action was launched against an alleged communist uprising. From 1965-1966 an estimated 500,000 - 1.2 million Indonesians were killed as the army and militias turned violent force against anyone either directly or indirectly affiliated with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), targeting especially peasant farmers, laborers, activists.<sup>46</sup> Mass graves like the ones depicted in Kusmulyo’s work still lie unceremoniously covered over across the landscape of Java, Bali and Sumatra, and the subsequent political transitions ushered in an extended period of authoritarian control in Indonesia that lasted until the late nineties.<sup>47</sup> The tension in the peasants’ expressions above points towards the ways in which the peasantry was reinterpreted after the political shift to the New Order. The suggestion of peasant power was subsequently exaggerated to deflect the violence away from the military to the peasant.

The violent events of 1965-66 effectively truncated a popular discourse of peasant resistance in Indonesia that had been foundational to the establishment of the Indonesian nation. In the wake of the New Order's physical and symbolic suppression of peasant resistance, a culture of fear and silence predominated. From the late sixties onward, agrarian livelihoods shifted as Suharto opened the Indonesian economy to corporate foreign investment, large-scale national developmental interests, and state enterprise.<sup>48</sup> The agrarian landscape was dramatically changed as industrialization and factory production became increasingly important to Indonesia’s growing export economy. New relationships of power in a rapidly expanding economy had lasting effects on the social and cultural dynamics of Indonesian life, but also on the ways in

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<sup>42</sup> Artists of LEKRA were committed to producing political art by linking the concerns of farm and factory laborers with aesthetic representation.

<sup>43</sup> Founded on November 25, 1945, the mass farmer’s organization was heavily involved in land reform and peasant advocacy during the first 20 years of Indonesian independence. Tempo, Tim Buku. *Seri Tempo: Lekra dan Geger 1965*. Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2014, pp. 76-77.

<sup>44</sup> Or rather “unprovoked action” in the language of the military.

<sup>45</sup> For more details on the dynamics of early land reform in Indonesia see Soemardjan, Selo. “Land Reform in Indonesia.” *Asian Survey* 1, no. 12 (1962): 23–30.

<sup>46</sup> The actions were supported by the United States in one of many cold war era interventions attempting to eradicate communism globally. Since Boyolali was a major center of agrarian activism, it also became a site of some of the most brutal violence of this period. The political nature of LEKRA artworks and their affiliation with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) also made many artists the target of state violence. I was unable to find any specific information about Kusmulyo after 1965, but because of the high profile and confrontational nature of his artwork, it can be assumed that he too was a target of state violence.

<sup>47</sup> While Suharto fell from power in 1999, Indonesia still struggles to reconcile this history of violence within institutions that continue to perpetuate authoritarian policies of the New Order. The Indonesian state today has barely recognized this history and international tribunals have yet to bring any substantial charges against those who lead these violent efforts. In fact, many of the same political and military leaders remain in government and positions of great authority.

<sup>48</sup> For a detailed analysis of the ways in which capital exerts a major influence upon the Indonesian state, its officials and policies, see Robison, Richard. *Indonesia: The Rise of Capital*. Equinox Publishing, 2009.



which Indonesian citizens could express themselves. With the very real threats of censorship, imprisonment, disappearance, and even death for those who resisted New Order state ideologies, public activism and political art became risky acts.

The graves covered over in Kusmuljo's 1965 woodcut foreshadow not only the violence of 1965-66, but also the ways in which the New Order government continued to cover over incidents of violence, suppress critical perspectives, while, in some cases literally submerging communities and sites that had a history of voicing resistance. One example that is the focus of this chapter is the construction of the Kedung Ombo dam and reservoir, a large-scale multipurpose dam on the Serang River in Central Java, located on the border of three regencies in Central Java: Grobogan, Sragen and Boyolali. This was one of a series of large-scale development projects intended to increase Indonesia's economic viability and support the expansion of its industrial sector within increasingly globalized markets.<sup>49</sup> The construction of the dam and reservoir took the better part of a decade,<sup>50</sup> and by the time the project was fully completed in 1993, over 5,000 families had been forced to relocate, and 37 villages inundated by the waters of the Kedung Ombo reservoir.<sup>51</sup> It is not a coincidence that the site depicted in Kusmuljo's woodcut print was covered over by the rising waters of this large-scale development project. Twenty years after the violence of 65-66, Boyolali continued to represent a symbolic site of peasant resistance. Farmers like the ones above were still seen as being poised and ready to rebel against the state, the sickle was no longer merely a tool of farm laborers but presumed to be a symbol of communist affiliation and potential weapon of resistance, a bias perpetually reinforced by local and national officials. In the narrative furthered by the authoritarian military state, communities of peasant farmers represented a potential reemergence of communism in Indonesia and a threat to the authority of the state. As state-led development exacerbated economic and social inequalities, however, new forms of resistance to state oppression also emerged.

In this chapter I focus on three creative responses to New Order developmentalism at Kedung Ombo. The first, the poetry of Wiji Thukul, became emblematic of people-centered social movement activism. While Thukul was the victim of state disappearance in 1998, his poetry remains deeply ingrained in the ethos of social movement activism in Indonesia. The second is the Catholic priest and architect, Yusuf Bilyarta Mangunwijaya, known affectionately as Romo Mangun, whose public activism, promotion of educational access and humorous discursive style that draws from the trickster-like clown gods of the Javanese wayang cultural repertoire helped to raise national attention to humanitarian injustices of the New Order. Thirdly, I will look at the ways in which an early theatrical work of the performance arts group, Kyai Kanjeng combined modern and traditional theatrical forms to speak to the injustices at Kedung Ombo. By thematizing the experiences of disenfranchised communities at Kedung Ombo and speaking against the forced consolidation of national subjectivities during the New Order, even as the state silenced and suppressed voices of resistance, they developed a distinctive blend of

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<sup>49</sup> These goals were temporarily accomplished as Indonesia became one of the smaller tigers of the East Asian Economic Miracle, but these large-scale economic successes proved to be temporary as Indonesia was hit hard by the Asian economic crisis at the end of the 20th Century. See Anderson, Benedict. "From Miracle to Crash." *London Review of Books* 20, no. 8 (April 16, 1998): 3-7. See also World Bank, ed. *The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy*. A World Bank Policy Research Report. New York, N.Y: Oxford University Press, 1993.

<sup>50</sup> In 1985, the World Bank approved a \$156 million loan to the Indonesian government for construction of the Kedung Ombo dam and reservoir.

<sup>51</sup> World Bank. *Project Completion Report, Indonesia, Kedung Ombo Multipurpose Dam and Irrigation Project (loan 2543-IND)*. Washington, D.C: World Bank, 1995.

Islamic, Javanese and Western cultural action that helped to reframe and problematize the role of high-profile cultural workers within grassroots social movements. Finally, I return to a poem by Wiji Thukul as a foil to set into perspective the limitations of activism at Kedung Ombo. As these cultural workers attempted to represent the struggles of marginalized people, they revived a suppressed tradition of politically oriented arts and cultural expressions as outlets for resistance to state hegemony. They modeled ways of evading and even embracing censorship to publicly voice critique of New Order developmentalism at a time when it was very dangerous to do so. Their works uncover some of the limitations of urban-centered activisms by highlighting agrarian communities.

### *The Case of Kedung Ombo: Breaking the Silence, Representing the People*

*ceritakanlah ini kepada siapapun*<sup>52</sup>

tell this story to anyone

*panas campur debu  
terbawa angin kemana-mana*

heat mixed with dust  
brought everywhere by the wind

*koran hari ini memberitakan  
kedungombo menyusut kekeringan  
korban pembangunan dam  
muncul kembali ke permukaan  
tanah-tanah bengkah  
pohon-pohon besar malang-melintang  
makam-makam bangkit dari ingatan  
mereka yang dulu diam*

the newspaper today reports that  
kedungombo is receding in the drought  
victims of the construction of the dam  
re-emerge on the surface  
land splits  
large trees fallen over each other  
graves rise from memory  
of those who used to be silent

*kali ini  
cerita itu siapa akan membantah  
dasar waduk ini dulu dusun rumah-rumah*

this time  
who will dispute that story  
the base of this dam was once a village of homes

*waktu juga yang menyingkap  
retorika penguasa  
walau senjata ditodongkan kepadamu  
walau sepatu di atas kepalamu  
di atas kepalaku  
di atas kepala kita*

it is time that will reveal  
the rhetoric of the powerful  
even though weapons are pointed at you  
even though shoes are on your head  
on my head  
on our heads

*ceritakanlah ini kepada siapapun  
sebab itu cerita belum tamat  
(Thukul, Mencari Tanah Lapang 34)*

tell this story to everyone  
because that story has not ended

This poem was written by Wiji Thukul in 1991, the same year Suharto visited Central Java to officially inaugurate the completion of the Kedung Ombo dam and reservoir. Thukul reflects on the confluence of activism surrounding Kedung Ombo. While the construction of the dam only directly impacted a relatively small portion of the population of Java, it generated a great deal of collective action at the time as people from major cities now came into direct contact with the struggle of rural peasants and farmers marginalized by national development projects. The poem begins and ends with an imperative for audiences to continue to share the stories of Kedung Ombo.

<sup>52</sup>Thukul, Wiji. *Mencari Tanah Lapang: Puisi*. Manus Amici, 1994.

This poem offers a departure from the typical street slang and everyday vernacular enabled in Thukul's poetry. It takes a different approach as Thukul writes entirely in Indonesian, adopting the language of the nation-state to orient Indonesian audiences to the injustices of state-initiated development. The imagery throughout subtly unearths narratives buried beneath the surface of memory and history. The repetition of "di atas" in the second to last stanza, "on your head / on my head / on our heads" highlights the narratives of development which cover over and dehumanize working-class people, as well as the repeatedly subordinated narratives of resistance to authoritarian force. When paired with the image of the Boyolali graves at the start of this chapter, Thukul's poem unearths the transformation of the concrete graves (*makam*) to symbolic graves as the poet tells the story and solicits audience participation for the story to be retold: "tell this story to everyone / because that story has not ended." Everything that the New Order has tried to submerge—symbolic narratives, physical lands, and the lives and livelihoods, and even deaths of laboring Indonesians—these things all eventually resist. The poem serves as a kind of snapshot of a late moment of activism at Kedung Ombo, which points towards the silenced, buried, and submerged histories of oppression since the start of the New Order to reinvigorate a greater sense of resilience among oppressed peoples and continued modes of resistance.

More than any other large-scale development project that took place during Suharto's New Order regime, "Kasus Kedung Ombo" or the case of Kedung Ombo, as it was popularly referred to, brought together artists, intellectuals, scholars, journalists, farmers, and peasants in direct resistance to the New Order state. Kedung Ombo was not the first, or even the last, large-scale development project of the New Order,<sup>53</sup> but it was a turning point in the contemporary history of activism in Indonesia. Early activism at Kedung Ombo was led by a variety of civil society organizations who served as intermediaries between the state and communities marginalized by state development projects.<sup>54</sup> Legal advocacy by Lembaga Bantuan Hukum (LBH, the Legal Aid Institute) attempted to halt the construction of the dam and assist residents in pursuing adequate compensation for displacement.<sup>55</sup> There was, however, minimal compensation for landholders and since the majority of affected residents did not even own land, they were therefore ineligible for much compensation and the construction of the dam continued without much disruption. Residents also adamantly rejected efforts by the state to encourage transmigration to Sumatra. Those that remained defied state orders to relocate and were often labeled *ex-tapol* (ET), former political prisoners, a New Order euphemism for alleged communists affiliated with the former Indonesian Communist Party (PKI).<sup>56</sup> The presence of the Indonesian army in the region created significant physical barriers to entry into the affected areas. These political, ideological, and physical obstacles made many of the advocacy efforts

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<sup>53</sup> See Aditjondro, George, and David Kowalewski. "Damning the Dams in Indonesia: A Test of Competing Perspectives." *Asian Survey*, vol. 34, no. 4, University of California Press, 1994. And

<sup>54</sup> See Aspinall, Edward. *Opposing Suharto: Compromise, Resistance, and Regime Change in Indonesia*. Stanford University Press, 2005. And Lev, Daniel. "Legal Evolution and Political Authority in Indonesia: Selected Essays." *Legal Evolution and Political Authority in Indonesia*, Brill Nijhoff, 2000.

<sup>55</sup> Legal efforts continued until 1994. See Nusantara, Abdul Hakim G., and Budiman Tanuredjo. *Dua Kado Hakim Agung Buat Kedung Ombo: Tinjauan Putusan-Putusan Mahkamah Agung Tentang Kasus Kedung Ombo*. Cet. 1, ELSAM, 1997.

<sup>56</sup> Sidney Jones and the Asia Watch Committee report on the ways in which local officials continued to mark individuals as communist as a strategy to support state development projects and suppress forms of resistance in agrarian Java, especially in the area of Boyolali. See Jones, Sidney, and Asia Watch Committee (U.S.). *Injustice, Persecution, Eviction: A Human Rights Update on Indonesia and East Timor*. Human Rights Watch, 1990, 63)

seem like a complete failure to activists and residents alike, but where political and legal defense proved to be ineffective, cultural action offered a more sustained strategy of resistance, even after the completion of construction at Kedung Ombo.

Thukul's use of Indonesian in the poem mimics the language of newspapers which reported extensively on the rising waters of the Kedung Ombo reservoir.<sup>57</sup> By 1989, newspapers around Central Java and nationally published articles on a daily basis critiquing the development at Kedung Ombo. What was most striking about this influx of media attention is that it initiated a wave of public critique of the New Order government that would have been previously unimaginable considering the history of censorship throughout the New Order.<sup>58</sup> Gradually more and more people began to recognize the oppressive actions implemented by the New Order state in the name of economic development and progress. Thukul articulates this influx of newspapers reporting on the construction of a dam and displacement of rural peoples by the rising waters of the reservoir, yet there is a conspicuous lack of the mention of water in the poem. Instead, a dryness pervades the landscape of the opening lines, an ironic allusion to the droughts and water shortages experienced in Java at the time.<sup>59</sup> By saying that the story has not ended, Thukul points towards both the environmental impacts of New Order developmentalism but also to the possibility that the dead, now emerging from the parched earth that somehow the dam did not quench, will continue reveal stories that must be told.

The dust carried by the wind in the opening lines of the poem suggests a countermovement to the rising waters of the reservoir as Thukul brings these underlying ironies of developmentalist logic to the surface. There are many unspoken stories contained and concealed (*disamar*) within the story of Kedung Ombo. Like the wind, they were ephemeral in so far as they were actively erased from national consciousness, and yet also pervasive in how the consequences of developmentalism continued to assert influence. This tension, like the peasants' silent gaze towards the audience in Kusmulyo's work, draws readers into a landscape that retains the memory of violence.

A temporal shift from the pervasive and ephemeral dust of the opening lines to the marked time of the newspaper reports in the second stanza creates a space within which the stories of communities submerged by the waters of the Kedung Ombo reservoir resonate with previous incidents of the New Order erasures of history. The silences of the past create a continuity between contemporary circumstances at Kedung Ombo and histories of violence in the region. Where individuals could not speak, Thukul brings imagery of the earth responding to

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<sup>57</sup> To name only a few: "Kronologi Kedung Ombo" (*Tempo* 25 Mar. 1989); "Penduduk Kedongombo Minta Oknum Penjaga Pos Ditindak" (*Suara Pembaruan* 25 Mar. 1989); "Simbol Kedung Ombo" (*Editor*, 25 Mar. 1989); "Gubernur Bengkulu Soeprapto: Romo Mangun agar pelopori warga Kedungombo bertransmigrasi" (*Angkatan Bersenjata* 25 Mar. 1989); "Soal Kedung Ombo 'Welas Tanpo Asih'" (*Media Indonesia* 25 Mar. 1989); "Yang Membuat Ribut: Malaikat Penyelamat" (*Tempo*, 25 Mar. 1989); "Kanwil Depsos Jateng: Romo Mangun Pahlawan Kesiangan" (*Merdeka*, 13 Apr. 1989). All of these articles are included in Centre for Strategic and International Studies, editor. *Kliping Tentang Kasus Kedung Ombo*. Biro Informasi dan Data, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1989.

<sup>58</sup> See Aditjondro, George J. *The Media as Development "Textbook" a Case Study on Information Distortion in the Debate about the Social Impact of an Indonesian Dam*. 1993.

<sup>59</sup> Kedung Ombo was officially designed to increase food production for Java's rapidly expanding population, provide job opportunities by creating greater access to irrigation, and generate over 22.5 megawatts of hydroelectric power, but little was ever disclosed about the factors that that created those circumstances in the first place. The World Bank Completion report also notes how the Indonesian government concealed the nature of resistance to the construction of the dam.

the news of Kedung Ombo through volcanic rumblings. The cracks in the earth begin to reveal that which has been buried, covered over, and forgotten.

Thukul returns to the state narrative of a “receding drought,” but undermines it as “graves rise *again* from memory. The cemeteries of displaced villages were a particularly poignant symbol for the cultural losses at Kedung Ombo. Communities not only lost their land and livelihoods, but also their sense of connection to place, to family and community history. The upheaval of the earth and “large trees fallen over each other” are visceral images, the world turned upside down, a contemporary version of *jaman edan* in which history is rewritten. But who is silent here? It’s not the occupants of the graves, but those who were silent about it, now called to speak.

As the poem continues, Thukul’s play on time collapses history into the present and creates a sense of proximity with the audience. Set against the imagery of those in power that have twisted the rhetoric of history, Thukul creates a preferred audience that can recognize these historical manipulations. Even as the “guns are pointed at you,” Thukul uses the informal pronouns *kamu* (you) and *aku* (my), as well as the inclusive *kita* (our<sup>60</sup>) to progressively establish a feeling of community and solidarity with his audience, Indonesian citizens, who are all impacted by the authoritarian “boots on our heads.” As Thukul returns to the framing imperative to share the story of Kedung Ombo, “*ceritakanlah*” reinforces a refusal to be silent, by author and audience. In addition to conveying the negative side effects of large-scale development and generating awareness for wider Indonesian audiences beyond the immediate context of Kedung Ombo, the poem also serves as a countermovement to the failures at Kedung Ombo. While activists failed to halt the construction of the dam, activism at Kedung Ombo created widely publicized criticism of New Order developmentalism and opened greater possibilities for Indonesians to imagine beyond authoritarian controls.

State-sponsored narratives of development and economic growth concealed the history of human rights violations of the New Order, but cultural actors persisted in raising their voices to critique the state and bring the silenced histories of the New Order to light for larger Indonesian audiences. By organizing mass resistance to the construction of the dam, activists and artists gained a new foothold to voice critique about the growing economic inequalities and human rights violations of the late 20th Century. Activism at Kedung Ombo formed the basis of a culturally inflected social movement that proved to be more resilient than earlier campus-based actions such as those that took place in the 1970s. The Indonesian government and army found themselves confronting a new kind of social movement that was strengthened by a growing recognition among civil society actors of the efficacy of cultural action as a means of resistance.

The existing literature on Kedung Ombo written by activist groups, governmental organizations, the World Bank, and scholars, tends to highlight the socio-economic impacts of Kedung Ombo as part of the greater landscape of large-scale, technocratic economic development during the New Order.<sup>61</sup> While activism failed to avert the construction of the dam, the case of Kedung Ombo provides examples of the ways in which a discourse of resistance

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<sup>60</sup> *Kita* (our / we) is inclusive of the person being spoken to, in contrast to *kami* which excludes the person being spoken to.

<sup>61</sup> Governmental reports typically articulate the “success” of Kedung Ombo in terms economic growth and the creation of hydroelectric power. See World Bank. *Project Completion Report, Indonesia, Kedung Ombo Multipurpose Dam and Irrigation Project (Loan 2543-IND)*. World Bank, 1995. For a comprehensive assessment of Kedung Ombo from the perspective of an activist scholar see Stanley. *Seputar Kedung Ombo*. Cet. 1, ELSAM, 1994. As well as Dixon, Kevin Richard. *Avenues of Alternative Political Expression under the New Order Regime in Indonesia: Kedung Ombo and the Response to Developmentalism*. University of California, Berkeley, 1996.

reemerged despite increased surveillance, censorship and suppression by an authoritarian state. My approach is invested in the cultural dynamics that became rhetorically important for resistance, and I argue for greater attention to be placed on the symbolic baseline of grassroots efforts that in some ways foreground instances of mass resistance to the New Order that emerge again at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Kedung Ombo spurred a public confluence of art and activism in Java that worked to shift the discourses of cultural hegemony and forms of resistance to it away from large scale actors and towards greater consideration of the importance of rural and agrarian participation in grassroots movements for social change.

In the Javanese context, two concepts are important for understanding creative strategies of resistance enabled at Kedung Ombo. The first is the concept of *plesetan*, the Javanese term for a “play on words” that involves a slippage between meanings. Plesetan create alternative meanings in the strategic misuse or misappropriation of language and symbolism. In a situation of extreme restrictions on freedoms of expression, as was the case during the New Order, plesetan are acceptable to official audiences who take the words at face value, even while creating a differentiation with an implied preferred audience—those that understand the slippage and can “read between the lines.” A poignant example in the Javanese context comes from the Samin community of farmers in Northern Central Java who often enabled plesetan in resistance to the expansion of Dutch plantations in Java.<sup>62</sup> The second concept that is very much related to plesetan, is that of *samaran*, a kind of linguistic disguise. When something is spoken that may seem inconsequential but is a veil for a larger discourse or deeper context, it is “disamar”, veiled or concealed just under the surface of the utterance. Cloaked in Javanese symbolism, artists and activists can speak to multiple audiences through plesetan and samaran as a means by which to address “unspeakable” political histories, without directly addressing them. These linguistic and symbolic cultural techniques are important features of the performance arts of wayang shadow plays in Java which also became a stage for shaping the politics of public perception throughout the New Order. One activist, religious leader, and cultural trickster who is widely recognized as a leading voice of resistance to New Order authoritarianism is Romo Manguwijaya. In the next section I look at the ways in which he enabled a distinctively Javanese set of cultural tools to subvert restrictions at Kedung Ombo and reframe narratives of what makes a national hero during the New Order.

### **Khasana Pewayangan: Making New Order Heroes, Enemies and Tricksters**

Javanese cultural symbolism was central to the rhetoric of New Order authoritarianism, but also set the stage for its deployment as an act of resistance to the New Order state. In “The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture,” Anderson provides some framing for understanding this dynamic by investigating the interrelationships between cultural and social action as reflected in negotiations of power in Java, and by extension in the Indonesian nation. He argues that centralizing and unifying motivations of power as exemplified in the state motto “Bhineka Tunggal Ika,” “Unity in Diversity,” stem from distinctively Javanese cultural traditions. “The Javanese see power as something concrete, homogeneous, constant in total quantity, and without inherent moral implications as such,” notions which are entirely antithetical to modern European

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<sup>62</sup> For a close analysis of the use of *plesetan* among the Samin community during the late colonial period see Shiraishi, Takashi. “Dangir’s Testimony: Saminism Reconsidered.” *Indonesia*, no. 50, Oct. 1990, pp. 95–120. For a more detailed essay on the Javanese cultural embeddedness of *plesetan* see Mohamad, Goenawan. “Pasemon: On Allusion and Illusions.” *Manoa*, translated by John H. McGlynn, vol. 18, no. 1, July 2006, pp. 72–82.

conceptions of power (Anderson, *Language and Power* 5-8). This reinforces scholarship on the traditional polities of pre-colonial Southeast Asia—such as the galactic polity outlined by Stanley Tambiah or the mandala state as theorized by O.W. Wolters—who saw polity constituted in the interaction between center and periphery as a radiating light of influence which could expand and contract as allegiances of the peasantry moved between multiple centers of authority. Anderson deploys the metaphor of radiating light to highlight the ways in which Javanese tradition, and therefore polity, are overpoweringly center oriented (*Language and Power* 22). Extending the idea of the dominant role of the center even in forming a national identity, Aspinall and Fealy (6) note that in the New Order, state violence to suppress dissent necessitated forms of resistance which were more culturally nuanced so as not to be so quickly squelched by the military strength of the state.<sup>63</sup> Cultural symbolism in Javanese tradition then became a central means through which many activists continued to critique the state as veiled through their engagement with the same language of myth and symbol employed by the state. The richness of the wayang tradition of shadow plays and stories drawn from the indigenization of Ramayana and Mahabharata tales offered an outlet for the expression of dissent for especially Mangunwijaya. In light of the importance of plesetan and samaran, we might see how he assumed his critical role as cultural trickster to counter the cultural hegemony of the state by enabling the symbolism of Javanese wayang—the *khasana pewayangan* or “world of wayang”—to evade and undermine New Order cooptation of Javanese cultural symbols, at the same time to transform the hierarchical and centralizing tendencies of traditional Javanese culture.

However concerted the political and legal actions of civil society organizations efforts seemed at the start, they were ultimately considered “too little too late” (Stanley). Despite the refusal of many residents to relocate, the dam was closed in January of 1989. As the rainy season began, the waters of the Serang River started to flood surrounding areas.<sup>64</sup> Residents working with NGO activists were desperate for alternative forms of assistance, so turned to the support of Romo Mangun. His reputation for working to address poverty among communities displaced by New Order economic development was already well-established in Indonesia and internationally. Prior to his involvement at Kedung Ombo, Romo Mangun was best known for his work with the Kali Code River community in Yogyakarta from roughly 1981-1986. The Code River which runs through the center of the city of Yogyakarta had been labeled a “daerah hitam” or “black area” of Yogyakarta. It was a vulnerable community perpetually on the brink of displacement by local government efforts to clean up the area. In this area of abject poverty, high rates of crime and prostitution, many people lived in cardboard dwellings with no running water or proper sanitation. Some made their livelihoods out of collecting and selling sand from the banks of the river. Tackling the threat of community displacement, Romo Mangun built more permanent

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<sup>63</sup> Aspinall and Fealy go on to articulate the repressive nature of the New Order by describing how “the ‘Pancasila ideology’ propagated by the regime was a straight-jacketing and profoundly conservative doctrine. It tried to freeze Indonesian society in the stasis of a mythic vision of the Indonesian past, which stressed, consensus, harmony and tradition, but also obedience and passivity. This vision strove to obliterate the conceptual division between state and society, and to teach individuals and groups that their interests must always be subordinated to the greater ones of the state and nation” (5).

<sup>64</sup> The image of the rising waters at Kedung Ombo became symbolically significant in many newspaper reports at the time. One work of longform journalism by the Jakarta based magazine, *Tempo*, for example, published an article in 1989 entitled “Menunggu Sang Air Menyentuh” (“Waiting for The Water to Touch”). Large glossy photographs of the affected communities and human-interest stories describing plight of residents at Kedung Ombo worked to convey the severity of cultural loss at the expense of New Order economic development and generate popular sympathy for the displaced residents. See Centre for Strategic and International Studies, editor. *Kliping Tentang Kasus Kedung Ombo*. Biro Informasi dan Data, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1989, pp. 9-15.

housing and community schools with an architectural style that incorporated brightly colored aesthetics for increased visibility and low-cost, locally sourced building materials. These seemingly simple additions had a large impact on empowering people living on the banks of Kali Code that made it increasingly difficult for local governments to displace these communities. In 1992 Romo Mangun and the Kali Code community received the Aga Khan Award in Architecture which is granted to projects that address social needs in Muslim societies. Throughout the New Order, Romo Mangun helped to shape human rights discourse in response to authoritarian developmentalism. Through his activism and a distinctively Javanese style of cultural action drawing from the wayang traditions of Java, he was responsible for bringing human rights advocacy around issues surrounding poverty and access to education into wider public discourse.

His involvement at Kedung Ombo became the subject of controversy as he publicly resisted regional authorities that tried to halt his humanitarian efforts. A proliferation of newspaper reports from this moment, as well as Romo Mangun's own (prolific) corpus of writings provide a window into the discursive practices he used to defend the human rights of impoverished communities and resist New Order authoritarianism. In an interview published in *Editor* on March 25, 1989, Romo Mangun explains how he began working with the people of Kedung Ombo.

“When the reservoir was closed on January 18<sup>th</sup>, the people felt confused because they had put their hopes in LBH [the Legal Aid Institute], who were no longer present. So, they fled to Mangkunegoro because they felt a spiritual and historical connection there. That used to be the meeting place of prince Sambernyawa. They had [nearly] given up, ‘Kawulo sadoyo sampun klelep. Nyuwun tulung’ [‘We are all sinking. Please help.’]

“They were taken care of by Yayasan Sosial Mangkunegara, or Yayasan Bakti Satria headed by R. Setiawan, along with Abdul Hakim (Central LBH). Setiawan met with me while I was being taken care of at Elizabeth Hospital in Semarang. ‘Do you want to come help? Those of us that went the legal and press routes are now stuck,’ they said.

“Yes, I want to help. As a man of god, it would be a sin for me to reject helping people who are suffering. But I said that I didn't want to get involved with the law, compensation, or politics. Give me the task of public relations and saving the children” (Mangunwijaya).<sup>65</sup>

Here he does not focus on popular issues regarding compensation, poverty or the victimization of rural communities by state development, instead he establishes himself as an a-political actor called to action and focused on the local needs and agency of communities displaced by the construction of the dam. Called to help by a group of residents and activists at Kedung Ombo, Romo Mangun first visited one of the areas projected to be inundated by the waters of the reservoir, Kecamatan Kemusu, on February 28, 1989. A few days after his visit, the Governor of

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<sup>65</sup> “Ketika waduk itu ditutup pada 18 Januari lalu, rakyat merasa kebingungan. Karena LBH yang diharapkan, tak hadir. Lalu, mereka lari ke Mangkunegoro karena merasa ada hubungan batin, hubungan historis. Itu dulu tempat pertemuan pangeran Sambernyawa. Mereka pasrah bongkokan ‘Kawulo sadoyo sampun klelep. Nyuwun tulung. Mereka lalu diurus oleh Yayasan Sosial Mangkunegaran, yaitu Yayasan Bakti Satria yang dipimpin oleh R. Setiawan. Bersama Abdul Hakim (LBH Pusat). Setiawan menemui saya ketika saya dirawat di RS Elizabeth Semarang. ‘Apakah Romo mau ikut menolong. Karena kami yang lewat jalur hukum dan pers macet,’ kata mereka. Ya, saya mau membantu. Rohaniawan 26okum diminta bantuan orang yang menderita ‘kan berdosa 26okum menolak. Tapi, saya bilang bahwa saya tak akan bergerak di bidang okum, ganti rugi, politik. Beri saja saya tugas public relations dan penyelamatan anak-anak,” Centre for Strategic and International Studies, editor. *Kliping Tentang Kasus Kedung Ombo*. Biro Informasi dan Data, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1989, 34.



Central Java, Muhammad Ismail, officially banned Romo Mangun from returning to the region, which began a widely publicized confrontation between the priest and New Order authoritarian controls in Central Java. The Governor insisted that Romo Mangun should work through official state task forces deployed at Kedung Ombo, members of the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI). Ismail underscored the perceived importance by state actors of a tightly controlled bureaucratic mechanism in overcoming issues faced by communities displaced by the construction of the dam. “I am not rejecting his social duty, his humanitarianism. But there are rules, it has already been organized: assistance is channeled first through the *bupati* and then the Kedung Ombo task force.”<sup>66</sup> The governor suggested Romo Mangun redirect his efforts to assist residents in Kayen, the first of three new villages built by the government on state-owned forest land to accommodate families from Kedung Ombo.<sup>67</sup> Official accounts reinforced the need to work with government programs; Romo Mangun’s efforts “must be in accordance with government programs.”<sup>68</sup>

Romo Mangun continued his humanitarian efforts at Kedung Ombo despite restrictions set upon him by Governor Ismail. He helped refocus national attentions towards humanitarian rights in the region by foregrounding the agency of local communities to seek new homes, livelihoods, and assistance where the state failed to compensate them for their losses. His central strategy was to draw national attention towards the children displaced at Kedung Ombo and their right to access education despite the presumption that their parents had lingering communist affiliations. Set against the backdrop of 1965, Romo Mangun’s public subversion of state authority would have been unthinkable earlier, but now suddenly became a topic of great public debate with little to no major repercussions for the priest. He approached the highly sensitive state fear of a reemergence of communism in the agrarian context with relative ease, invoking the authority of religious and cultural values deemed higher than state authority to continue to work in direct opposition to state intervention.

In the above quote, we see how Romo Mangun shapes different levels of discourse aimed at three distinct audiences: Indonesian citizens broadly, Javanese communities specifically, and a general audience of regional and national officials who went to great lengths to suppress his involvement at Kedung Ombo with little success. The language is Indonesian, with the exception of one Javanese phrase, “*Kawulo sadoyo sampun klelep. Nyuwun tulung,*” indicating a preferred audience of Javanese speakers embedded within a message designed for an Indonesian audience. The phrase is not immediately translated, but the sentiment is expressed in the surrounding descriptions. “We are all sinking. Please help.” Romo Mangun does not ascribe meaning or reasoning to the exodus of communities from Kedung Ombo as this would perpetuate a narrative of Javanese peasants made to be victims of New Order development. Instead he highlights the peoples’ *batin* (internal feeling) and historical connection to the Javanese courts to focus on the

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<sup>66</sup> “*Saya tidak menolak bakti sosialnya, kemanusiannya. Tapi semua kan suda ada aturan, sudah diorganisasikan: bantuan disalurkan lewat bupati, lalu ke Satgas Kedungombo,*” Centre for Strategic and International Studies, editor. *Kliping Tentang Kasus Kedung Ombo*. Biro Informasi dan Data, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1989, 58.

<sup>67</sup> See Rumansara, Augustinus. “Indonesia: The Struggle of the People of Kedung Ombo.” *The Struggle for Accountability the World Bank, NGOs, and Grassroots Movements*, edited by Jonathan Fox and L. David Brown, MIT Press, 1998.

<sup>68</sup> “*...harus sesuai dengan program pemerintah,*” in Centre for Strategic and International Studies, editor. *Kliping Tentang Kasus Kedung Ombo*. Biro Informasi dan Data, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1989, pp. 56-57.

agency of their movements toward, in this case, a source of Javanese cultural authority.<sup>69</sup> The official audience is not overtly addressed, but the subtext of raising the authority of Javanese courts above the nation-state in the eyes of the residents of Kedung Ombo undermines the terms by which Suharto attempted to appropriate Javanese culture for political gain, and which I will discuss below. Romo Mangun returns a co-opted cultural narrative back to the people, and in so doing, unpacks for his Indonesian audience a local history of political authority in the Javanese cultural context that far predates the establishment of the Indonesian nation. This rhetorical move also subverts typical narratives of rural poverty and movements into cities in search of work as the agrarian landscape became increasingly difficult for farming communities to subsist. People divested of their lands and livelihoods often chose to move into cities for work, but instead found abject poverty, as was the case with the community at Kali Code. Poverty, however, is still not what Romo Mangun calls attention to in the quote above, rather he reinterprets these movements through the lens of a cultural draw to the heartland of Javanese civilization, the agency of the local community and their movement towards what *they* consider their cultural home.

The symbolic struggle of the Javanese courts is especially significant, not only because Suharto used Javanese culture as a means of bolstering his own political authority, but because Romo Mangun speaks to the parts of tradition that connect the self with community and place at a time when people felt fractured, disenfranchised, and dislocated by the supremacy of national economic development. By calling attention to the affected residents' connection to the Mangkunegara court, he expands the context of political power beyond the national imagination. Even as Romo Mangun appeals to Javanese culture in order to undermine state authority, however, he also undermines the rigid hierarchies of court culture. Mangkunegaran is the sultanate located in Solo, the lesser court of Javanese power and authority. The division of the two Javanese courts and supremacy of the Yogyakarta court over Solo were distinctions solidified by Dutch colonial administrative controls, not the people's cultural or political values. Mangkunegara established his court in rebellion against Pakubuwono II and the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Romo Mangun shifts focus back to the agency of the people and de-centers the discourse of the courts themselves. Not all of these meanings would be apparent to every audience, but that is part of the strategic nature of his criticisms. Slippages between meaning and resonance with cultural history that contribute to what I argue was Romo Mangun's "trickster-like" ability to subvert authoritarian controls and educate popular audiences beyond the simplistic narratives of the New Order State through Javanese cultural symbolism.

Romo Mangun's involvement at Kedung Ombo became the subject of great public debate, spurring a huge amount of press coverage, ironically at a time when *pembredelan* or banning of news agencies that published criticism of the New Order was a common occurrence. A persistent theme discussed in relation to Romo Mangun's humanitarian work, which he also takes up in his own writing, is an evaluation of what makes a national hero. At Kedung Ombo

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<sup>69</sup> Stanley notes that Sultan Mangkunegara IX asserted in 1989 that communities at Kedung Ombo were not considered part of the Mangkunegara court but merely trying to politicize his role in order to gain support their activism against the national development project. Stanley. *Seputar Kedung Ombo*. Cet. 1, ELSAM, 1994, 173. Regardless of this assertion by the Mankunegara court, what is important from the standpoint of Romo Mangun's argument is that the people themselves feel that connection. This additionally harkens back to pre-modern notions of authority and power in Java derived not from a centralized source of authority, but rather from the support and fealty of the people on the periphery. See Tambiah, Stanley. "The Galactic Polity." *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*, Cambridge University Press, 1976. And Anderson, Benedict. "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture." *Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, Cornell University Press, 1972.

Romo Mangun was praised by progressive news agencies, activists, and residents as the *pahlawan kesayangan* (beloved hero) and condemned by officials as the *pahlawan kesiangan* (a hero too late). Officials tried to undercut his work by sarcastically referring to him as the *malaikat penyelamat* (angel of salvation). In his attempts to assist residents whose homes would soon be inundated by the rising waters of the reservoir, he shifted focus toward the immediate local concerns of Central Javanese residents by articulating things that could no longer be spoken except in the act of resistance in increasingly cultural terms. Important for understanding the context out of which Romo Mangun drew a distinctly Javanese cultural discourse of resistance is the performance tradition of wayang shadow-plays. Although this was a cultural lexicon appropriated by Suharto himself, wayang also served well in resistance to the adverse effects of developmentalism throughout the New Order. Distancing himself from the politicization of Kedung Ombo through religious and cultural appeals set within the world of wayang, Romo Mangun enabled cultural symbolism and rhetorical techniques drawn from the Javanese performance tradition in response to being officially banned from the region. He re-appropriated already coopted Javanese cultural tools, flipping the script, so to speak, to undermine constructions of state authority.

The world of wayang or *khasana pewayangan* provides an important cultural basis for the expression of political ideology in Indonesia. Wayang stories, called *lakon*, are allegorical in nature and draw from the repertoire of mythic tales from the Javanese tradition of Ramayana and Mahabharata stories. In Indonesia today, shadow plays are performed regularly at celebrations of all kinds for a great diversity of audiences. As a predominantly oral tradition, the meanings these stories convey are rather malleable. Specific *lakon* (stories or plays) are selected by a *dhalang* puppet master to suit different occasions. They are often used didactically in performances to teach moral lessons or generate commentary on social and political realities. The epic narratives of the *Mahabharata* are not restricted to wayang performances, they are also a kind of cultural template onto which social and political happenings can be mapped. Sometimes their didactic messages are rather overt, but very often they are disguised or *disamar* within the larger more recognizable narratives of the story. The genre is adaptable as a point of authority or as a means of resistance. Premodern kings, contemporary presidents and everyday folks could use these stories to justify their political power or conceal their critiques of it. Sears notes that “by continual movements in and out of the thought-world of the wayang, by recognizing the persistent displacement of stories and meanings, [...] Mahabharata and Ramayana tales [are] potential sites of struggle in the postcolonial politics of the Indonesian state.”<sup>70</sup> They are a living tradition, and a cultural currency used every day in Java, always changing and often enacted for the negotiation of social and political discourse.

Suharto was well known for adopting themes from the Javanese wayang tradition throughout his administration to justify the authority of the New Order state. The confirmation of presidential authority on Suharto in 1968, for example, was cast in the light of wayang imagery. *SuperSemar* (a shortening of *Surat Perintah Sebelas Maret*, the “Order of Eleven March”), is a document that allegedly transferred authority from former president Sukarno into the hands of General Suharto. The physical document itself can be seen as a myth in its own right as it has never been seen or publicly verified to exist, but it was conveyed as historical truth in Indonesia for decades. The name draws attention to the most beloved of the wayang characters, *Semar*. One of four characters unique to the Indonesian versions of the Mahabharata stories, *Semar* is the

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<sup>70</sup> Sears, Laurie J. *Shadows of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales*. Duke University Press, 1996, 269.

father of the *punakawan* clown-gods: his sons are *Gareng*, *Bagong* and *Petruk*. Semar is a fat character with a round bulbous body, one hand rests on his hip and the other points downward to symbolize his connection to the earthly realm. He is considered the representative of the people on earth to the gods in heaven. All of the *punakawan* have *kasar* (coarse) features that contrast with the sharp refinement of the more *halus* (refined) courtly characters. Their ugliness makes them all the more relatable to common people. Their slapstick antics fumbling around the extremely hierarchical courts of Java serve as a kind of comic relief in *wayang lakon*. They also act as translators of high Javanese dialogue (*Kromo*) into lower forms of Javanese (*Ngoko*), Indonesian or, depending on the context of contemporary performances internationally, they will also translate Javanese into other foreign languages. Suharto publicly imagined himself as a kind of Semar-like figure to seem more relatable to Indonesian audiences, he was after all unseating the revolutionary hero of Indonesian independence.

Suharto presented himself as the ultimate hero of the Indonesian nation, building monuments and developing public works throughout his presidency that served as a persistent reminder of that role. One example that is useful for understanding constructions of presidential authority and resistance to it, is the *Patung Kuda Arjuna Wijaya* or the Horse Statue of Victorious Arjuna. It is a large stone monument in Jakarta erected in 1987, notably at the same time that construction was well underway at Kedung Ombo, that depicts an episode from the *Mahabarata* known as “Karna Tanding/Tinandhing,” the “Battle with Karna” or “Karna Meets his Match.”<sup>71</sup> Arjuna, the hero of the Pandawa kingdom, is depicted brandishing his magic bow and arrow on a chariot of galloping horses. His charioteer is the god Krisna, who leads Arjuna into the field of battle where he will face off with his estranged brother of the Kurawa kingdom, Karna. This is one of the most dramatic moments of the *Mahabarata*. When the final battle is performed in shadow plays, the *dhalang* will often use the same puppet for Karna as was previously used for Arjuna. As Arjuna sees himself in Karna, he is conflicted. He remembers that they share the same mother and so he does not want to kill his own brother. The god Krisna steps in to remind Arjuna of his *dharma ksatria*. As a knight, he is duty bound to protect the kingdom at all cost, even if it means killing his own brother. Arjuna becomes a hero by sending a barrage of arrows at Karna. Suharto, who commissioned this work, no doubt saw himself as a stand-in for the hero, Arjuna, forced to unseat his (national) brother Sukarno/Karna, in order to save the nation.

The *Patung Kuda* may be thought of as an allegory by which to read contemporary political history. The monument, serves as powerful symbolic justification for Suharto’s own rise to power.. In the case of *SuperSemar*, Sukarno was symbolically killed and politically removed, placed under house arrest for the remainder of his life. Throughout his presidency, Suharto continued to fashion himself as the father of the Indonesian nation and of Indonesian national development.<sup>72</sup> Paradoxically, in attempting to align himself with Java’s most beloved *wayang* characters, such as Semar and Arjuna, Suharto also opened the space for resistance along the same cultural lines.

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<sup>71</sup> For a description of a *Karna Tinandhing* performance in Solo in 1983, see Sears, Laurie J. *Shadows of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales*. Duke University Press, 1996.

<sup>72</sup> In a work of government propaganda, *Bapak Pembangunan Indonesia* (1983), an illustration of Suharto wearing the *caping* farmers hat and hoe in hand stands in the center of a rice field surrounded by large monuments erected during his presidency such as Monas. See Ronodirdjo, Bustomi Hadjid, et al., editors. *Presiden Soeharto, Bapak Pembangunan Indonesia: ditetapkan dalam Sidang Umum 1-11 Maret 1983 oleh Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat R.I.* Yayasan Dana Bantuan Kesejahteraan Masyarakat Indonesia Jakarta bekerjasama dengan Yayasan “Karya Dharma” Purwokerto, 1983.

The interview with Romo Mangun quoted at the start of this section contains a subtle cultural reference that underscores the cultural strategies that became important for him at Kedung Ombo. It is a passing reference made by the author who introduces Romo Mangun as “the former food delivery servant of Major Suharto (now president of the Republic of Indonesia) when [serving as a] guerilla in Mraggen, Semarang, during the previous war for independence.”<sup>73</sup> This historical framing situates Romo Mangun culturally as a servant to Suharto, like the god Krisna serving Arjuna by leading his chariot into battle as depicted in the *Patung Kuda Arjuna Wijaya* erected just a few years prior. While framed as servant, in the wayang tradition, the roles of servant and kings are unstable and easily inverted. Romo Mangun is in fact an unsung hero of the revolution for Indonesian independence as the author embeds an allusion to an essay written by Romo Mangun prior to Kedung Ombo in which he explores the “forgotten heroes” of Indonesian history in the context of the wayang tradition.

In “Sejarah dan Sejarah” / “History and History,” first published as an editorial in the national newspaper *Kompas* in 1975, Romo Mangun interrogates constructions of national historical authority. He uses the underlying moral themes of wayang stories to question the process by which national heroes are created. The relationship between the warring families of the *Bharata Yuddha* are set against the state to construct historical truth.

Usually we think like this: **MY** side is the **Pandawa**. **THEIR** side is the **Kurawa** [sic.]. The wisdom of the Mahabharata does not teach this. Pandawa AND Kurawa are relatives of the same tribe, one blood lineage; both live and go to war from within each of themselves. In some ways we are Pandawa, in other ways we are also Kurawa. The wisdom of our ancestors did not teach *Right or wrong my country* [sic.]. Dasamuka’s two younger siblings, Kumbakarna and Wibisana, were not knights with the slogan “Abangan is always right,” or “My boss is always right. ... Actually, in the Ramayana there are interests and norms that are more sublime than the interests of family, tribe, or even national interest. Or more precisely, what do we call truth [sejati]? Who is a hero in the sense of the deepest truth [sejati]? (Mangunwijaya)<sup>74</sup>

Romo Mangun articulates to readers how those who hold positions of power dictate the terms by which a hero is fashioned. As he questions notions of truth it seems he would agree that there are still Foucauldian ‘regimes of truth,’ but also suggests that there is a version of truth deeper than worldly notions determined by those in power. *Sejati* or “true” here is tied to a spiritual or ephemeral notion of truth rooted in Javanese culture. For Romo Mangun, we can also assume that this is linked with Christian notions of truth, but with a broad humanitarian, non-proselytizing drive. Foucault would see Romo Mangun’s version of truth as a “philosophical

<sup>73</sup> “*bekas pengantar makanan bagi Mayor Soeharto (kini presiden RI) tatkala bergerilya di Mranggen, Semarang, pada perang kemerdekaan dulu,*” Centre for Strategic and International Studies, editor. *Kliping Tentang Kasus Kedung Ombo*. Biro Informasi dan Data, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1989, 34. Since Suharto served most of war for independence as a general in Kalimantan, it is likely that this was imagined rhetorical formulation by the priest.

<sup>74</sup> “*Biasanya kita berpikir demikian: Pihak KU adalah pihak Pandawa. Pihak MEREKA adalah Kurawa. Mahabharata arif tidak mengajar demikian. Pandawa DAN Kurawa adalah saudara-saudara satu suku, satu darah keturunan; kedua-duanya hidup dan berperang dari dalam diri kita masing-masing. Hanya dalam beberapa hal kita Pandawa, tetapi dalam beberapa hal lain kita Kurawa juga. Para arifin-arifat nenek-moyang kita juga tidak mengajar Right or wrong my country (negaraku selalu benar). Kumbakarna dan Wibisana kedua adik Dasamuka lalim juga bukan ksatria yang bersempayan ‘Abangan selalu benar’, atau ‘Atasanku selalu betul.’ ... Ternyata [dalam Ramayana] ada kepentingan dan norma yang lebih luhur daripada kepentingan keluarga, suku, bahkan kepentingan nasional. Atau lebih tepat apa yang disebut dalam arti sejati? Siapa pahlawan dalam arti yang sejati?*” Mangunwijaya, Y. B. *Gerundelan orang Republik*. Cet. 1, Pustaka Pelajar, 1995, 52. Originally published November 19, 1979, in *Kompas*.

myth,”<sup>75</sup> but the question of myth in relation to the Ramayana stories is precisely the cultural sphere in which Mangunwijaya engages. In “The Truth of Myth” Raffaele Pettazzoni offers a deeper analysis of the truth-value of myths and points to the changing role of the character of the trickster (in his case, the Coyote) and his role as speaker of truth or falsehood.<sup>76</sup> Whether a myth is considered a literal historical truth or metaphorical/symbolic truth is to be understood as a historical process of subjugation and dominance. In a circumstance of extreme oppression strategies of evasion and trickery become important as a means by which to address real injustices and advocate for greater humanitarianism. Mangunwijaya plays along the same lines of symbolism as Suharto in the *Patung Kuda Arjuna Wijaya*, but undermines the value ascribed to them by the authoritarian leader. In this fashion, it is no surprise that Romo Mangun was popularly perceived as a Semar-like figure, much more so than Suharto. The effectiveness of Romo Mangun’s direct support of communities in need at Kedung Ombo revealed the fragility of the bureaucratic mechanisms of the New Order as well as thin notions of charismatic leadership that pervaded government and non-governmental organizations. This includes the shifting nature of leadership within the social movements as well. Figures like Romo Mangun and Wiji Thukul regularly shifted attention away from themselves as leaders of change towards greater involvement of the people themselves, a move which becomes integral to future movements of transformative social change.

Religious dimensions of leadership and notions of change in Indonesia are especially interesting to look at through the lens of Romo Mangun’s activism. As we saw in the work of Sartono Kartodirdjo, charismatic religious leaders have been closely involved in social movements among the Indonesian peasantry since the Dutch colonial era. As a *rohaniawan* (“man of god”), Romo Mangun was in a distinctive position to offer assistance at Kedung Ombo. His religious affiliation shielded him from accusations of communist sympathy, but as a catholic priest working in a majority Muslim context it also opened space for criticism. At Kedung Ombo, officials attempted to shift public perceptions of the humanitarian efforts of Romo Mangun by suggesting that they were a cover for attempts to convert people to Christianity in the region. Governor of Central Java, Muhammad Ismail, regularly suggested that the priest's good works were evidence that he was actually trying to proselytize Christian values in the region.

**[Interviewer] “Up until now, many reservoirs have been built and the land was freed. Why didn’t anything happen like at Kedungombo?”**

[Governor Ismail] “Actually, the people there are innocent, willing to follow the Government's invitation as long as there is no one from outside influencing them. We did not hassle [them] and there was no fuss. The one making all the noise is that ‘angel of salvation.’ He claims that there are abandoned school children, who says that? No one. He said someone was beaten up, bullshit. Some say ABRI forced them to take compensation, even though that didn’t happen” (Mangunwijaya).<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Foucault, Michel. “Truth and Power.” *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, vol. 3, The New Press, 2000, pp. 111–33.

<sup>76</sup> Pettazzoni, Raffaele. “The Truth of Myth.” *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*, edited by Alan Dundes, University of California Press, 1984, pp. 98–109.

<sup>77</sup> “Selama ini banyak dibangun waduk, dan tanah dibebaskan. Tapi kenapa tak terjadi peristiwa seperti di Kedungombo?

“Sebenarnya masyarakat di sana lugu, mau mengikuti ajakan Pemerintah kalau tak ada oknum dari luar mempengaruhi mereka. Kami tidak repot dan tidak ada ribut-ribut. Yang membuat ribut itu kan malaikat penyelamat itu tadi. Katanya ada anak-anak sekolah terlantar, spongongong? Nggak ada. Katanya ada orang yang dipukuli, omong kosong. Ada yang bilang ABRI memaksa terima ganti rugi, padahal nggak ada apa-apa?” Centre

Ismail attempted to overwrite Romo Mangun's popularity with the communities at Kedung Ombo by calling him an outsider and a liar responsible for stirring up trouble at Kedung Ombo. The reference to *malaikat penyelamat* is particularly interesting in the context of what has been termed the "messianic" character of early social movements and "charismatic" leadership of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sartono Kartodirdjo's historical research on millenarian movements in Banten, West Java, for example, illustrates how Islamic leaders were instrumental in mobilizing resistance to Dutch plantation owners. Even Pramoedya Ananta Toer. In the context of the late 20th and early 21<sup>st</sup> century Java, there is still a lingering popular belief in the return of the *Ratu Adil* or "just king". This underlying linkage between religious belief and political action became an important focus for many activists, especially those with western educations, like Romo Mangun and members from the performance arts group Kyai Kanjeng that is the subject of the next section. Activists like Emha Ainun Nadjib and Toto Rahardjo, both members of Kyai Kanjeng, grew increasingly uncomfortable with the prevalence of magico-religious beliefs among especially the rural poor. Their work with grassroots performance arts alongside engagement with western works of political criticism led to another cornerstone of activism at this time, i.e., political education. Romo Mangun's own emphasis on education as a human right was instrumental in opening future alternatives to the coopted cultural narratives and constricted histories of state authority perpetuated through state educational institutions.

The accusation that Romo Mangun was trying to spread Christian values in the region was easily dismissed by the Catholic priest in popular media by pointing to the fact that he was not working alone at Kedung Ombo. As a leader in interfaith dialogue, Romo Mangun brought in a variety of actors from diverse religious backgrounds to work together at Kedung Ombo.<sup>78</sup>

I invited my friends: Mr. Soewarno (Red Cross Semarang), Prof. Slamet Rahardjo (Diponegoro University) and Kyai Hamam.<sup>79</sup> We each took a different position—as a doctor, a red cross [worker] and a man of god—we each took an oath to God and society to help everyone regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, politics, ideology or anything else" (Mangunwijaya).<sup>80</sup>

By framing common work in terms of a moral and ethical duty shared between Christian, Muslim or academic perspectives, Mangunwijaya appropriates the highly politicized slogan of "bhineka tunggal ika" (unity in diversity) which has more often been used to impose uniformity in thought and action and reveals its inherently humanitarian potential. He continues by calling attention to the values of Pancasila, which include the principle of humanitarianism, in order to set their work in contrast to that of the military presence at Kedung Ombo.

"In war, the red cross must help soldiers or officers of the enemy who are injured. Even if once they are healed, they might become a danger. But this is the consensus among all modern and civilized nations. It's not our responsibility if it becomes politicized. [...] The affairs of politics and considerations of the military are different from the considerations of a man of god, a scholar, a cultural expert. [We] must recognize each other's positions and obligations. [...] The red cross and military complete each other. The military

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for Strategic and International Studies, editor. *Kliping Tentang Kasus Kedung Ombo*. Biro Informasi dan Data, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1989, 35.

<sup>78</sup> Sri Wahyaningsih whose leadership is the focus on the next chapter was another friend of Mangunwijaya who regularly traveled with him to Kedung Ombo at this time. She first met him by volunteering with the Kali Code community in Yogyakarta during her undergraduate work at UGM (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).

<sup>79</sup> *Kyai* is a title for Muslim religious leaders.

<sup>80</sup> Centre for Strategic and International Studies, editor. *Kliping Tentang Kasus Kedung Ombo*. Biro Informasi dan Data, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1989, 35.

bombs. The red cross heals. This is the consensus among modern and civilized nations. This is Pancasila. In Pancasila there is an oath to humanity that is just and civilized. And here, we're just trying to help the children" (Mangunwijaya).<sup>81</sup>

By drawing a distinction between political and civil society, Romo Mangun reflects the Gramscian discourse on hegemony which circulated in Indonesia in the eighties and nineties, and became an important point in the development of the language of the transformative movement towards symbolic action, i.e. action on the level of language itself. In this quotation, New Order logic is shown to have turned its military force against its own citizens to ensure state security. The example of the red cross in times of war sets an antithesis between the duty of knights (i.e. political society, represented in its most forceful form in the authoritarian military state) and the duty of other members of society (civil society, i.e. "the people"). The didactic message, as with much of Romo Mangun's writing, is a subtle discursive *samaran*. He uses the logic of Pancasila against the New Order by drawing from familiar cultural notions that are widely recognizable by many Indonesians, and especially Javanese. He speaks of the state prohibition to his entry into Kedung Ombo as merely a temporary roadblock that runs counter to the needs and rights of the people. His light-hearted, un-bothered response provided a public model of resistance.

"Just like the red cross that cannot be stopped, we also cannot be prohibited from helping children and officers of the enemy. That there are obstacles, is yet another issue. We have to keep going. The obstacle? Yes, there is that prohibition. But it's just one obstacle. Only one dead end. In this world there 1001 other paths. As long as one doesn't go against God, it continues.

**"Even though you've already been banned?"**

"Oh, that makes me happy...because it makes the case clearer. For example, if [our work] was immediately accepted, maybe only 1000 people would know [about it], instead now more than one million people know. Ha...ha" (Mangunwijaya).<sup>82</sup>

Part of Romo Mangun's success at evading New Order restrictions stems from a cultural sensitivity to the history of resistance in Java. In his previous writing, Romo Mangun also

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<sup>81</sup> "Lalu saya mengajak teman: Pak Soewarno (PMI Semarang), Prof. Slamet Rahardjo (Undip), dan Kyai Hamam. Kami lalu mengambil posisi. Yakni posisi doctor, palang merah, rohaniawan—yang telah bersumpah pada Allah dan masyarakat untuk menolong siapa pun tanpa memandang ras, suku, agama, politik, ideologi, dan sebagainya. Palang merah itu, ketika perang, harus juga menolong serdadu atau perwira musuh yang luka. Meski kalau sembuh mungkin, akan menjadi bahaya. Tapi itu consensus dari semua bangsa yang modern dan beradab. Kalaupun dipolitiskan, bukan urusan dan tanggung jawab kami. [...] Tapi urusan politik dan pertimbangan militer berbeda dengan pertimbangan rohaniawan, pendidik, budayawan. Harus saling mengakui posisi dan kewajiban. [...] Palang merah dan tentara itu 'kan saling melengkapi. Tentara yang ngebom. Palang Merah yang mengobati. Ini 'kan consensus negara yang modern dan beradab. Ini kan Pancasila. Toh dalam Pancasila ada sila kemanusiaan yang adil dan beradab. Dan ini 'kan hanya menolong anak," Centre for Strategic and International Studies, editor. *Kliping Tentang Kasus Kedung Ombo*. Biro Informasi dan Data, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1989, 35.

<sup>82</sup> "Seperti Palang Merah yang tak bias dihentikan, kami pun tak bisa dilarang untuk menolong anak-anak dan bukan perwira musuh. Bahwa itu ada kendala, itu lain perkara. Tapi harus terus.

"Kendalanya? Ya. Adanya larangan itu. Tapi itu 'kan hanya kendala. Hanya satu jalan saja yang buntu. Tapi di dunia ini 'kan ada 1001 jalan. Sepanjang tak menlawanan Tuhan, itu terus."

**"Meski sudah dilarang?"**

"Wah malah senang, Karena menjadi semakin jelas perkaranya. Seumpama diterima begitu saja, yang mungkin hanya diketahui 1000 orang, kini malah 1 juta orang yang tahu. Ha...ha" in Centre for Strategic and International Studies, editor. *Kliping Tentang Kasus Kedung Ombo*. Biro Informasi dan Data, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1989, 35.



contrasts the duty of the knights with the hidden struggles of the people. In the case of the Indonesian revolution, he speaks of the multitudes of villagers, farmers and families that opened their homes to revolutionary guerilla fighters across the Javanese countryside. In this example, Romo Mangun uses his own personal memory of revolution to reinforce the notion that the *rakyat* are the true heroes of the nation, even though they are the ones most often excluded from official state narratives of history. The *rakyat* in this case are the mass base of peasants who helped to feed and house resistance fighters traveling across the Javanese landscape in the struggle for independence from the Dutch. Mangun makes specific note of the the mothers of Java, *simbok-simbok*, and everyday folks who literally fed the revolution(-aries). *Simbok* is a lower-class term for mother and thus emphasizes the working-class nature of depictions of the *rakyat*, set in contrast to the *priyayi*, Javanese aristocracy. All of these social constructs are then mapped onto the wayang repertoire, recalling the false dichotomy between Pandawa and Kurawa, good and bad, which originate from the same family. The “unknown revolutionaries” are the *rakyat*, the people, and he himself is not, a gesture which points towards the ways in which he works to decentralize his own authority and instead point towards the efforts of the *rakyat*.

“The unknown revolutionaries [are] the mothers [*simbok-simbok*] and villagers who worked day and night in the communal kitchens to guarantee three meals a day for the guerrilla fighters sacrificed far more than the armed guerillas. [...] I remember when I was still an ignorant little guerilla guarding the front. We sat in the farmhouse, the wife and her children had already been evacuated. Every morning the farmer prepared to face the sons of the armed upper classes [*priyayi*] (not to say *sinyo-sinyo*) from the city.<sup>83</sup> He was very quiet and not easy to talk to. Although we maintained good manners and were united with the people, after I pondered this a year later, you were gentlemen in the eyes of the farmer, the sons of the gods that had to be served. And although not all, we with our Pendawa attitudes were not always sympathetic. Understand, that with so many depths there are so many fish, and with so many hats there are so many thoughts” (Mangunwijaya, “Sejarah dan Sejarah” 49-50).

This passage elicits a number of counter movements to typical historical narratives of the nation encased in the language of the kingdoms and revolutions of the past and reorient Javanese hierarchies to situate the *rakyat* as the heroes. First this is done by foregrounding the role women play in sustaining the nation, here in terms of the movements of revolution. Mangunwijaya points to the undervalued and overlooked labor of women in the nation that are in fact integral to the history of national independence as well as the contemporary struggles of average Indonesians. The notion of “tumpah darah” or the “spilling of blood” which is a central symbol of national allegiance is typically conceived as the sacrifice of guerilla fighters in battles of bloodshed.<sup>84</sup> The emphasis Mangunwijaya places on the mothers at the start of this passage, lower class mothers at that, sets this national narrative against the invisible backdrop of a much larger sacrifice, that is the blood that is spilled in giving birth to the nation. Women are both integral to the birth of the nation and invisible to its symbolic forms. Mangunwijaya additionally decenters his own subject position as an arbiter of cultural authority by including himself in the “we” of upper class *priyayi* individuals who see their goodness reflected in “Pandawa attitudes” of the wayang tradition (Mangunwijaya, Sejarah dan Sejarah” 49-50). He goes on to refer to

<sup>83</sup> Linking upper class Javanese (*priyayi*) with mixed race Javanese Europeans (*sinyo-sinyo*), set in contrast to the Javanese villagers considered lower class and most likely not of European descent.

<sup>84</sup> Candraningrum, Dewi. “Tanah Wutah Rah: Membongkar Mitos Dewi yang Terperangkap” in *Ekofeminisme*. Cetakan I., Jalasutra, 2013.

himself in the self-deprecating language of “gerilyawan ingusan” or an “ignorant little guerilla,” as the young Mangunwijaya stands with the priyayi, identifying as Pendawa (“Sejarah dan Sejarah” 50). He reflects his own priyayi style attitude in the past and criticizes that. Overall, this quotation exemplifies a density of cultural referents enabled in forms of resistance to cultural hegemony during the New Order in which criticism had to be densely veiled in order to escape censure. Most importantly, Mangunwijaya allows a proliferation of meanings to resonate in order to flip the script on popular hierarchies of what constitutes good and bad, right and wrong, heroes and villains in Java. By refocusing the narratives of history on the role of marginalized communities, Romo Mangun shifts perspective away from national narratives towards greater humanization of the people. Packaging his discourse in Javanese colloquialisms helps to ground his argument with the needs and interests of the people. The ending line, “sekian lubuk sekian ikan, banyak kupluk banyak pikiran,” a proverb that underscores his emphasis on the kebudayaan rakyat, or a people’s culture—actually more on diversity: many pools, many fish, many hats many thoughts. Ending with a bit of Javanese folk wisdom, called *peribahasa*—a genre at the opposite end of the cultural spectrum from the high courtly referents of wayang tradition—is yet another flip of the hierarchies of the text.

For Romo Mangun, defending the human rights of the people of Kedung Ombo was tied to a larger educational mission, and an important feature of social movement activism at the time. Before his work at Kedung Ombo, Romo Mangun worked to alleviate the struggles of marginalized communities through emancipatory educational initiatives at Kali Code.<sup>85</sup> Fulfilling the educational and housing needs of the community at Kali Code reflects the wider circulation of emancipatory educational models throughout Indonesia. He articulated problems within the educational system in Indonesia as closely connected to constructions of political power and historical authority. He spoke openly about the educational drive of the state to teach only the versions of history that directly support political power.

“The outdated way of teaching and learning history is to memorize the years of war, the overthrow of the throne, the victory of a king, the defeat of a regent, when the VOC founded Batavia, when the Japanese occupied the Dutch East Indies, or the years of other trivial events. This kind of history is a series of official events in the world of **political power** [sic.]. Now historians are aware that historical knowledge like this is superficial and totally not educational. History is now seen more in the process that determines one’s personal life and society; social and economic history. An even more advanced stage is history as a humane attempt to find oneself and develop oneself into a fuller and more meaningful human and society, namely cultural history” (Mangunwijaya, *Gerundelan* 52).<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> As discussed previously, Romo Mangun chose one of the most deprived areas of the city of Yogyakarta as the site of a new model for community-based and human rights-oriented activism. Romo Mangun’s architectural work brought visibility to a community living in abject poverty on the “margins” of society, yet directly in the center of the city of Yogyakarta. Kali Code became a lively center of emancipatory learning in an unlikely location on the banks of a river.

<sup>86</sup> “Cara mengajar dan belajar sejarah yang sudah usang ialah menghafalkan tahun-tahun perang ini penggulingan tahta itu, kemenangan raja ini, kekalahan bupati itu, kapan VOC mendirikan Batavia, kapan Jepang menduduki Hindia Belanda, atau tahun-tahun kejadian tekek bengkek lainnya.<sup>1</sup> Sejarah macam itu adalah rangkaian peristiwa-peristiwa resmi dunia **politik kekuasaan**. Sekarang para sejarawan sudah sadar, bahwa berilmu sejarah seperti itu adalah dangkal dan sama sekali tidak mendidik. Sejarah kini lebih dilihat dalam prosesnya yang lebih menentukan hidup pribadi dan masyarakat; sejarah sosial dan ekonomi. Tahap yang lebih maju lagi ialah sejarah selaku usaha manusiawi untuk menemukan diri dan mengembangkan diri menjadi manusia dan masyarakat yang lebih penuh dan berarti, yakni sejarah kebudayaan” (Mangunwijaya, *Gerundelan* 52).

His focus on the educational rights of children at Kedung Ombo and Kali Code was closely tied to his personal commitment to liberation theology, as well as a larger discourse of emancipatory education that circulated in Indonesia in the eighties and nineties. As Jennifer Lindsay describes in his 1999 obituary:

“Romo Mangun always identified with ordinary people, both in social work and in his writing. As a priest, he was attracted to Liberation Theology, writing many essays on the subject, but remaining ambivalent about ideologies of social action, preferring to pursue his work as a quiet act of personal commitment, rather than as a manifestation of his affiliation with a wider movement. As a social activist, he showed great courage and generosity of spirit. His defense of the people of Kedung Ombo dam was tireless, and he placed himself in a position of real personal risk. Despite the fact that the Supreme Court’s ruling in favor of just compensation was ruthlessly overturned, he continued to fight for their cause,” (Lindsay, “Y.B. Mangunwijaya” 202).

Many activists looked to examples from Latin American—critical pedagogies and liberation theology—and a growing discourse in the Global South of how to facilitate emancipation from forms of marginality and oppression tied specifically to expansion of global capital. The rise of authoritarian nation states global predominance of economic growth implemented through developmentalist goals had the most polarizing and consequences for many “third world” countries., Mangunwijaya was influenced by the circulation of liberation theologies and critical pedagogies in Indonesia as he worked to address poverty and the dehumanizing effects of New Order developmentalism specifically through educational and housing focused initiatives. The circulation of liberation theology was not only restricted to catholic activists, but were also taken up by many Muslim activists, shown for example by Muslim Abdurrahman in *Islam Transformatif (Transformative Islam, 1995)*. Solidarity with movements of the global south became increasingly relevant among activists in the eighties and nineties, through gradual attempts by NGO and student activists to return some degree of agency back to the peasant communities whose lands and livelihoods had been forcefully disrupted by the New Order state. These efforts to represent the struggles of marginalized communities found a critical climax at Kedung Ombo.

The cultural and symbolic struggles of power and authority that adversely affected the economic and social conditions on the margins of Indonesian society became more clearly articulated through Mangunwijaya’s activism at Kedung Ombo. He embodied the trickster personality of the father of the punakawan, Semar. As a representative of the people and a man of god, he twists the rhetoric of those in power, defies state orders to defend the rights of the common people. In so doing, he showed wider Indonesian publics that it was possible to defy the state. Mixed with a light-hearted yet subversive communicative style, he brought national attention to state abuses of power, and in so doing, brought into sharper focus a subtle and culturally encoded discourse of resistance. Inflected with Javanese cultural nuance, a sense of humor and a series of the small but judicious transgressions of state authority, Mangunwijaya helped to shape much of the trajectory of humanitarian discourse in Indonesia. Religious leadership remained in a strategic position for mass organizing at Kedung Ombo, but we can see a gradual shift in the ways in which religious leaders aligned with a more people-centered activism. Figures like Mangunwijaya used their charismatic position to gain a foothold in being able to voice resistance to an oppressive state, at the same time they work to transform that

role.<sup>87</sup> Mangunwijaya was among a new wave of activists working to change the nature of leadership within social movements.

Anti-Christian sentiment became another tool for the suppression of Mangunwijaya's humanitarian work, but his collaborative work with Islamic leaders at Kedung Ombo points towards a larger discourse of transformative Islam which many Muslim activists were exploring at the time.<sup>88</sup> The Javanese cultural terms of resistance to the New Order began to shift more towards religious forms of resistance in the 1990s as Suharto also began repackaging his public image, from Semar-like Javanese *ratu adil* towards greater self-branding as a devout Muslim. For example, in 1990, clad in Islamic attire, he presided over the first official meeting of Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia (ICMI or the Indonesian Muslim Scholars Association). He also added "Muhammad" to his name after going on the hajj in 1990.<sup>89</sup> This was a significant departure from his previous alignments with Javanese cultural identities. The concerted efforts by religious figures around Kedung Ombo, especially of Muslim leaders, had then to grapple with the ways in which Suharto began to enable Islamic cultural discourse as a tool for advancing his authority in Indonesia. Emha Ainun Nadjib—educated in the modern pesantren of Gontor in Jombang, East Java, and a member of Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia (ICMI or the Indonesian Muslim Scholars Association)—is one of many religious leaders whose work at Kedung Ombo reflect a disengagement with the shifting terms by which Islamic identification became associated with the state. Nadjib chose to step away from ICMI in order to work on more grassroots level project, such as his involvement with the formation of the performance arts group Kyai Kanjeng that is the subject of the next section.

### *Cultural Resistance and "Then silence. Desertion.": A Praxis-Style Play*

In 1993 Komunitas Kecil Pak Kanjeng or the Small Community of Pak Kanjeng,<sup>90</sup> produced a play in response to the completion of the Kedung Ombo dam. Entitled *Pak Kanjeng*, the play is popularly credited to the poet, performance artist, and Islamic cultural figure, Emha Ainun Nadjib, but it was originally written, directed, and performed collectively by the performance group. After only two public performances, first in Surabaya and second in Yogyakarta, the play was banned due to their direct criticism of the economic development policies of the New Order state.<sup>91</sup> After Kedung Ombo, many activists were frustrated with how their work failed to stop the construction of the dam, represent the interest of marginalized communities, and involve direct participation by those same communities in actions against the

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<sup>87</sup> Recuperating "kampung" culture also means confronting the difficulties and constraints of mass mobilizations. The tendency towards charismatic leadership is problematic, especially as activists worked towards a more emancipatory form of empowerment for marginalized communities.

<sup>88</sup> By 1995 Moeslim Abdurrahman publishes *Islam Transformatif*. Influenced largely by Latin American social movements, liberation theology, and critical pedagogies of Paulo Freire, this text is foundation for specifically Muslim inflected involvement in transformative social movements.

<sup>89</sup> See Hefner, Robert W. "Islam, State, and Civil Society: ICMI and the Struggle for the Indonesian Middle Class." *Indonesia*, no. 56, Southeast Asia Program Publications at Cornell University, 1993, pp. 1–35.

<sup>90</sup> Many of its members were involved in music, poetry, theater, and Islamic activism in the 70s and 80s, including work with the famous poet, Rendra, and his experimental *Bengkel Teater* or Workshop Theater in the 70s. In the late nineties they adopted the name Kyai Kanjeng. *Kyai* is an honorific for Islamic leaders, namely the founder or headmaster of a pesantren Islamic boarding school. It is an inherited title and role as a community leader. It is also a term used to name a gamelan.

<sup>91</sup> After the fall of Suharto in 2000, the banned original play was published as a novel to reinvigorate critical discourse among activists, artists, and rural communities in Central Java.

state. In this play, the authors reflect on the failures of Kedung Ombo in a way that illustrates an early engagement with praxis by cultural activists at the time. The actors are elite cultural workers, predominantly from the city of Yogyakarta. They are not the *wong cilik* of Kedung Ombo, so this is not an example of the kind of participatory forum theater project permutations also taking place at this time in Java.<sup>92</sup> What this text helps to illustrate, however, is a moment in the trajectory of social movement organizing in Indonesia in which high profile cultural workers, voicing resistance on the national stage in direct confrontation with the developmentalist policies of the New Order, begin to reflect on their public role as intermediaries between the state and marginalized peasant communities and shift their focus to incorporate greater participation by peasant communities marginalized by New Order developmentalism, the *rakyat*. The authors thematize many problems of representing *rakyat* interest in the play. I call this a praxis-style play, because the authors (who are also the actors) incorporate reflections on cultural actions based on their implementation of theoretical considerations, namely Freirean notions of conscientization and Gramscian formulations of cultural hegemony, in order to transform their actions, cultural forms, and expand the breadth of their work to include greater participation of peasant communities within critical cultural actions in the following years.

The narrative *Pak Kanjeng* is based on the real-life story of a local leader at Kedung Ombo who refused to relocate once the floodgates of the dam were shut in 1991. In the play, the conflict takes place in a village which the government has forced to vacate to make way for the construction of a factory and golf course, emblems of labor extraction and capitalist accumulation, and the one leader who remains to defend the dignity of the community, *Pak Kanjeng*. The opening lines describe emptiness and stillness, the remnants of a once thriving community on the cusp of its impending destruction. Imagery of a scattered and hopeless landscape are reminiscent of how the “land splits” and “large trees fall over each other” in Thukul’s poem discussed at the start of this chapter (*Mencari Tanah Lapang* 34). Time is marked at “the threshold of twilight” to reinforce the bleak end of what was once a thriving village (Nadji, *Pak Kanjeng* 11). Structures are abandoned, labor is wasted, and the histories, traditions and futures of this community are erased. Only the birds remain.

“A village at the threshold of twilight. The sun sinks its rays down the back of a hill, separating the clouded colors of a far-away sky. Trees bow down without hope. Rice fields and farms are full of birds. The rice granary, school building, guard house, and scattered houses have lost their shape and dreams. Pits of grief and stones of suffering are scattered along the road. Tens of thousands of residents have left behind their blood and sweat on each span of hoed and fertilized earth. Left behind harvest season and future, as well as the seeds of happiness, places of worship, and graves of their relatives. They went somewhere. Maybe to a new village provided by the government in the middle of a forest. Maybe to the capital city, complaining about their fate below a bridge. Or maybe they returned to the navel of the earth, a village from the past, a place where they were born the first time” (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 11-12).

Here the authors extend this sense of a scattered and fragmented landscape to include the dispersal of people who have been forced away from their homeland, with no clear destination, future, or place to call home. The former residents of this village have been forcefully evicted by the military, some are given places to reside by the government—and now they all rest their hope

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<sup>92</sup> See Bodden, Michael H. *Resistance on the National Stage: Theater and Politics in Late New Order Indonesia*. Ohio University Press, 2010.

with a single local leader, Pak Kanjeng,<sup>93</sup> who remains in order to defend the dignity of their community.

“They agreed to surrender their souls, courage and rebellion to a figure who is believe to be an integral part of life and the dignity of humanity. A figure by the name of Pak Kanjeng” (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 12).<sup>94</sup>

*Pak Kanjeng* is presented throughout the work as an honorable figure, a tragic hero whose refusal to relocate reflects resilience in the face of insurmountable oppression. He is also a revolutionary hero or “pahlawan revolusi,” a former member of the Indonesian military who fought in the war for independence (Nadjib 45). He is described as someone who would place his body and soul on the line to fight oppression. “With the will and desire to be free and independent from the grip of power, from the wisdom and decisions that go against the whispers of his conscience.”<sup>95</sup> There is very little that is triumphant or glorious about this peasant hero story, but it explores a long history of displacement, relocation, and the ways in which identity is tied to different notions of community as Pak Kanjeng grapples with his own sense of marginalization as well as the people he comes to represent, a *rakyat* community of peasants displaced and dehumanized by developmentalism under the restrictions and false hopes in the imagined community of the nation.

The authors of the play draw a direct connection between the rising waters of the Kedung Ombo dam and the histories of violence which serve as the foundation of national imaginings in Indonesia, both in terms of the revolution independence as well as the violence of 1965-66.

“Everyone knows that the advancement of history is always marked by bloodshed, curses and hatred, the people [bangsa-bangsa] also abandon the invaders/colonists and threw them away in a river of blood.

It is not possible for any cluster of humans to enjoy freedom and liberation without leaving behind the stench of blood. Nations cast aside their ruthless leaders to drown tyrants in the blood of their pride...[sic.]

And also because of blood, Pak Kanjeng can escape from death. From a vain death like the death of unknown heroes. He is willing to feel the erosion of humanity because he has lost a shared sense of vitality, the spilled blood of humanity and demonic characters. Destroy the oppressors, blackmailers, the ones who uphold power at all costs, only for their own sake” (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 22-23).<sup>96</sup>

It is notable here that the authors use the term *bangsa-bangsa* to indicate a national imagination of solidarity, the community of people who would die (and kill) for the nation and are therefore

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<sup>93</sup> His name is a double honorific, *Pak*, the shorthand for *Bapak*, means father but it is also a common term of respect for senior men, and *Kanjeng* is another honorific which can refer to traditional or religious leaders in Java.

<sup>94</sup> “Mereka juga bersepakat untuk menyerahkan jiwa, keberanian dan pemberontakannya pada seorang tokoh yang dipercaya sebagai bagian tak terpisahkan dari kehidupan dan martabat kemanusiaan. Dan tokoh itu bernama Pak Kanjeng” (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 12).

<sup>95</sup> “Dengan kehendak dan keinginannya untuk bebas dan merdeka dari cengkeraman kekuasaan, dari kebijakan dan keputusan-keputusan yang berlawanan dengan bisikan suara hati Nurani” (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 13).

<sup>96</sup> “Meski semua orang juga tahu, perbaiki sejarah selalu ditandai oleh ceceran darah, kutukan dan kebencian. Bangsa-bangsa meninggalkan para penjajah dan mengusirnya melalui sungai darah.

Kemerdekaan dan kebebasan tidak mungkin dapat dinikmati oleh serumpun manusia tanpa meninggalkan amis darah. Negeri-negeri mencampakkan para pemimpinnya yang kejam, meneggelamkan para tiran ke dalam kebanggaan darah...

Dan karena darah juga, Pak Kanjeng dapat lolos dari maut. Dari kematian yang sia-sia, seperti kematian para pahlawan yang tak kenal. Ia rela rasa kemanusiaan terkikis karena menghilangkan nyawa sesama, menumpahkan darah manusia yang berwatak iblis. Menumpas para penindas, manusia pemerias, yang menegakkan kekuasaan dengan segala cara, demi kepentingan sendiri” (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 22-23).

inculcated in the cultural hegemony of the state set in contrast to the *rakyat*. This distinction becomes more apparent as the authors explore how personal identity within the *rakyat* community is constructed very differently to the national community. Pak Kanjeng is himself a figure which bridges these two communities, he is a former revolutionary hero and a representative of the *rakyat*. *Pak Kanjeng* is not just a story of displacement by large-scale development, it is also a story of an individual grappling with his own sense of individuality torn between commitment to the imagined national community and his local *rakyat* community, and his attempts to understand how one could become so powerful and the other so weak. He is yet another unsung hero in line with the forgotten revolutionary heroes discussed by Manguwijaya, who fought for the nation but now has been demoted to stand as a representative of the displaced *rakyat* community and a long history of struggle between those who hold power and those who are subject to it.

Pak Kanjeng is described by the authors as being alone in his village, with the exception of a single companion, a figure called Begejil. The exception is made—being alone except for one other figure—is the first signal to audiences that this figure is a representation of the quintessential *wong cilik* (little people, orang kecil, *rakyat*), barely even human, a pathetic and useless “creature” who feels “not that different from a lone sandal floating along the river” (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 14).<sup>97</sup> Begejil is a dehumanized figure in the play, even their gender is never articulated in the play, a further parody by the authors to attempt to represent the peasant who originates “from a tradition of suffering and poverty” (Nadjib *Pak Kanjeng* 14-16). In the play, Begejil’s actions are limited to sleeping all the time and only listening to the soliloquies of Pak Kanjeng. The figure is described as ignorant, dumb, and is effectively mute as Begejil does not speak throughout the duration of the work. Begejil’s ignorance is constructed as the product of being embedded within a culture of silence, the ultimate victim of history and of “*pembodohan*,” a term which the authors regularly use to describe Begejil (Nadjib *Pak Kanjeng*). In Indonesian, *pembodohan* is the nominalization of the adjective *bodoh*, meaning “stupid” or “dumb.” It is the act or process of making someone stupid, which in English would translate to something along the lines of “stupidification.” In verb form, *dibodohkan* carries with it the sense that one is made to be stupid or ignorant, often by the wrong kind of indoctrination.<sup>98</sup> In the play and its subsequent reworking as a novel, the authors associate *pembodohan* with repeated cycles of oppression tied to colonial and national history. Begejil is made to be stupid merely by existing within cycles of oppression, an entry point through which the authors then begin to interrogate notions of power in the nation state through the dehumanization of Begejil.

"The oppressors did not inherit any lessons from the past for future generations, except for an education of oppression. ... Those who are oppressed, as if being protected, are given the widest possible opportunity to remain ignorant [tetap menjadi bodoh], reluctant to speak or *lazy*<sup>99</sup> to think. Just dreaming and dreaming. Confused and delirious. Yes, Begejil is an example. However, if we elevate [Begejil’s] existence, entrusted

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<sup>97</sup> “Makhluk [...] yang merasa tidak begitu berbeda dengan potongan sandal jepit yang mengambang di sungai...” (Nadjib *Pak Kanjeng* 14).

<sup>98</sup> Javanese and Indonesian language speakers have a distinct way of avoiding direct subjects and for that reason passive voice is quite common. In the context of Begejil’s *pembodohan*, authors speak of the object of “stupidification” without directly addressing the subject itself. In the context of exploring modes of cultural resistance, it is also a useful tool of *samaran*.

<sup>99</sup> My emphasis.

to be a more perfect human being, Begejil would be ready and willing to be a victim on the front lines. A shield and vest on the chest of history and of revolution” (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 23-25).<sup>100</sup>

In this passage the authors create a direct link with the history of revolution for Indonesian independence that is similar to Mangunwijaya’s interrogation of the terms from which national heroes are created. Begejil is a citizen of the nation in that this figure too would die defending it, to become a sacrifice for the sake of “history and of revolution” (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 25). The authors make an important caveat to this construction, however, which pulls the audience into the action as arbiters of Begejil’s worthiness to become a national hero. It can only occur if we, the audience, can trust that he is good, and that his ignorance (*bodoh*) and laziness (*malas*) are a product of a society that has confined him to ignorance and forced his laziness. I’ve isolated “lazy” in the above quotation to highlight how the authors enable a plesetan on the meaning of *malas*. The popular usage of this term is indeed “lazy” and fits with popular stereotypes of the lazy peasant, a construction which dates back to the colonial period. The concept of *pembodohan* as reflected in Begejil’s laziness is raised throughout the work in order to redress common misconceptions regarding the “ignorant peasants” of Java, an idea overtly reinforced by Suharto’s floating mass policy which saw the peasant class in Indonesia as needing guidance in order to succeed in the nation. Another meaning of *malas*, however, points to what Scott would call a form of everyday resistance as outlined in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. As Begejil is “reluctant to speak or lazy to think” (“enggan bicara dan malas berpikir”), the language of laziness can also mean an aversion to what is required (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 23). Begejil’s laziness is in that case a refusal to think, an act of resistance enacted largely because of his marginality to what is considered good in the national imagination. In the text, the surrounding appeal to humanize Begejil as having an essential good nature continues on this line as the authors attempt to shift audience attention towards greater reflection on the structural circumstances surrounding Begejil, a figure who is presumed to be lazy but whose laziness is more of a reflection of his oppression than of an intrinsic nature. The marginality of Indonesia’s peasantry to the power and imagination of the nation is creatively reproduced on the state in this way. It is conceivable that the authors are also attempting to protect Begejil within this silence. Since Begejil does not speak, the figure’s words also cannot be coopted, twisted or manipulated for political or economic gain.

The construction of Begejil as a marginalized and silent peasant figure is in some ways reminiscent of Agamben’s conception of bare life.<sup>101</sup> Begejil’s life has been reduced and dehumanized by the internalization of external forces of national power and domination. Pak Kanjeng imagines what will happen to Begejil after their home is destroyed and suggests the figure may become a migrant worker in Saudi Arabia, Korea, Hong Kong or Singapore, to work as an Indonesian migrant worker (Tenaga Kerja Indonesia, TKI). In the ever-expanding global capitalist promise of economic opportunity, many impoverished people in Indonesia willfully

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<sup>100</sup> “...para penindas tidak mewarisi pelajaran apapun yang dapat ditauladani oleh generasi, kecuali Pendidikan penindasan. Yang pertama dari mereka berlaku sebagai pemimpin penindasan untuk generasi berikutnya. Dan yang berikutnya mengikuti cara-cara yang dipakai oleh pemimpin sebelumnya. [...] Orang-orang yang ditindas itu, seolah-olah dilindungi dan diberi kesempatan untuk tetap menjadi bodoh, enggan berbicara dan malas berpikir. Kecuali bermimpi dan bermimpi. Menceracau dan mengigau. Ya, begejil itu contohnya. Namun, jika sedikit saja diangkat keberadaannya atau diberi kepercayaan untuk menjadi manusia yang lebih sempurna, Begejil juga yang akan berkata siap dan sedia untuk menjadi korban di barisan paling depan. Menjadi tameng dan rompi di dada sejarah dan revolusi” (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 23-25).

<sup>101</sup> See Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford University Press, 1998.



seize the chance to work abroad in this manner because it means they can send money back to families in Indonesia. It is, however, also a massive source of unfair and unregulated labor practice. The *wong cilik* exist with the constant threat of further marginalization. Begejil and the community of surrounding peasants in the village are repeatedly dislocated and marginalized by economic growth. Even the figure's own body is treated as a fragmented and tortured object in this framing.

“Its name is just Begejil, [even if] it jumped abroad, it must still be prepared to be stamped on the forehead, ironed on the chest, burned on the lips with the embers of the cigarette or tortured and killed like the story of the suffering of Begejil's friends who work in whatever country that is” (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 16-17).<sup>102</sup>

Pak Kanjeng understands the futility of Begejil's circumstance, even if the figure tries to escape by becoming a migrant worker abroad, upon returning from such an opportunity the figure's body is still threatened by violent national forces. No matter what, the figure of the *wong cilik* will be “stamped,” “ironed,” and “burned” by the national and international forces of oppression (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 17). There is a high demand for transnational migrant labor from Indonesia which, combined with the weakness of Indonesia's overseas labor policies, continues to exacerbate exploitative practices for migrant workers who remain largely “unprotected from human rights abuses and economically exploited parties within the migration industry in Indonesia and abroad” (Tirtosudarmo and Mulyani 51).<sup>103</sup> Pak Kanjeng concludes that it makes no great difference where Begejil ends up, “what is most important is that Begejil manages to escape from [their] hometown. From a tradition of suffering and hunger” (Nadjib *Pak Kanjeng* 16). Begejil's silence is his marginalization, magnified as the bulldozers destroy their village and death is tragically Begejil's escape.

In the figure of Begejil, Nadjib and his collaborators reflect on the works of the Brazilian educator and activist, Paulo Freire. They thematically address the concept of a cultural of silence (*budaya bisu*) to reflect more broadly on how so many marginalized people, including those displaced at Kedung Ombo, are unable to reflect critically on their own circumstances of oppression. Begejil plays an important role as a silent witness to the heroism of Pak Kanjeng which is significant in the way that the authors use it to structure political commentary and raise critical awareness for the audience. Pak Kanjeng directly addresses Begejil, but the figure's silence turns their dialogue into monologue, it is always a one-way conversation. Pak Kanjeng is the only character who speaks throughout the entire work, and in performances of the play the monologue of Pak Kanjeng is transformed into dialogue by three actors playing the single character of Pak Kanjeng, a kind of schizophrenic monologue posed as dialogue. Through the transformed monologue of Pak Kanjeng, the authors then isolate the state developmentalist agenda as a major force in perpetuating oppressive power structures. The text highlights how developmentalist models imported from abroad and western capital stimulating national economic growth are some of the major sources which create the poverty that they attempt to eradicate. In the following passage Pak Kanjeng speaks to himself, but in doing so speaks to an audience that is also transformed into a participant, however theoretically.

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<sup>102</sup> “*Namanya saja Begejil, sudah melompat ke luar negeri pun masih dituntut untuk bersedia distempel dahinya, disetrika payanya, disulut bibirnya dengan api rokok atau disiksa dan dibunuh seperti layaknya kisah derita kawan-kawan Begejil yang bekerja di negeri entah*” (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 16-17).

<sup>103</sup> See also Rudnyckyj, Daromir. “Technologies of Servitude: Governmentality and Indonesian Transnational Labor Migration.” *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 77, no. 3, The George Washington University Institute for Ethnographic Research, 2004, pp. 407–34.

- “Has he been poor for a long time?”
- “That’s not important. Don’t think too much about poverty. Rich or poor, that happens everywhere. What we should ask is how long he has been oppressed. How long has he been made to be poor?” (Nadjib *Pak Kanjeng* 28).<sup>104</sup>

The authors strategically refuse to isolate any single source of Begejil’s poverty, instead pose various scenarios and open-ended questions for the audience to reflect upon. They create opportunities to raise critical discourse by opening space for interpretation by calling into question ideas of nationalism, globalization, and developmentalism that are guided by economic imperatives over human dignity.

In the foreword to the novel, the authors explain how the inversion of dialogue as monologue is designed to elicit and subvert forms of cultural hegemony of the New Order, namely regarding the one-way nature of state communication surrounding developmentalism and manipulations of mass media at the time the play was first produced.

“...the story of ‘Pak Kanjeng’ managed to break the stalemate of dialogue that plagued almost every segment of society—including mass media.

“News of ‘development’ and the voices of the monologue from above has, for a long time, bombarded the ears and mouths of the Indonesian people.”<sup>105</sup>

The fragmentation of Pak Kanjeng’s identity is only a reflection of a much more violent and oppressive means by which the *rakyat* or *wong cilik* are inundated with New Order indoctrination and silenced from voicing any resistance or form of critique for fear of death. The graves which rise from memory in Thukul’s poem at the start, for example, speak louder than the living *rakyat*. The palpably oppressive circumstances of the New Order highlight larger movements of power which extend throughout many iterations of national history. The heroes shift and change, even within in the fragmented character of Pak Kanjeng. In the following passage we witness the moment his identity is split into three, and it is notably connected to the imagery of water, a further extension of the fragmentations caused by the rising waters of Kedung Ombo.

“If you want to develop, do it properly. Humanize people. Approach them nicely. Consult with them. Invite them to bargain fairly. Value their rights. All of the riches of the earth and water belong to the people. Be polite and just! Don’t just try to win!”

“To me, winning or losing is not important. But if an “orang kecil” such as myself is underestimated and trampled upon, I will run amok. Do they think that God would blame me?”

In a voice that never recedes, the words and threats were thrown forcefully from Pak Kanjeng’s tongue, a cold and heavy burden resounded in the air. In the middle of that remorseful night, Pak Kanjeng’s home suddenly became an estuary, a place where tears of grief met and flowed into several tributaries of life. But, from what Begejil witnessed, the events of this remorseful night were more like a miracle.

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<sup>104</sup> “Ya, hanya Begejil yang tidak pernah menutup daun telinganya untuk mendengar keteguhan dan kejujuran kata-kata Pak Kanjeng. Sekaligus juga menjadi saksi kegelisahan dan kesunyian seorang pahlwan yang telah dilupakan. Bahkan makhluk Begejil itu telah merelakan diri dan menyerahkan seluruh hidupnya untuk tetap setia menemani sekala jenis sumpah serapah dan umpatan” (Nadjib *Pak Kanjeng* 28).

<sup>105</sup> “...lakon ‘Pak Kanjeng’ berhasil mendobrak kebekuan dialog yang selama itu melanda hampir semua segmen di masyarakat—termasuk media massa.

“Berita-berita ‘pembangunan’ dan suara-suara monolog dari atas telah lama memang membombardir telinga dan mulut bangsa Indonesia.” (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 6-7)

Miraculous because it was as if Pak Kanjeng materialized into three shadows. He became three figures facing one another in a room” (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 30-31).<sup>106</sup>

Pak Kanjeng is split into three personalities, a magical moment for Begejil, as three different streams of his own identity emerge like an estuary. Estuaries are typically a place for the creation of new life, a breeding ground and nursery for wildlife and the site where waters meet and flow. This reference is ironic in the context of the rising waters of the Kedung Ombo dam as well as an extension of the visual metaphor we began this chapter. The water and blood that flowed from the graves at Boyolali, from the revolution for national independence, as well as the death of Karna at the hand of his heroic brother Arjuna are all undercurrents to the unnatural reservoir created at Kedung Ombo. The estuary is no longer a site of creation and new life but is turned into a site of sadness and grief. The connection to Kedung Ombo is further amplified by a plesetan slip of the tongue in which Pak Kanjeng questions why they need to leave their home and accidentally mentions the construction of a dam

“...floating in the cultural confines created by the state, by the power that forces their bodies and souls to lose and give up or move to new villages that have been programmed in accordance with economic growth and development. ... That's not development, but power! ... Must we be willing to be moved? Must be willing to be evicted? To have to give up our struggles and lives for something called a giant factory, golf course or dam? Sorry! That country should be ashamed if its people suffer. How are there people who plan suffering. Design impoverishment. And if the people feel poor then they are beaten or abused” (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 32-33).<sup>107</sup>

The plesetan is an accidental slip of “dam” into the list of the developmentalist projects, when there is not actually a dam project in development in the story. It is countered by a playful apology, that is of course not an apology. The three Kanjengs go on to debate what kind of violence they must face in order to fight back. Not just a slap, but perhaps a bullet to the chest. One Kanjeng questions whether it will come to that, deciding that instead of bullets he would prefer a “perang tanding,” a duel like that of Arjuna facing off with his brother Karno (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 34), and a return to the notion that the cycle of the nation is one of bloodshed.

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<sup>106</sup> “Kalau mau membangun itu mbok yang baik-baik. Orang mbok diorangkan. Dekati baik-baik. Ajak runding. Ajak tawar menawar yang adil. Hargai haknya. Toh semua kekayaan, tanah dan air ini pada dasarnya kan milik rakyat. Mbok ya kepada rakyat itu bersikap yang sopan, yang adil! Jangan ambil menangnya saja!

“Bagi saya, kalah dan menang itu tidak penting. Tapi kalau orang kecil macam say aini diremehkan dan diinjak-injak, lantak mengamuk, apa mereka pikir Tuhan punya argumntasi untuk menyalahkan saya?”

Dengan suara yang tak pernah surut, kata-kata dan ancaman itu terlempar begitu keras dari lidah Pak Kanjeng, lalu bergaung di udara dengan beban yang berat dan dingin. Sehingga di tengah keremangan malam itu, rumah Pak Kanjeng seolah-olah telah berubah menjadi muara, tempat bertemu air mata keluh yang mengalir dan berbagai anak sungai kehidupan. Tetapi, dalam kesaksian Begejil, peristiwa di remang malam itu lebih tepat jika disebut sebagai keajaiban. Ajaib karena sosok Pak Kanjeng seakan telah menjelma menjadi tiga bayangan. Menjadi tiga tokoh yang saling berhadapan dalam sebuah ruang (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 30-31).

<sup>107</sup> “...terombang-ambing dalam jeruji kebudayaan yang diciptakan oleh negara, oleh kekuasaan yang memaksa keberadaan tubuh dan jiwa mereka untuk kalah dan menyerah atau berpindah menuju kampung baru yang telah diprogram sesuai dengan pertumbuhan ekonomi dan pembangunan. ... Itu bukan pembangunan, tapi kekuasaan! ... Harus rela dipindah? Harus rela digusur? Harus menyerahkan perjuangan dan hidup saya pada sesuatu yang bernama pabrik raksasa, lapangan golf atau waduk...Sorry!...Negara itu mestinya kan malu kalau rakyatnya menderita. Lha kok malah ada oknum yang merancang penderitaan mereka. Merancang pemiskinan. Itupun, kalau rakyat merasa miskin, malah ditempeleng atau digebug” (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 32-33).

There is one small opening through which Nadjib and his collaborators reflect the liberation of Begejil, and so also for the *wong cilik*, or the rakyat kecil. Throughout the work Begejil merely lazes around the veranda of Pak Kanjeng's home, sleeping and dreaming, waking only to listen and witness the speech and ruminations of Pak Kanjeng who struggles to find an explanation for his and Begejil's poverty of circumstance. It is within the unmarked space of dreams that imaginative possibilities for audiences are opened up. Dreams offer a potential means of liberation from the reduction of the dehumanized figure to be able to imagine beyond structures of oppression. Begejil's dreams are never described, however, and this is then turned by the authors into an important play on the notion of dreams as they relate to the nation. After Begejil's death, Pak Kanjeng reflects on the figure's life: "What is clear is that he never decided to betray the struggle. To become a dream man who only lives in sleep" (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 102).<sup>108</sup> Dreams in this case are not a site of liberation but rather the imaginative space of the nation, a site in which peasants dream to become heroes whose lives are recorded in the pages of history. The fact that Begejil remains a silent witness who tragically dies in obscurity, is partially what constitutes the figure's emancipation from structures of oppression, here reproduced most notably by the national dream of becoming a hero in history. Silence is Begejil's only means of liberation from the cycle of historical violence.

"Then silence. Desertion.

"The rhythm of a heart beats in the cold veins of the wind. It made Begejil collapse and shiver. The ceiling of the house spun like the calmness revolving in the memory of Pak Kanjeng. Legends flashed by, flapping their wings intensely in the space of mortality. The silence of Pak Kanjeng took flight, from event to event, from one era to the next. It was as though history was the one that moved, no one else moves, no one refuses in order to be better than before. Even though everyone knows, improvements in history are always marked by spilling of blood, curses and hatred. The people (*bangsa-bangsa*) abandoned the invaders and drove them through rivers of blood" (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 22-23).<sup>109</sup>

Begejil's silence, and death, is like the deaths represented in the woodcut print, "Boylali." The ones who are silent are not the dead lying in unmarked graves, they are the living people who choose not to speak out against structures of oppression. Silence, when paired with a death committed in sacrifice to the struggle of the rakyat kecil, is liberation. Silence in the dream of the nation, however, means one will "become a man who only lives in sleep" (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 102).<sup>110</sup> Begejil's silence is, in the end, his liberation because the figure remains embedded in the struggle of the rakyat kecil, and these texts, of dream and of sleep, are themselves powerfully persuasive symbolic acts.

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<sup>108</sup> "Tetap yang jelas, ia tidak pernah memutuskan untuk mengkhianati perjuangan. Untuk menjadi manusia mimpi yang hanya hidup dalam tidur" (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 102).

<sup>109</sup> Quotations are from the 2000 novelization of the play, my translation. I've chosen to include the original text in the footnotes but indicated the source and page in text.

"Lalu sunyi. Lengan.

"Irama jantung berdetak di urat angin yang dingin. Hingga Begejil ambruk dan menggigil. Langit-langit rumah berputar seperti ketenangan yang berputar dalam ingatan Pak Kanjeng. Riwayat-Riwayat berkelebat, mengepakkan sayapnya dengan keras di ruang kefanaan. Menerbangkan kesunyian Pak Kanjeng dari peristiwa ke peristiwa, dari jaman yang satu ke jaman yang lain. Seperti layaknya sejarah yang bergerak, tak ada seorangpun yang bergerak, tak ada seorangpun yang menolak untuk menjadi lebih baik dari sebelumnya. Meski semua orang juga tahu, perbaikan sejarah selalu di tandai oleh ceceran darah, kutukan dan kebencian. Bangsa-bangsa meninggalkan para penjajah dan menusirnya melalui sungai darah" (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 22-23).

<sup>110</sup> "Tetap yang jelas, ia tidak pernah memutuskan untuk mengkhianati perjuangan. Untuk menjadi manusia mimpi yang hanya hidup dalam tidur" (Nadjib, *Pak Kanjeng* 102).

Throughout *Pak Kanjeng*, the authors embed messages about the nature of history and its relationship with social movements in resistance to cultural hegemony of the state, as well as call into question their own positionality. As the authors attempt to raise awareness about structures of oppression, they also grapple with the impossibility of truly representing the struggles of the an impoverished rakyat kecil, and their own discomfort as cultural mediators during the New Order. While it is problematic that a group of mostly middle-class cultural workers are attempting to speak for the rural poor, or not speak in the case of Begejil, in some sense the play also poses a perfect failure of representation. History is what is moving, and the *bangsa-bangsa* (citizens) of the nation are the ones frozen in dreams and conditioned by the patterns of the past. The refusal for people to move in the above quotation is strange, and intentionally so. This kind of refusal is not like the *malas* refusal to think by Begejil, it is a refusal to move and act that reflects both being frozen in fear of retribution at the same time having internalized the cultural hegemony of the national imagination. The movements of history reinforce a sense of desperation and inevitability of the ways in which people as *bangsa-bangsa*, the people of the nation (not *rakyat*) are static, stuck in the patterns of history. Only history moves, people do not, and so only the patterns of history remain, no change is made, and the result is the continued marginalization of the people as *rakyat*.

It is not surprising that the play was banned after only two performances because of its overt criticism of the New Order and didactic orientation towards resistance. The group claims that the ban actually did more to raise awareness about their critique of the oppressive nature of the New Order than perhaps the play itself, a similar dynamic experienced by all of the figures discussed in this chapter. Cak Nun and his collaborators experiment with an amalgamation of creative forms, and despite the ban on this particular work, the proliferation of cultural action by this and other groups working at Kedung Ombo continued. In some ways, echoing Mangunwijaya's sentiments regarding his being banned from involvement at Kedung Ombo, the Small Community of Pak Kanjeng received more public attention because of the banning of the play.

The authors of *Pak Kanjeng* thematize the culture of silence in Indonesia to interrogate a long history of violence and oppression associated with forms of cultural domination reproduced in the nation-state. These histories are institutionalized by the developmentalist programs and military force of the New Order, but what the authors come to realize is that these structures of domination are already deeply internalized by oppressed peoples. Through their own practice of implementing the methods of praxis—engagements between theory, action, and reflection—in theatrical form, the authors form a critique not only of the limitations of national imagination, but also a critique of their own position as elite cultural workers attempting to represent oppressed rakyat kecil peoples. This play is produced at a moment of transition within the social movement in which transformative methodologies through cultural action, in this case on the theatrical stage, are being formulated. Praxis is enacted in the play on *Pak Kanjeng* in the authors' engagements between theory, action, and reflection in response to the perceived failures of activists to halt the construction of Kedung Ombo.

After the play was banned, members of the Small Community of Pak Kanjeng searched for other creative outlets of socially engaged art. They went through a period of experimentation, shifting away from grassroots theater to incorporate a greater variety of aesthetic forms. The idea of developing a critical pedagogy for Indonesia circulated widely among activist groups, yet there was not much of an educational movement at the time. The artists of the Small Community of Pak Kanjeng began to feel that their work needed to speak to the changes taking place among

Muslim communities. Since many of the members were Muslim and Nadjib was considered a leader among Islamic communities, they started to shift their focus more towards engagements with alternative modes of Islamic practice that involved education and performance, most notably by incorporating music with *pengajian* or Qur'anic recitation. The Malay root *kaji*, means study, but in its active voice, "ngaji" is often used for Islamic knowledge. Learning how to recite the Qu'ran involves not only learning the correct Arabic pronunciation, but also the appropriate melodies and rhythm of the recitation. Although they refrain from calling it music, this musical aspect is what Kyai Kanjeng build upon. Also built into the notion of *pengajian* is the sense of *ijtihad* or interpretation of the Qur'an based upon independent reasoning. At the beginning of the fourth century hijrah (approximately A.D. 900), the gates of *ijtihad* were declared closed, meaning the Qur'an was closed to further interpretation because of a fear of false interpretation (Hallaq 3). As an act of recitation, *pengajian* does not typically necessitate critical reflection, instead it involves much greater focus on correct recitation based on rote memorization. Kyai Kanjeng and Emha Ainun Nadjib, critique this kind of codified and closed system of learning as it runs contrary to their goals to facilitate critical reflection among marginalized communities.

In my conversations in 2015 with one of the founders of Kyai Kanjeng, he reflects on how *pengajian* became a target of their social action after their work at Kedung Ombo and raises the concept of *pembodohan* to speak to the educational aspects of Kyai Kanjeng which they worked to incorporate into their performance arts. When Begejil interprets Pak Kanjeng's fragmentation as a miracle, it is a form of magico-religious belief that members of Kyai Kanjeng critique.

"We realized that religion could actually be used as a tool for making society more stupid [bisa dijadikan alat untuk pembodohan masyarakat]. We couldn't distance ourselves from that, the more we tried the more other people used religion to make society more stupid. So we decided to create *pengajian*. ... Now I am one of the people who also made use of art [alongside *pengajian*], but the essential purpose of all of this was to find a way, through *pengajian*, to change people's way of thinking," (Rahardjo, *Oral History*, 5 Mar. 2015).<sup>111</sup>

This sense of "healthy" critical thinking and the critique of religious orthodoxy is further imagined with a food metaphor as Rahardjo highlights the basic necessity for a reorientation of educational and religious practices towards greater participation of the rakyat kecil.

"According to us, religion is a raw material that cannot be eaten raw, you see. It must be processed. Eating uncooked rice is not delicious, it has to be cooked in order to become food. So, religion is like uncooked rice. All this time what has been happening in Indonesia is that, in fact, people are eating raw-uncooked rice, you see, not rice that has been cooked. So many of these disputes, conflicts, or whatever else, originate from this," (Rahardjo, *Oral History* 5 Mar. 2015).<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Kita menyadari bahwa agama itu justru bisa dijadikan alat untuk pembodohan masyarakat sebetulnya. Makanya justru kita tidak bisa menjauhi itu. Semakin kita menjauhi itu justru dipakai orang lain untuk lebih dipakai, untuk memdodohkan bebih parah laki. Makanya kita akhirnya membikin pengajian-pengajian ... Nah memang dirinya juga salah satu menggunakan kesenian juga. Tapi intinya sebenarnya bagaimana melalui pengajian itu mengembalikan lagi cara berfikir," (Rahardjo, *Oral History* 5 Mar. 2015)

<sup>112</sup> "Agama menurut kami itu adalah itu kan bahan baku yang tidak tidak boleh dimakan mentah-mentah gituloh. Justru itu harus diolah. Kalau beras kan dimakan kan ngak enak, beras harus diolah supaya bisa menjadi nasi, atau bisa menjadi makanan yang lain juga. Nah, agama itu adalah beras gituloh. Nah selama ini yang terjadi di Indonesia pada umumnya, justru yang dimakan itu berasnya gituloh bukan beras diolah menjadi. Itu yang pertikaian atau konflik atau apa itu asal-usul dari situ," (Rahardjo, *Oral History* 5 Mar. 2015).

This critique of “uncooked” Islamic educational practice became a reinvigorated form of cultural action in the work of the ensemble. The fusion of Qur’anic recitation with performance arts as a form of critical pedagogy now serves as a baseline for their continued cultural action to comment on and cultivate new political, cultural, and religious modes of expression and community imagination.

Today Kyai Kanjeng and Emha Ainun Nadjib perform throughout Indonesia and internationally. Having built a broad popular following, known as the Komunitas Maiyah (translated roughly as the “Community of Togetherness”), Kyai Kanjeng continue to produce a distinctive form of politically engaged cultural action that is as rooted in local rakyat kecil communities as well as engaged with social and cultural movements globally by enabling forms of praxis via performance. Their contemporary performances have become hugely popular as they incorporate practices of Qur’anic recitation as a critical pedagogical tool in radical ways. For example, in most mosques in Indonesia men and women are typically separated during pengajian, but with Kyai Kanjeng they are not separate. Also, the goal of pengajian is typically rote memorization and closed interpretation, but in performances Nadjib also explores meaning and context of the Qur’an, interpreting it within contemporary social, political, and cultural circumstances. Opening this space for critical discourse is for them is a pivotal step in empowering rakyat kecil communities to reflect on their own circumstances more critically. Theater remains a major part of their work, but as high-profile cultural workers attempting to break through cultural silences, they shifted their focus from attempting to represent the marginalized in Indonesia, to instead incorporate a range of cultural aesthetics that facilitate critical discourse. By combining Arabic, Western and Javanese musical styles alongside Qur’anic recitation, their work today is symbolic of the way they embrace cultural hybridity and experimentation with critique of religious orthodoxy and capitalism.

Among activist working at Kedung Ombo, the failures of their movements raised important lessons about the nature of advocacy efforts that were, in the end, unsuccessful at reversing or even slowing state developmentalism. This period also represents the last big wave of economic success of the New Order “miracle economy,” and the cultural actions presented in the chapter show how the sense of unrest caused by poverty, dislocation, and outright violence which marginalized peasant communities economically, culturally and politically throughout the New Order were in fact the precursors to the Asian economic crisis. As the growth of the Indonesian middle class created further marginalization of lower-class communities, high-profile cultural workers like Thukul, Mangunwijaya and the members of the Small Community of Pak Kanjeng are among a growing group of activists who brought forms of praxis into wider circulation through their cultural projects. The problems of representation in art and activism amongst these high-profile cultural workers attempting to alleviate the struggle of marginalized and impoverished rakyat kecil communities in the nineties also inspired critical reflection among themselves as they then began to model more transformed positions of leadership as facilitators and capacity builders, rather than representatives. They begin to divert the spotlight from their stage to the decentered stages of small communities across the landscape of Java. Learning from and reflecting on problems of representation at Kedung Ombo leads activists to work in new ways that in turn shift the discourse of social movement action towards strengthened modes of participation and transformation at the interface between rural and urban Java.

## *Setting a Symbolic Stage: “Batas Panggung” by Wiji Thukul*

Finally, I return to the work of Wiji Thukul as counterpoint for understanding the high-profile cultural workers at Kedung Ombo, as well as to set the stage, so to speak, for the symbolic actions of SALAM and KBQT which situate rakyat kecil communities at the center of their actions. Thukul is one of the most important voices in the lexicon of cultural resistance in Indonesia. Widely known as Indonesia’s *penyair kerakyatan* (poet of the people), he is known as the poet of the people because he, as a person, is of the poor.

“I write poetry because poetry is a medium that is able to convey the problems of small people [orang kecil]. Oppressed people like me.”<sup>113</sup>

“Small people” here is a direct translation of the Indonesian term he uses, *orang kecil*, which is itself a translation of *wong cilik*, a Javanese vernacular term for rakyat kecil, or “the people” in the most proletarianized sense. Thukul not only represents the rakyat, he *is* the rakyat.

“...it needs to be straightened out that I am not defending the people [rakyat]. I am actually defending myself. I don’t want to be called a hero because I was instrumental in fighting for the fate of the little people [rakyat kecil]. I’m really only talking about myself. Look at me, I varnish furniture, my wife is a seamstress, my father is a pedicab driver, my mother-in-law a junk dealer, and everything in my surroundings are destitute. All of this enters into my poetry. So I’m not defending anyone. Only coincidentally, by defending myself turns out to also be voicing the rights of others who are temporarily out of place” (Thukul *Aku Ingin Jadi Peluru* 168-169).<sup>114</sup>

Thukul wrote during the height of New Order authoritarianism in Indonesia and was a vocal critic of the symbolic and physical violence inflicted upon himself, and therefore also Indonesia’s most vulnerable communities. Factory workers, farm laborers, urban and rural poor all feature in his poetry. He shares their struggle and continued marginalization by a state which placed economic development and resource extraction over the interests of the vast majority of Indonesian citizens, most notably the rakyat kecil. These are themes repeated throughout his oeuvre. He was a hero for common folk and therefore an enemy of the New Order state. The power of his poetry to “speak truth to power,” and the threat he presented to constructions of state authority during his lifetime, are tragically proven by his sudden disappearance in 1998 at the hands of the New Order state. During his brief lifetime (1963-1998), Thukul nevertheless managed to create a corpus of poetry that continues to resonate with the struggles of marginalized and oppressed communities in Indonesia today. His words were an integral part of the movement to unseat Suharto from power in 1998, and his poetry is still widely used in social movement actions to this day. His life and his poetry are a testament to the importance of cultural resistance in social movements in Indonesia.

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<sup>113</sup> “*Kalau pun saya menulis puisi, karena puisi adalah media yang mampu menyampaikan permasalahan orang kecil. Orang-orang tertindas semacam saya*” (Thukul, *Aku Ingin Jadi Peluru* 168).

<sup>114</sup> “*...memang perlu diluruskan bahwa saya tidak membela rakyat. Saya sebenarnya membela diri saya sendiri. Saya tidak ingin disebut pahlawan karena berjasa memperjuangkan nasib rakyat kecil. Sungguh saya hanya bicara soal diri saya sendiri. Lihatlah saya tukang pelitur, istri buruh jahit, bapak tukang becak, mertua pedagang barang rongsokan, dan lingkungan saya semuanya melarat. Mereka semua masuk dalam puisi saya. Jadi saya tidak membela siapa pun. Cuma secara kebetulan, dengan membela diri sendiri ternyata juga menyuarakan hak-hak orang lain yang sementara ini entah di mana*” (Thukul *Aku Ingin Jadi Peluru* 168-169).



The stage as a metaphor for power is a familiar trope in literature and scholarship. From ‘All the world’s a stage’ by William Shakespeare to more scholarly engagements with theater as a form of resistance to the politics of the New Order, as discussed in *Resistance on the National Stage* (2010) by Michael Bodden, the stage is a productive site for imagining negotiations of power. In the Javanese tradition of wayang *kulit* shadow plays, the stage is a screen, called *kelir*, usually a piece of stretched cotton cloth situated between the audience and performers. The performance is a play of light and shadow. *Kulit* for “skin” refers to the shadow puppets themselves, made from leather and intricately painted and chiseled so that the shadows they cast reflect the distinctive features of each character drawn from the Ramayana and Mahabharata traditions of epic storytelling in Indonesia. On one side of the *kelir* are situated a group of *gamelan* musicians to accompany the performance, a light source (traditionally a coconut-oil lamp called a *blencong*, though electric light sources are more common today), and the *dhalang* puppet master who sits on the floor with a pantheon of shadow puppets at arm’s reach, flat characters typically attached to thin bamboo reeds that are enlivened in voice and movement by the *dhalang* as their shadows are cast upon the screen. On the other side of the screen sit the audience, typically a public who watch the play take action in shadows. In performances of wayang *kulit* in the court tradition of Java, royal elites watch the play from the performance side of the screen, what in modern theatrical terms would be more of the backstage area. From this position they can see the elaborately painted shadow puppets, the movements of the *dhalang* and *gamelan* musicians, as well as the shadows cast on the screen. This separation of the elite from the general public reflects the strict hierarchical nature of Javanese cultural traditions reflected in performance arts, language, and social relations.

Wiji Thukul enables the stage as a mediating site for the negotiation of power relations in his poem “Batas Panggung” or “Limits of the Stage” (*Aku Ingin Jadi Peluru* 28). In a characteristically playful poetic staging of actors and audiences situated within the poem, he enables the metaphorical slippage of *plesetan* between the political stage and the theatrical stage to shape meaning from their interactions in a performance. Written in Solo in 1991, the stage in Thukul’s poem cannot be separated from a resonance with meanings surrounding the stage as constructed in the wayang traditions of Java. As a Javanese poet and member of the *rakyat kecil* known for his poetic engagements with everyday forms of Javanese cultural expression and resistance to the cultural hegemony of the Indonesian state, this poem brings the high center of the Javanese court into the common language of Indonesian. In my reading of “Batas Panggung,” Thukul enables a redeployment and reversal of the wayang stage to reshape how and for whom the stage is designed to empower, and in turn create a new poetic audience of engaged, participatory actors.

BATAS PANGGUNG

kepada para pelaku  
 ini daerah kekuasaan kami  
 jangan lewati batas itu  
 jangan campuri apa yang terjadi di sini  
 karena kalian penonton  
 kalian adalah orang luar  
 jangan rubah cerita yang telah kami susun  
 jangan belokkan jalan cerita yang telah  
 kami rencanakan  
 karena kalian adalah penonton  
 kalian adalah orang luar  
 kalian harus diam

LIMITS OF THE STAGE

to the actors  
 this is our realm of power  
 don’t cross the boundary  
 don’t mix up what happens here  
 because you are the audience  
 you are outsiders  
 don’t change the story we’ve created  
 don’t twist the stories that  
 we planned  
 because you are the audience  
 you are the outsiders  
 you must be quiet

*panggung seluas ini hanya untuk kami  
apa yang terjadi di sini  
jangan ditawar-tawar lagi  
panggung seluas ini hanya untuk kami  
jangan coba bawa pertanyaan-pertanyaan berbahaya  
ke dalam permainan ini  
panggung seluas ini hanya untuk kami  
kalian harus bayar kami  
untuk membiayai apa yang kami kerjakan di sini*

a stage this wide is only for us  
what happens here  
don't try to haggle with  
a stage this wide is only for us  
don't try to bring your dangerous questions  
into our play here  
a stage this wide is only for us  
you need to pay us  
to pay for what we've worked on here

*biarkan kami menjalankan kekuasaan kami  
tontonlah  
tempatmu di situ (Thukul, *Aku Ingin Jadi Peluru* 28)*

let us carry out our power  
just watch  
your place is there

In the subtitle to the poem “*kepada para pelaku*” or “to the actors,” Thukul brings the notion of *laku*, or more specifically the personalization of the term *pelaku* meaning “actors” or more literally “doers” (*Aku Ingin Jadi Peluru* 28). Thukul gestures toward a community of people who take action (*melakukan*) as a commanding voice emanates from center stage in the opening lines. Situated as a site of authority, “*daerah kekuasaan kami*” or “our place of power,”<sup>115</sup> throughout the poem to create an audience of actors (*Thukul, Aku Ingin Jadi Peluru* 28). With the center of authority on the stage, the voice is positioned to create new demarcations as audience attentions are drawn to the movement between actor and audience. Thukul establishes a crass antithesis between those on and off the stage, and a hierarchy is created with an in-group and an out-group, those who act on the stage and those who merely watch silently.

The subtitle to the poem is complicated by another common meaning of *pelaku* which means “perpetrator” in a legal sense. At the time this poem was composed, the New Order state had instituted censorship laws which criminalized anyone, especially artists, for voicing any form of criticism or critique of the government. Thukul was a *pelaku* cultural perpetrator who defied censorship laws of the New Order government. With this added meaning, the “actors” or “doers” are also “perpetrators” who transgress government regulations, and in the poem also transgress the formal boundary between audience and actor since the audience of this poem are in fact the *pelaku* themselves. In a 1994 interview Thukul speaks of his role as part of a community of artistic *pelaku* set in contrast to artists who distance themselves from the politics of art.

“Many of our artists have an allergy to politics. That’s not right. By not knowing about politics, we can be easily manipulated [lit. “played” from *dipermainkan*]. We must be actors [*pelaku*], not objects. Yes, I also agree that many of our artists stand out as salon-style artists. I don’t know much about their literary tastes. For them, literature exists in the clouds. It’s not contextual at all. Shouldn’t literature live where they live? To record the events that grow around them?” (*Thukul Aku Jadi Peluru* 170).<sup>116</sup>

<sup>115</sup> Here Thukul uses he uses the Indonesian word *kami* for “our / us / we,” a form of the word which excludes the person being spoken to. Compared to *kita* which is inclusive of the person being spoken to. Thukul’s use of *kami* echoes reinforces the division of space and creation of boundaries in the poem.

<sup>116</sup> “*Banyak seniman kita itu alergi politik. Itu tidak betul. Dengan tidak tahu soal politik kita mudah saja dipermainkan. Kita harus jadi pelaku, bukan objek. Ya, saya juga setuju seniman kita banyak yang berdiri sebagai seniman salon. Saya kurang tahu selera sastra mereka. Baginya sastra berada di awang-awang. Tidak kontekstual sama sekali. Bukannya sastra mesti hidup di mana ia hidup? Merekam peristiwa yang tumbuh*” (*Thukul Aku Jadi Peluru* 170).

For Thukul, politicizing art means making it contextual and related to the lives and livelihoods of the rakyat kecil, which he himself is a member. In this statement, Thukul also makes an implicit reference to cultural debates which emerged in the fifties and sixties between artists who advocated for the political role of art, represented by the cultural organization *Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat* (Institute for People's Culture, LEKRA), as opposed to artists who advocated for more universalist applications of "art for the sake of art", known as the signatories of the *Manifes Kebudayaan* (Cultural Manifesto, 1963).<sup>117</sup> This discourse was truncated by the violence of 1965 which led to the establishment of the New Order. Since LEKRA was loosely affiliated with the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (Indonesian Communist Party, PKI), members of LEKRA were a key target of violence and many were killed, tortured, imprisoned, or disappeared. When Thukul raises the question of pelaku as cultural actors, it is this discourse of violence which is not overtly stated but very much implicit in the distinction he draws between politically engaged artists and those "salon style" artists who "have an allergy to politics" (*Aku Ingin Jadi Peluru* 28). Thukul embraces being a pelaku artist for this reason, and in "Batas Panggung" the sense of legal transgression of the pelaku as perpetrator is transformed into a necessary action of resistance by pelaku as cultural actors. In this way, Thukul redetermines the meaning of pelaku as agents of cultural action, and instead of merely speaking to a chosen community of social movement actors, in fact creates a community of actors who participate through the poem. Poetry is after all an act of creation, of *poesis*.

I enable Thukul's poem to highlight a shared cultural stage of participatory action that is foundational to my research on transformative social movements in Java. This stage is shared by a multiplicity of decentered agents, empowered to act against longstanding forms of cultural hegemony in Indonesia. When Thukul speaks from his own experiences of poverty, violence, marginalization, disenfranchisement, and oppression, he speaks to a community of oppressed peoples in Indonesia who recognize and share those experiences. In this shared affect, Thukul creates and sustains a new audience of participatory actors in "Batas Panggung" by reserving space just for "us," "a stage this wide is only for us" (*Aku Ingin Jadi Peluru* 28). This is an empowering move in which Thukul widens the stage and therefore broadens the possibilities for participation by small-scale actors. It is a countermovement to the forces which previously limited the participation of small-scale actors, most notably the implementation of global capitalist expansion under the restrictive New Order state. Thukul creates space for a participant audience who will listen, learn, speak, and act out against the cultural silences (*budaya bisu*) of cultural hegemony in Indonesia. "Batas Panggung" lays a foundation of cultural praxis for my engagement with the multiple and diverse actors (pelaku) and stages (panggung) which are the subjects of this research.

The following two parts of this dissertation are guided by reflections on symbolic and historical analysis drawn from two contemporary communities in Central Java which constitute the two communities Sanggar Anak Alam (SALAM) and Komunitas Belajar Qaryah Thayyibah (KBQT). These cases provide examples of the kinds of transformations that take place within social movements that focus on the agency of rakyat kecil communities in symbolic action. The arts and participatory educational models are central to the ways in which these communities operate today and are examples of the changing shape of transformative movements in Java. In the studies that follow, the transformation of leadership represents an important shift away from

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<sup>117</sup> Their use of the term "manifes" a word borrowed from English is a gesture towards the universalizing tendencies of this group as they work to situate art in a depoliticized, international framework.

the high-profile leadership of activists at Kedung Ombo. The figures that emerge in each community operate as intermediaries in the process of enacting transformative change among rakyat kecil communities that stand at the interface between rural and urban realities. These leaders reject their centrality to the movements and instead work to decenter notions of leadership to place agency back in the hands of the small stakeholders, the wong cilik in the case of Java. Their stories are, however, important to demonstrate how these transformations take place and how as leaders they work to facilitate the transformative methodologies of praxis among a diverse set of rakyat kecil community actors. Critical engagements with theory, actions designed to raise greater awareness, and participatory reflections throughout the process inform transformative engagements that are designed to liberate, emancipate, and facilitate greater self-determination for peasant communities traditionally marginalized by forms of cultural hegemony in Indonesia.

## 2 | **Laku-melaku SALAM Lawen, Tracing Rivers and Memories of Return to Agrarian Java**

Sanggar Anak Alam (SALAM) was first established in the rural village of Lawen, Banjarnegara, in which a small intergenerational community organized a variety of independent economic initiatives, educational projects, and political actions. It was initiated by a woman named Sri Wahyaningsih, though she is called simply Wahya by members of the community. She had been involved in other grassroots empowerment projects before coming to Lawen. She studied Economics at Universitas Gajah Mada in Yogyakarta in the early eighties, during which time she worked with Y.B. Mangunwijaya at the Kali Code River community. In addition to assisting in his work, she organized micro-finance projects for impoverished people living on this same river who were not part of Mangunwijaya's project. She also accompanied Mangunwijaya on several of his trips to Kedung Ombo. It was then that she realized she wanted to do something different than what was going on among the activists at Kedung Ombo. She wanted to do something smaller, but which could be more useful to people who were feeling the negative impacts large-scale development in Indonesia. She decided to move to Lawen, a place that was not impacted by the dam project but which she knew the people were still struggling, economically and socially. Lawen was the hometown of her husband, Toto Rahardjo, one of the members of the Small Community of Pak Kanjeng discussed in the previous chapter. A lesser-known activist, she is not mentioned in any of the scholarship on activism in Indonesia. It is this woman whose movements I follow in this chapter as she helped to establish the first permutation of SALAM in Lawen from 1988-1996.

I came to learn more about the early formation of SALAM in Lawen during the Lebaran holiday in 2015, mentioned in the introduction to this work. Invited by Wahyaningsih, I returned home with her and her family to meet the people of Lawen. It was there that I learned through the memories of the people of Lawen the significance of what SALAM meant to this community. The late eighties and early nineties were the height of New Order authoritarianism. The national economy was booming, but early signs of the Asian economic crash to come in the late nineties were already being felt by communities such as the one in Lawen. As Wahyaningsih describes her reasoning for starting SALAM in Lawen, she wanted to prove to the people that their community could be a site of learning. SALAM began as a community empowerment project for children and adults in Lawen which lasted from 1988-1996. Many of these children had now grown of and had families of their own. They described this period as a "golden age" ("jaman emas") of Lawen. It was a turning point in what is remembered as local history. As Harti described when sharing "Ilmu Iku" with me, "itu berubah cara berpikir saya", "it changed my way of thinking." Many people in Lawen reflected this feeling and recounted their memories of Wahyaningsih's time in Lawen. It is her story that I follow in this chapter most closely.

Scholarly narratives of activism in Indonesia usually describe mass movements staged in direct confrontation with the state, like the example from Kedung Ombo. However, following the movements of one woman's return to a rural village shapes a different story of activism. This woman's movements are more subtle, gradual, and embedded in personal journeys and collective experiences of an intergenerational community of actors. Her story is integral as a catalyst of social movements that situate communities of rakyat kecil actors as central agents of change. In this chapter I demonstrate how notions of activism are recast by following the small steps of

return to a village homeland in Java. Not always reflected in overt or direct confrontation by high-profile figures, activism in this example is embedded in family and lived experience. It is facilitated by the leadership of one woman, an already decentered subject position, but it comes to include participation by a large community of small-scale actors. It is in these movements that one community of rakyat kecil actors came to find their own sense of empowerment. The establishment and operation of SALAM from 1988-1996 in Lawen offers instructive examples of the challenges and opportunities faced by activists working to bring economically and socially disenfranchised communities more squarely into movements of social change in Java. I begin by tracing down a river in Lawen to follow the paths of memory that shaped my understanding of the early formation of SALAM. These movements work to illustrate how communities of rakyat kecil were transformed into agents of social change during the height of New Order authoritarianism.

### *Laku-melaku Narrative: Entry points of Memory and Return*

*On a clear sunny day during the Lebaran holiday in June of 2015, we walked around the Javanese countryside in Lawen, Banjarnegara. We trekked up a small river that borders the village and runs through the surrounding agrarian mountain landscape. Pak Waryo describes the legends and stories of the mountains surrounding us. Gunung Benteng (lit. Fortress Mountain) is said to be the site where the wayang character Bima raises his animals. Gunung Sintok, where wild horses roamed in the past, and where the Javanese prince, Diponegoro, while opposing Dutch colonial rule in the Java War of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, is said to have found his most trusted horse while meditating on the mountain, Kyai Gentung. On nearby Gunung Jaran, there is a rock named “Batu Kelir” (lit. screen rock, as in the screen used in the wayang shadow plays) which can be heard singing like a gamelan every malam jumat kliwon. I wasn’t able to hear the gamelan songs of the mountains during my time in Lawen, but I did experience the soundscapes of a countryside full of life. The rural landscape can be quite loud at times, rarely any silence heard between chirping bugs, frogs, birds, the river flowing, our footsteps on the gravel road, roosters crowing, the azan call to prayer, and motorbikes zooming around the agricultural landscape. The soundscape cued me into the subtle movements, changes and tensions of this place. Walking around the village with Bram and Waryo felt anything like a “remote” experience in rural Java, rather we were immersed in a very busy and constantly moving place. Urban and rural soundscapes blend in this space.*

*We walk off the roadway and neared a small river that flows through the fields surrounding Lawen. The motorbikes faded into the background and sounds of the flowing waterway surrounded us. We trace down the banks of the river, our footsteps splash in the water and squish in the slick mud. Bram remembers coming down to swim and play in the water as a child, especially in portions of the river that narrow to create faster flowing white-water or small waterfalls. He points towards a portion of the river, saying this spot is “wajib berenang,” “required swimming.” We laugh and Bram reminds me that everything having to do with water in their village used to revolve around the river. Playing, drinking, cleaning, bathing, gathering water each day to carry back to their homes, the river was a central part of everyday life in Lawen. We discuss how there have been a great deal of infrastructural improvements in this small town since that time, most every home now has running water and electricity, but the nostalgia of the river as a center of life remains. Many of these projects are credited to Bram’s grandfather, Soebarno, who served as village Lurah for over 25 years, and Bram’s mother*

*Wahya, who moved to Lawen in 1988. Many stories and memories surfaced of Wahya's time living in Lawen as we continued our walk and as I was introduced to this small Javanese town over the Lebaran holiday,*

*Bram and Waryo brought me to a site where the irrigation channels connect and supply water to the fields surrounding Lawen, the result of a collaborative infrastructural project facilitated by Wahya, in the early nineties. She worked with residents of Lawen, her father-in-law, Soebarno, as well as the humanitarian activist, Romo Mangunwijaya. Together they created an open-source irrigation channel, a simple open square basin made of bricks and cement that connects two channels of irrigation that flow down the landscape through pvc piping. Bram explained that there are many smaller villages downstream from Lawen that depend on the same river for irrigation. When designed these cisterns, it was important that they keep in mind an open access design so that any community member could repair or change the irrigation flow to accommodate environmental and agricultural changes.*

*Pak Waryo pointed out the wild and agricultural plant life around us. We passed by a very old sugar palm, pohon aren, the fruits of which are eaten fresh (kolang kaling / sugar palm fruit) or turned into sugar (gula Jawa / palm sugar). This particular tree was very old, no longer producing enough fruit to make sugar but the fruits were still edible. He also points out singkong / cassava, growing on the sides of the road surrounding the fields of rice, and a kind of soybean that grows in Lawen. The plant itself is much smaller than most industrially grown soybeans, but Waryo explained to me that it produces soybeans with much more flavor and natural sweetness.*

*On our way back to the family home, we climb up the banks of the river to cross over a small walking bridge, another of Soebarno's projects as village Lurah. Entering the residential area of Lawen, a few residents greeted us as we passed. "Mau kemana?" asking where we had been and where we were going. Bram smiled and responded simply, "laku-melaku" as we continued our walk.*

Memories unfolded where the waters weave between small farms and rural hillsides as two generations of individuals born in Lawen led me through this agrarian landscape. Bram is the eldest son Sri Wahyaningsih and Toto Rahardjo. While he spent most of his childhood in Yogyakarta, his friends and family in Lawen describe him as a "child of SALAM." He was born at the height of his mother's organizing in Lawen and his grandfather, Soebarno, was a beloved leader in their community. Waryo is of an older generation, born and raised in Lawen and closer in age to Bram's parents. A soft-spoken man in his fifties, he now serves as the groundskeeper of SALAM in Yogyakarta. Inspired by the landscape and people of Lawen, Bram and Waryo shared their hometown with me. Our path that day was unplanned, but each step of our short journey conjured memories and experiences of the myths, sounds, songs, plants, projects, and traditions embedded in this place. *Laku-mlaku* (or *jalan-jalan* in Indonesian) uttered by Bram at the end of our walk is an expression used frequently in Java which means roughly "walking around." On our walk that day, however, it carried meaning beyond simply walking without aim or purpose. Each step of our short journey around Lawen resonated with Harti's song discussed at the introduction to this work, "*Ilmu itu kanthi laku*", "knowledge embedded in action." She sang this *tembang* in remembrance of her time organizing at SALAM, just as Bram and Waryo conveyed stories inspired by the landscape of Lawen, all three sharing their reflections of local pride and community history of praxis in Lawen.

Stories like these flooded my research notes over the course of just four days spent in Lawen. I was invited by Wahyaningsih and Rahardjo to accompany their family on their annual

return home to celebrate the Lebaran holiday in 2015. Lawen is located roughly 150 kilometers northwest of the city of Yogyakarta in the hilly mountains of Western Central Java. Unassuming from the outside, this place and the people in it, like many remote corners of Java, carry a rich web of stories and traditions. Ghosts and spirits are present in the imagination of this landscape. The “superstitions” of the countryside such as the singing mountain recounted by Bram and Waryo above, are stories which challenge western scientific rationale. Skepticism of the countryside is, in some ways, a legacy of colonial and national attempts to control the Javanese landscape. Dutch fears of a mass movement of peasants rising spontaneously out of the rural landscape preceded the revolutionary movement that led to the establishment of the Indonesian nation. Twenty years after independence, fears of the countryside were revived as the political landscape shifted toward authoritarian control. By turning its military strength inward, the New Order state seized power in order to squelch an alleged communist uprising they feared would arise among agrarian peasants. Political history and the physical landscape of Java is full of myths and legends that mix and intertwine with the contemporary experiences of Javanese peasants.

In Lawen, I was invited to participate in the memories of an extended family and community whose work as activists, organizers, educators, and artists were most enlivened by their return home to this place. Stories of family and self, of learning and emancipation, of change and growth were repeated among multiple generations of individuals who have a special bond to this place. As I took part in holiday traditions with the Soebarno family that were both familiar and new to me—families reminiscing, sharing stories, music, performance and, perhaps most memorably, food—a collective history and feeling of local community empowerment shared over the Lebaran holiday was palpable in Lawen, and lead my research towards a fuller understanding of the shape and nature of transformative social movements in Central Java.

The movements of return to agrarian Java traversed by millions of Indonesians each year during the Lebaran holiday also point towards a different framing of social movements and activism than is typically conceived in scholarship. Urban spaces are often seen as sites of progress and centers of activism and change. Rural spaces, on the other hand, are often conceived as places confined to tradition, conservative ideas or “backward” thinking. In exploring the early formation of SALAM, I found an important reorientation of this stark dichotomy, where the agrarian context was seen as the central site for change, action, and “real” progress, “*yang riil*” as it was often recounted to me. *Laku* is an important conceptual tool that I enable for understanding notions of praxis in Java. Learning from the small actions and movements of a family returning to their agrarian origins, *mudik* facilitates a mass movement of people returning home to small towns and villages that reinforces the interconnection between urban centers and rural agrarian homelands for many Indonesians. As *mudik* facilitates a return home to family origins, a reinforcement of community ties and sense of collectivity that connects rural and urban communities through both physical and symbolic movements home, *laku* works to link movements and actions with the context of place and of tradition. It is a conceptual term that carries a great deal of meaning in Java, from simply “walking around,” to the more abstracted “knowledge embedded in action”, *laku* involves movement between physical space, behavior and practice, between the step and the journey. The landscape architects Taylor and Lennon describe the multiple meanings of *laku* in their analysis of Javanese conceptions of space.

"The Javanese concept of space is an abstract one, connected with the concept of life as a *lakon*, or story of a journey, that has to be seen in its wholeness as with a wayang ritual or play. This is best related to the



Javanese idea of place, which is grasped as the characteristic site where events and daily activities take place. A place is meaningless without any relation to *laku* (walking, behavior, action and role of actors, in wayang it is named *lakon*, meaning scenario, story or performance). The other meaning of *laku* is journey or trip, of life itself. In any performance, the significance of place is always associated with its *lakon* or story. How to build and to dwell is associated with the need to go for a walk. In the Javanese idea, life is taken as ‘a stop awhile for drink at an inn during a long journey’ (*urip sa’derma mampir ngombe*) (Wiriyomartono, 1998). The notion is that the built environment including the landscape is perceived by the Javanese as a setting for events and happenings in the sense of ‘on the move’” (Taylor and Lennon 77).

Laku is itself an example of a slippage (*plesetan*) embedded in the lives and language of Java. The slippages in meaning open spaces for reformulation and transformation. The abstraction of space that these authors describe might more usefully be understood as concepts that constitute the everyday realities of Java. A multiplicity of meanings that overlap and intersect to create very real, practical, and actionable sites of praxis. My ethnographic portraits of Lawen as described above, combined with the stories, memories and performance arts shared with me during the Lebaran holiday in 2015, recast the *mudik* movement within the concept of *laku*, as discussed in the Introduction. In Lawen, this process is tied most directly to one woman’s return to an “out of the way town” in central Java, and the growth of the community educational project called SALAM. What began as a small community school in a remote town in Eastern Central Java, has since grown into a model of emancipatory education in the city of Yogyakarta.

### ***A Movement Born from Husband and Wife and the “Dual Role” of Women in Indonesia***

“SALAM was born from husband and wife” (Rahardjo, *Oral History* 5 Mar. 2015).<sup>118</sup> This is how Toto Rahardjo, the activist, performance artists, and member of Kyai Kanjeng first described SALAM to me in 2015. Toto Rahardjo and Sri Wahyaningsih, or Toto and Wahya as people recognize them, are husband and wife and the so called “parents” of *Sanggar Anak Alam*, [SALAM]. While they both play significant roles at SALAM, it is Wahyaningsih whose work with the community in Lawen was most instrumental to the establishment and early growth of SALAM.

“The journey of SALAM today cannot be separated from the journey of Wahya. A woman born in 1961, spent her childhood in Desa Karangdowo, Kabupaten Klaten, Central Java. She grew up in a rich agrarian society. Her grandfather and grandmother were the ones to cut the rice each harvest, who indirectly drove the economic wheels of the village. Wahya grew up in a village atmosphere that was beautiful, fertile, and well-off” (Rahardjo, *Oral History* March 5, 2015).<sup>119</sup>

Rahardjo is of course part of the process, it is after all his hometown that became the site of the first permutation of SALAM and he is an active facilitator in their community today, but it is through the biography of Wahyaningsih that members of SALAM trace their origins. SALAM feels very much like a family, and Wahyaningsih is the community mother. At the start of every day she is present as students gather to prepare their independent and collective student-driven

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<sup>118</sup> “SALAM lahir dari suami-istri” (Rahardjo, *Oral History* 5 Mar. 2015).

<sup>119</sup> “Perjalanan SALAM sampai hari ini tidak bisa dipisahkan dari perjalanan Wahya. Perempuan yang lahir pada 1961 ini menghabiskan masa kecilnya di Desa Karangdowo, Kabupaten Klaten, Jawa Tengah. Ia tumbuh dalam budaya masyarakat agraris yang kental. Kakek dan neneknya adalah penebas padi siap panen, yang secara tidak langsung menggerakkan roda ekonomi desanya. Wahya tumbuh dalam suasana desa yang asri, subur, dan berkecukupan” (Gernantatiti, et4 al. 3).

research projects. She is responsible for the intake and orientation of new students and parents as they become members of SALAM. She regularly cooks for the community, facilitates learning activities, manages the bureaucracy of the school, and is the spokesperson whenever officials, researchers or any other visitor come to interview, film, document, and occasionally even interrogate the goings on at SALAM. Rahardjo and Wahyaningsih's family home is the center of the learning community in its current form in Yogyakarta.

The significance of this woman's biography to the establishment and presence in the everyday functioning of SALAM cannot be overstated. When I first began writing about SALAM, I didn't know quite where to fit the personal stories of her journey within larger narratives of activism in Java. Initially I resisted writing about her and tried to avoid stories that seemed "too personal" or "too focused on the individual." I wanted to tell a story of community solidarity and local empowerment through a Gramscian lens of "organic intellectuals" emerging "naturally" from the agrarian landscape of Java, as well as of the displacement of individual history for collective practice. This was, of course, a naïve hope and led my writing towards increasingly generic directions, but it also led my research towards a deeper interrogation of the terms by which scholars typically approach social movement discourse in Java and elsewhere. Public charismatic figures most often feature at the center of these narratives, rarely are families and private lives considered. There is little to no embodiment.<sup>120</sup> Immersed in theoretical considerations, removed from lived experience and family life, the search for a natural emergence of organic intellectuals from the agrarian landscape is a scholarly fantasy. As discussed previously, Gramsci's own conception of the organic intellectuals is a romanticized notion that is problematic in his stilted view of the peasantry. Described as having aspirations of escape, admiration of outsider social position, and feigned disdain of intellectuals, in his view, peasants are still locked into tradition and dependent on and subordinated to the intellectuals (Gramsci 202). The potential for conditions of change to emerge among peasant communities are limited in his framing, or at least in the ability to recognize conditions of change and agency among rural peasants. Social movements at the grassroots level do not always look like overt resistance that take place in the spotlight, characterized by big eruptions of public protest. Grassroots movements among rakyat kecil communities can take more subtle expression within homes and among families (whether biological or metaphorical), and within domestic and agrarian sites as well as urban and rural. Grand sweeping historical narratives tend to overlook the everyday lived experiences of especially women, children, and the domestic sphere, unless they are specifically thematized as such. When women are depicted in the literature on social movement activism in Java, gender is often treated as a special interest rather than as an essential one. This is a situation that emerges both within scholarship and among activists in Indonesia. The collection of essays in *Fantasizing the Feminine* (1996), edited by Laurie Sears, represents a significant contribution in terms of scholarly engagements with issues of gender in Indonesia. This collection, however, is predated by the work of two Indonesian activists, Wardah Hafidz and Tati Krisnawati, who were instrumental in bringing greater awareness to the problems faced by women in Indonesia among activists. I will dedicate some time now to present findings from their 1989 work *Women and Development in Indonesia*, because of its importance in shifting the

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<sup>120</sup> Public perceptions of Wiji Thukul as the "representative of the people" serve as an excellent counter example to this trajectory. He was a figure who embodied a marginalized existence, and while tried to resist being typed as the representative of the people, to instead reflect the feeling and experience of his own marginalization, the narratives of activism continued to pull him into the center of the discourse.

ways in which activists talk about the direct impacts the developmentalist policies of the New Order had perhaps most especially on working class women.

Hafidz and Krisnawati's work is a policy study on women in development in Indonesia. According to their assessments, it was primarily the patriarchal orientation of state actors as well as NGO activists which presented significant obstacles for women's engagement within movements for social and political transformation in Indonesia during the New Order. From the governmental side of their study, their findings showed a general patriarchal orientation within national policies and programs that disproportionately affected the lives of women. Domestic labor and reproductive work were, unsurprisingly, categorized as "unproductive work" according to the New Order state, and greater emphasis was placed on economic growth and development by promoting large-scale production and capital accumulation. Women's role in society, shaped by cultural and religious values, was typically seen as confined to the domestic sphere, conceived of as private and isolated from their public, political, and predominately male counterparts, notions codified during the New Order as all organizations became increasingly centralized and bureaucratized by the state (Hafidz and Krisnawati 30-118).

Similar perceptions regarding women and development were found among NGOs. The authors isolate two major ideological orientations that in turn shape the ways in which NGOs approach and implement programs for women. The first, a general agreement with patriarchal values where biological difference were the basis for defining both men's and women's roles in society. Men were positioned by these NGOs as natural political and religious leaders, women were positioned as natural caregivers under the protection of their husbands and responsible for domestic labor such as child rearing and family finance (Hafidz and Krisnawati 125). The authors highlight how one of the biggest difficulties that arises for women in this "natural" arrangement, is in fulfilling a dual role, or "*peran ganda*" (Hafidz and Krisnawati 32). The authors quote the opinion of one NGO worker that highlights a simplistic view of the problem of women but illustrates the dual role women were expected to adhere to: being both good housewives in their domestic responsibilities at the same time expected to advance and modernize alongside their husbands as part of the developmentalist agenda of the New Order.

"Many women in villages are stupid [bodoh], they don't know about nutritional problems. What's important for them is that they are fed, they are apathetic in managing nutrition or household finances...The problem of poverty in agrarian society is caused by patterns of income instability. There are times of harvest and times of famine, the problem is that when it is time to harvest, they are wasteful, consumptive to the point that they don't have enough for the future. [Embedded] within this situation is the problem of women managing household finances. Thus, we must balance modernization with Eastern values, which means that women enter into modern currents, for example in managing nutrition, family finance, trade at malls and supermarkets, pursuing higher education, etc., but without leaving behind their cultural values of being good housewives" (Hafidz and Krisnawati 127).<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> "Ibu-ibu di desa banyak yang bodoh, tidak tahu masalah gizi, yang penting buat mereka (adalah) asal kenyang, mereka apatis untuk mengatur gizi dan keuangan rumah tangga...Masalah kemiskinan di masyarakat agraris adalah karena pola pendapatan yang tidak stabil, ada masa panen, ada masa paceklik. Masalah adalah pada waktu panen mereka boros, konsumtif sehingga kekurangan di masa-masa berikutnya...dalam hal ini adalah masalah perempuan untuk dapat mengatur keuangan rumah tangga. [...] Dengan demikian, yang harus kita lakukan adalah menyeimbangkan antara modernisasi dengan nilai-nilai Timur, artinya perempuan dapat masuk arus modern misalnya mengatur menu/gizi, mengatur keuangan keluarga, dagang di Plaza/super market, berpendidikan tinggi, dan sebagainya tapi dengan tidak meninggalkan nilai-nilai budaya yang ada, yaitu menjadi ibu rumah tangga yang baik" (Hafidz and Krisnawati 127).

The stigmatization of “stupid” rural women reifies the developmentalist logic of the New Order, a concept which the authors of *Pak Kanjeng* in the previous chapter thematize in the figure of Begejil.<sup>122</sup> The separation between public and private spheres of influence became an especially gendered discourse in Indonesia during the New Order. A steady increase of regulations on organization narrowed the range of possibilities for women, especially among the rural and urban poor.<sup>123</sup> In the 1950s there had been a wide variety of Women’s organizations that linked urban and rural women’s movements. At the forefront were *Perwari* (Persatuan Wanita Republik Indonesia, Republic of Indonesia Women’s Union) and *Gerwani* (Gerakan Wanita Indonesia, Indonesian Women’s Movement), but after the communist purge and the eradication of *Gerwani*, *Pewari* became increasingly under the control of the government (Suryakusuma 15-23). In 1974, the New Order government appointed Kowani (The Indonesian Women’s Congress, first established in 1928) as an umbrella organization for all women’s groups and, as Suryakusuma highlights, “Kowani had a relatively untroubled existence by reason of its lack of effort in organizing or representing the tens of millions of Indonesian women existing outside the urban elite” (Suryakusuma 16). While lacking rural representation, gender ideology was concretized and reproduced through Kowani with legislation defining the Panca Dharma Wanita or the “Five Duties of Women” as follows:

“1. Women as faithful companions of the husband, 2. Women as procreators for the nation, 3. Women as educators and guides of children, 4. Women as regulators of the household, 5. Women as useful members of society” (Suryakusuma 17).

Panca Dharma Wanita served the state as a means to assert greater centralized control. As Suryakusuma highlights in her work on the shifting role of women during the New Order:

“Ideologically [Panca Dharma Wanita] attempted to make women conform to the model of state *ibuism*, the ideal of the ‘nuclear family’ and the ‘ikut suami’ (follow the husband) culture. Culturally it mediated *Javanisasi* (the imposition of Javanese cultural values) and ‘priyayization.’ Politically, it had militaristic and paternalistic overtones, given its role in marshalling votes to support the New Order regime, co-opting and dominating other women’s organizations, as well as the part it played in making women political and financially dependent on men and generally ‘resubordinating’ them. [...] Ultimately, the sum total of Dharma Wanita activities was the furthering of the state’s ambitions to engineer and control society” (130).

It is significant to highlight the intersections of gender, economic development, and poverty especially as the industrialization of the Indonesian landscape greatly changed communities that had traditionally relied on agrarian forms of sustainability. NGO view of women mirrors many of the state perceptions concerning the agrarian context, reflecting the opinion that women (and peasants) are “stupid”, “backward” and generally responsible for “wasteful” and “consumptive” mismanagement of resources, necessitating interventionist policies and programs. The authors of the NGO policy study on women in development locate a central critique of this view by pointing towards an analysis of structural flaws within society that create the circumstances out of which women are marginalized, and a second major ideological orientation of NGOs.

Hafidz and Krisnawati assert that this second group of NGOs tend to agree that there have been significant political and cultural changes since the establishment of the New Order,

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<sup>122</sup> Perhaps one of the reasons why Begejil’s gender is never revealed is due to the additional structures of oppression which peasant women experience.

<sup>123</sup> For a detailed analysis of women’s organizations in Indonesia see Suryakusuma, Julia I. *State Ibuism: The Social Construction of Womanhood in New Order Indonesia*. Komunitas Bambu, 2011.

namely an overarching de-politicization of Indonesian society. While they point towards greater awareness of social justice issues by establishing connections between political and cultural change, economic development, and poverty especially in the agrarian context, the authors highlight how this perspective is limited by the claim that there is no differential between men and women in relation to the oppressive circumstances of the New Order state. The following quotations from NGO workers illustrate this perspective.

“Men and women have become victims of government political development policy oriented towards economic markets, not oriented towards humanity or the environment. ... The problem is that women, as members of society as a whole, are now under the manipulation of the New Order regime that diminishes the values of their humanity / their human values...many people have become slaves to their superiors. This ‘society of ducks’ does not have its own orientation, always following, all in uniform, unable to develop a cultural alternative, no critical attitudes, not independent. The position of women is the same as men, oppressed by the upper classes and becoming a floating mass” (Hafidz and Krisnawati 129-130).<sup>124</sup>

While this perspective locates structural issues as constitutive of the dynamics of oppressive circumstances for many Indonesian citizens, it fails to account for the differential access to education experience by women and rural communities, as well as the “dual role” women are expected to adhere to, as caretakers as well as professional workers. It is important to note here the disparities in access to education at the time for rural communities and especially rural women. In an education system controlled by a strongly centralized state. The gap between local knowledge and state standardization is wide.

All of this provides some background to the ways in which gender had a significant impact on recasting the ways in which structures of oppression operated in Indonesia and among civil society organizations at the time. With a closer view of gender, it becomes much easier to see how such things as differential access to education and labor exploitation are doubly impactful among women, especially on the rural and urban margins of society. The increasing centralization of the New Order government, which had impacts on the standardization of the educational system and developmentalist policies of the Green Revolution, had great impact on displacing local (conceived as domestic) knowledge and re-structuring modes of agrarian production. Returning then to the context of SALAM, it is significant that Wahyaningsih’s narrative of return to homeland takes precedence over her husband's precisely because it disrupts mainstream depictions of how traditional cultural formations and modern institutional structures tend to give primacy to patriarchal patterns of leadership. As a kind of community mother of SALAM, her role both fits and surpasses stereotypical roles prescribed for women in society. Adding this important gender dimension at the level of NGOs working with communities to my analysis of the social movements at play in the formation of the community educational project at SALAM offers a productive opening for understanding and reframing counter-hegemonic movements. It is also for this reason that I allow the memories and personal stories surrounding her movements to flow according to the ways in which they were shared with me. The act of telling is in itself a form of reflection and therefore of knowledge production. In my work, by

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<sup>124</sup> “[L]aki-laki dan perempuan menjadi korban kebijakan politik pembangunan pemerintah yang berorientasi ekonomi pasar bukan berorientasi pada manusia dan lingkungan.” Yang menjadi persoalan adalah perempuan sebagai anggota masyarakat secara keseluruhan kini berada di bawah rekayasa rezim Orde baru yang mereduksi nilai-nilai kemanusiaan mereka ... banyak orang yang kemudian menjadi budak atasannya .. masarakat bebek ini tidak punya orientasi sendiri,selalu ikutikutan, serba seragam, tidak mampu mengembangkan budaya alternatif, tidak ada sikap kritis, tidak mandiri. Posisi perempuan sama denga posisi lakilaki yaitu,tertindas oleh kelas di atasnya dan menjadi massa mengambang.” (Hafidz and Krisnawati 129-130)

allowing the stories of one woman's personal journey serves to recast the concerns of national social movements in light of small-scale movements and everyday experiences of *rakyat kecil* communities, at the same time it reorients the linearity of scholarly narratives. The shapes of memories are far less linear, they involve cyclical forms of narration that invite reflection and an expansion of meanings. I demonstrate how this woman's work in Lawen show examples not only of how local knowledge, traditional arts and community-based education are enabled in efforts to develop alternative frameworks for marginalized communities to find emancipation from hegemonic power structures, but also the terms by which empowerment is enacted within very personal as well as collective negotiations of everyday experience. By following her narrative of return, this story helps to shape an understanding of the ways in which empowerment is lived and shared in order to reclaim agency in the production of cultural, economic and social practices that had otherwise been stolen away by large-scale narratives of the nation development, global capitalist expansion, activist representation, and scholarly elitism.

### ***What's in a name? An Early Political Education among Farmers***

Sri Wahyaningsih was born in 1961, the final years that Sukarno served as president. She was just 4 years old when the military seized control of the Indonesian government and the so-called New Order of political rule began and general Suharto was installed as president. She has no memory of the political transitions of that period. She was raised in an era of anti-Sukarnoism and educated in a system sculpted to legitimize the authority of the New Order state. From an early age, however, Wahyaningsih received a political education at home from her family, most notably from her father through his involvement with local party organizing in Klaten. He was a farmer like his father before him, and a loyal Sukarnoist, having been raised during the early years of Indonesia's independence from the Dutch. Wahyaningsih remembers her father exalting the revolutionary ideals of Indonesia's first president.

“My father was an admirer of Sukarno. He was very proud of Sukarno. Inspired to the point that he gave me my name because I was born when Bung Karno gave his ‘Trihora’ speech on December 19, 1961. In Javanese my name, Sri Wahyaningsih, means that I contemplate or absorb the words of great people who are loved by many” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).<sup>125</sup>

As an admirer of Sukarno, the “revolutionary spirit” of Indonesia's struggle for independence from Dutch colonial rule was an important factor in the education she received at home and that was very much alternative, if not altogether resistant to New Order indoctrination. It is worth noting the critical nature of her name in this context. In the quote above, she describes her full name Wanyaningsih as meaning, “merenungkan atau meresapi kata-kata orang besar”, “to contemplate or absorb the words of great people” (*Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015). In the context of what would become a lifelong project to not only educate but instill within marginalized communities the tools of critical thinking, it is significant to see her early childhood as a model for how one gains critical perspective in authoritarian times. For Wahyaningsih, her father is

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<sup>125</sup> “Bapak saya salah satu pengagum Sukarno. Sangat membanggakan Sukarno. Terinspirasi. Sampai saya, nama saya itu, artinya, karena saya lahir ketika Bung Karno sedang pidato, 19 Desember, “Trihora” [Tri Komando Rakyat]. Jadi Sriwahyaningsih, dalam bahasa Jawa artinya saya merenungkan atau meresapi kata-kata orang besar yang dicintai banyak orang” (Wahyaningsih *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015). Trihora was a consolidated military effort to remove the Dutch from Papua New Guinea and establish it as part of the Indonesian state (as opposed to an independent state, which the Dutch were supposedly helping to prepare).

hugely responsible for instilling within her a sense of the importance of critical thinking, of not taking meaning at face value, and of questioning the status quo.

As a young child during the New Order, Wahyaningsih's father encouraged her to read the writings of Sukarno, works such as *Indonesia Menggugat* and *Di Bawah Bendera Revolusi*,<sup>126</sup> early essays and speeches by Sukarno that reflect a deep sense of resistance to colonial domination that was so foundational to the establishment of the Indonesian nation. Wahyaningsih remembers feeling moved to tears by Sukarno's writings, but without a frame of reference for understanding the context out of which he wrote. Wahyaningsih attended elementary and middle school in Klaten from 1966-1975.

"I went to a Christian elementary school, a Dutch girl's school. My father was very practical, it was right across the street from our home. He chose this school because they had a 75-80% graduation rate on national exams, compared to the 5% graduation rate at other state elementary schools" (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).<sup>127</sup>

Like any state school at the time, she was simply taught that Sukarno was a communist. She remembers returning home to debate with her father about why he had such great respect for Sukarno when it contradicted what she learned in school. She says she had no knowledge of the political background of NASAKOM—Sukarno's conception of the Nationalist, Socialist and Religious ideological underpinnings of the Indonesian nation—and it was not until adulthood that she understood there were huge gaps in her understanding of Indonesian political history. Despite that educational conditioning, however, she gained an alternative political education to what was promoted by the New Order state.

Her father's political awareness and passion for the revolutionary ideals of Sukarno helped to instill a sense of social justice. In their family, Wahyaningsih describes how Sukarno was an ethical model of compassion and action for alleviating the struggles of marginalized communities, an influence that her father had to keep secret from New Order scrutiny.

"There was a time when images of Sukarno couldn't be displayed. People who hung images of Sukarno were considered PKI, communist. My father still hung Sukarno's picture hidden behind the cupboard. [...] According to my father, Sukarno was the one person who really thought about the people [rakyat], to the point that he was arrested for it. He fought for the "little people" [orang kecil]. He instilled this in me. I must care about other people. If something is wrong, I must go and take part" (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).<sup>128</sup>

In addition to being a farmer and a Sukarnoist, he was also an active member of Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI or the Indonesian National Party, first founded by Sukarno in 1927). His party

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<sup>126</sup> Sukarno, *Indonesia Menggugat* (Jakarta: Seno, 1956). ---, *Dibawah Bendera Revolusi* (Jakarta: Panitia Penerbit Dibawah Bendera Revolusi, 1963).

<sup>127</sup> "Saya SDnya SD kristen, sekolah perempuannya Belanda. Bapak praktis saja, sekolahnya di depan rumah jadi hanya menyebrang jalan raya. Karena pertimbangannya dulu masih ada ujian negara pada saat jaman kakak-kakak saya. Satu-satunya sekolah yang lulusnya sampai 75-80% ya SD kristen, SD-SD negeri hanya ada 5 %" (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).

<sup>128</sup> "Jadi ada sejarah dimana Sukarno, sampai gambarnya aja tidak boleh pasang, orang yang memasang gambar Sukarno dianggap PKI, komunis. Sampai seperti itu. Dan bapak saya tetap memasang gambar dibalik Al-Maria. [...] Menurut ayah saya, Sukarno orang yang mau memikirkan rakyat dengan sungguh, sampai ditangkap ya. Kemudian dia memperjuangkan orang kecil, seperti itu. Dan itu ditanamkan kepada saya. Jadi saya harus peduli pada orang lain. Kalau ada sesuatu yang tidak beres, itu, saya harus ikut, ambil bagian dari situ" (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).

involvement throughout her childhood provided Wahya with an alternative education to what she learned in school.

“My parents were farmers; I am thankful that they always included us. We had to learn how to farm. My father was also a party person. He would invite me to organize and brought me everywhere with him when I was still very young” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* March 15, 2015).<sup>129</sup>

She even remembers her father hosting clandestine political discussions at their home in Klaten.

“Nearly every day he would host discussions at our home. I was the only one of his children who he always invited into the discussions. This became a huge influence in my life” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).<sup>130</sup>

From this experience of being included in political discussions, she came to see political parties among farming communities as educational outlets to share information that would help them in their daily lives while also raising awareness about national politics. Politics were part and parcel of their everyday lives, especially so as farmers. In our conversations, Wahya also told of how the political party system has changed in Indonesia today, having become a system used almost exclusively for gaining positions of power rather than serving the needs of the people.<sup>131</sup>

At these party meetings among farmers in Klaten, she also learned the Sukarno slogan, BERDIKARI, “berdiri di atas kaki sendiri” or “standing on one’s own feet.” In 1964, Sukarno rejected American investment in Indonesia. He was famously quoted as saying “Go to hell with your aid,” and BERDIKARI became the motto for Indonesian autonomy and self-determination. This idea resonated deeply with her father and their family largely because they were farmers.

“Sukarno did this so that we would become a nation [bangsa] who strongly believed in ourselves. My father also instilled these ideas in me” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* March 15, 2015)<sup>132</sup>

That sense of personal and collective empowerment remained a feature of Wahyaningsih’s future organizing efforts in Lawen and Yogyakarta. Additionally, Suharto’s rejection of foreign aid brought attention to local productivity in the agrarian landscape namely through the populist ideology he referred to as Marhaenism. For Wahyaningsih, this was reflected in her admiration of her grandparents. Coming from multiple generations of farmers, their commitment to local small-scale livelihoods as farmers in Central Java strongly influenced her outlook on the importance of peasant economies and became an important point of resistance to the official economic imperatives of large-scale national development during the New Order. As the agrarian landscape was changed dramatically during the New Order with greater foreign

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<sup>129</sup> “*Karena orang tua saya petani, iya saya bersyukur karena saya dulu kami selalu dilibatkan. Orang tua saya selalu melibatkan. Iya petani saya harus tahu. Kemudian Bapak saya orang partai, saya juga diajak berorganisasi dibawah ke mana-mana, saya masih kecil*” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).

<sup>130</sup> “*Jadi setiap hari ada diskusi di rumah, satu-satunya anak yang selalu diajak diskusi, ya saya. Akhirnya pengaruhnya besar dalam hidup saya sekarang*” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).

<sup>131</sup> “*Dan jaman dulu saya ingat pendidikan partai itu ada, jadi orang memperjuangkan massif melalui partai untuk penyadaran masyarakat. Kalau sekarang, orang juga dari partai mau kedudukan, kekuasaan, dulu saya tangkap tidak kayak gitu*” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).

<sup>132</sup> “*Sukarno yang mengatakan ‘BERDIKARI, berdiri di atas kaki sendiri’, nah itu sangat kuat, jadi bagaimana kita sebagai bangsa besar, kita jangan, ya waktu itu kan anti-Amerika, segala itu kan, jaman Sukarno kayak gitu, itu dalam rangka supaya kita menjadi bangsa yang punya rasa percaya diri yang kuat, itu. Itu bapak saya menanamkan itu kepada saya*” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).



investment and agricultural industrialization, her family retained a critical sense of strength and resilience of a local peasant economy.

“My grandfather was a farmer but also a trader. All of my relatives, cousins, uncles, everyone had their schooling as paid by my grandfather. All the ones that became civil servants would too often ask for support from us. That worried my grandparents. ‘If you become a civil servant, you’ll just bother your other relatives.’ This was a kind of trauma for them. They paid for 19 cousins to go to elementary through high school, all from trading and farming. Yet all of them became civil servants. My grandfather also had a younger brother who was in the military. Every week, sometimes twice in one week, after receiving his salary, he would come to our house to ask for rice or additional money. My grandfather would say, ‘Join the military, become a teacher or a civil servant, it’s all the same’” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* March 15, 2015).

Wahya’s grandparents were of a generation that experienced a great deal of political upheaval. Having lived through the end of the Dutch colonial period, revolution, and national independence, followed by two major phases of Indonesian presidential leadership, their reticence to leave behind the ways of farming that was so important to their generation speaks to the resilience of a peasant economy. The New Order was perhaps the most abrupt shift in ideological orientation, but the persistence of peasant resistance to forms of national development remained, merely by continuing to be a farmer and to value the small-scale economic endeavors of farming. I later learned from her that her grandparents owned a tobacco farm. This means that they would likely rather well off, not subsistence farmers themselves but were able to support many people through their plantation but which also necessitating the need for growing higher value cash crops such as tobacco. The fact that Wahyaningsih was initially reluctant to share these details reflects perhaps a critical understanding of her own positionality coming from a family of landowners, but also points to a similar dilemma experienced by activists at Kedung Ombo discussed in the last chapter, namely, the negotiations of intermediaries in the process of facilitating praxis among communities of rakyat kecil. For Wahyaningsih, her work with impoverished communities in the urban context of Yogyakarta discussed in the next section, was an important outlet through which she worked to negotiate her own leadership role. This combined with her decision to go against her family tradition and convert to Christianity further therefore decenters her subject position in the transformative movement as well as within the Muslim majority context of Java.

### ***Moving to the “City of Education”: Lessons in Urban Poverty, Christian Faith, and the Seeds of Transformative Praxis***

In 1975, at the age of 15 Wahyaningsih moved away from her family home in Klaten to attend high school in Yogyakarta. It is common, at that time and still today, for young people in rural areas to move away from their families and homes to pursue continued education in the cities, either living with distant relatives or in boarding houses. Wahya attended another Christian school in Yogyakarta, SMA BOPKRI 2, and lived in a boarding house. It was in Yogyakarta that Wahya remembers witnessing poverty to a degree that she had never experienced in her childhood growing up in rural Java.

“[On the walk] from my boarding house to school, there was an old building that many homeless people lived. They would live off the trash from Bethesda Hospital next door. This was first time this really touched me. In my village, poverty was nothing like this. People having to eat garbage? Why? I followed them, some welcomed me, and others did not. There was one person who really welcomed me, and we

would meet every day. They had transmigrated to Sulawesi, but experienced flooding there so returned to the city [Yogyakarta] to do whatever they could. Some became beggars, some became criminals” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015)<sup>133</sup>

She witnessed problems of transmigration, a hallmark of New Order developmentalism, as well as the regular movement of people from villages into cities for work and school. Such migrations were often accompanied by rising rates of poverty.

It was also in Yogyakarta that she decided to convert to Christianity because of the ways that Christian identity resonated with her desire to help the needy. Wahya was raised in a Muslim family but describes being curious about Christianity as a child. This created tension in with her family. She spoke with me about that time in her life as presenting important challenges that helped to shape her identity.

“I was the first Christian person in my home, I come from a Muslim family. My grandfather went on the haj, my great-grandfather was more Javanese [i.e. kejawen], and my uncle was Hindu. So, I was already raised with those differences. Since childhood there was already this mix. My school was Christian, and I would spend time with the teachers. Maybe they influenced me to be interested in Christianity. My grandfather didn’t agree so I would pretend to be asleep and sneak out the back door. One time he found me at church and pulled me home. If I asked for money from my grandfather he would say, ‘why don’t you just ask Jesus?’ Not many people knew that we were close, even though we had different principles. Eventually after high school I studied the bible. I was interested in stories about Abraham, a person who was brave enough to leave the establishment and go to an unknown place, relying only on his belief. That had a big influence on me. I imagined my home, we had everything we needed. We were considered the richest family in our village, and we employed many of our neighbors. But there was something I was still searching for. So, after my second year of high school I asked to be baptized. My mother’s family didn’t allow me to come home because I was Christian. But my father was democratic, and my grandfather didn’t mind, he said I could be Christian as long as I was a good person, as good as any Muslim. I felt as though I was shaped by many challenges. Ask Jesus, the proof would be there. So, I graduated from high school and college. College I paid for myself. My family and my grandfather didn’t know. I said to my grandfather, ‘I’ll ask for help from Jesus’”(Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 18 Mar. 2015).<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> “Dari kos-kosan ke sekolah, ada rumah tua dan itu ada gelandangan itu, mengambil sampah rumah sakit bethesda, pertama kali yang menyentuh saya. Di kampung, semiskin nya tidak seperti itu, harus makan dari sampah. Kenapa? Saya mengikuti, saya sapa, ada yang menyambut ada yang engga. Tapi ada orang yang benar2 menyambut, dan saya setiap hari bertemu. Dia ternyata pernah bertransmigrasi ke sulawesi. Kebanjiran sampai 33 kali. Apa lagi yang terdampat di kota, apa adanya. Jadi pemulung. Ada yang jadi criminal” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015)

<sup>134</sup> “Kalau saya sendiri orang Kristen pertama di rumah , saya dari keluarga Muslim. Mbah saya haji, mbah yang dari Bapak saya lebih Jawa. Om saya Hindu. Jadi dibesarkan dalam perbedaan itu. Jadi sejak kecil sudah campur. Sekolah saya Kristen dan bergaul dengan guru-guru. Mungkin mempengaruhi saya juga, yang membuat saya tertarik di Kristen. Karena saat itu mbah tidak setuju, saya diam-diam pura-pura tidur. Saya pergi lewat pintu belakang. Pernah saat ke gereja ditarik untuk pulang. Ketika saya minta uang sama Mbah, dia bilang minta ke Yesus saja. Tidak banyak yang tahu kalau kami dekat, meski berbeda prinsip. Akhirnya setelah SMA saya belajar alkitab. Saya tertarik dengan cerita Abraham, orang yang berani keluar dari kemapanan pergi ke tempat yang sama sekali tidak tahu dan mengandalkan satu kepercayaan. Itu menjadi pengaruh yang luar biasa. Saya membayangkan diri di rumah, semua serba kecukupan. Kami dikatakan keluarga yang paling kaya, dan semua tetangga menjadi pegawai di rumah saya. Tapi ada sesuatu yang saya cari, kemudian kelas 2 SMA minta di baptis. Dari keluarga Ibu saya sama sekali tidak boleh pulang karena saya Kristen. Tapi Bapak saya demokratis. Mbah saya malah tidak apa-apa. Cuma bilang, kamu boleh Kristen tapi harus menjadi orang yang lebih baik dari seorang Muslim, kurang lebih seperti itu. Dari situ saya merasa dibentuk oleh banyak tantangan. Mintalah sama Yesus, akan saya buktikan. Kemudian saya lulus SMA dan kuliah. Dan kuliah dengan biaya sendiri. Keluarga, dan kakak-kakak tidak ada yang tahu. Dan saya mengatakan pada mbah, saya akan minta kepada Yesus” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 18 Mar. 2015).

As Wahya described the feeling of disenfranchisement she experienced from her mother's family and her grandfather's reluctant acceptance of her Christian faith, I was struck by this playful kind of banter she recounted. Her upbringing was already somewhat atypical for a child raised during the New Order. Having received a political education from her father and increasingly cognizant of the historical silences that laid just under the surface of the authority of the New Order state, her decision to convert was personal and took a great deal of resolve since it would impact the relationships with her family. At the same time, it wasn't a particularly monumental decision in her life. The fact that she could joke about "Jesus paying for her college" shows a degree of levity surrounding her decision. At a time of religious intensification among both Christian and Muslim communities, her conversion was driven more by a desire to help people. She was inspired by stories in the Bible that spoke to questions of social responsibility. The life story of Jesus is one where poverty plays a huge role in shaping one's ethics. For Wahya, her conversion solidified her desire to work towards the greater empowerment of marginalized peoples disenfranchised by the economic policies of the New Order. Unfortunately, this also sets her up for future accusations of "Christianization" during the period of Islamic intensification during the New Order, and which becomes a major contributing factor to her deciding to relocate SALAM to Yogyakarta which I will return to.

In 1980, Wahya continued her education at Universitas Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta in the Faculty of Economics and Business. At that time, she befriended the priest, Y.B. Mangunwijaya, and from 1983-86 she worked with him at the Kali Code River community in Yogyakarta. She was drawn to how he used architecture and education to bring attention to the needs of impoverished urban communities living in abject poverty on illegal settlements on the banks of the Kali Code River. Many of these communities had moved from their rural homes into cities, some displaced by development projects such as the Kedung Ombo Dam, others migrated independently in search of better opportunities for work. These kinds of displacement migrations caused especially by the large-scale economic development projects of the New Order often created circumstances of increased marginalization for rural and urban impoverished communities. People residing in Kali Code's "daerah hitam" (lit. black area), for example, lived in abject poverty without permanent settlements nor access to education. Romo Mangun brought visibility to their marginalization by building homes and community schools on the banks of the river. The colorful architecture of the Kali Code community remains a model for sustainable urban development in Indonesia today. Wahya worked there to help residents register for identity cards (Kartu Tanda Penduduk, KTP) to be "seen by the state" in an official bureaucratic capacity. Without KTP, residents effectively had no rights in the eyes of the state. They could not access employment, schooling, or any other state resources. After obtaining their KTP, Wahya helped to organize a mass marriage ceremony for couples who had never received official marriage licenses.<sup>135</sup> This would in turn also make it possible for their children to be officially registered as Indonesian citizens. At Kali Code they also organized economic projects for collecting, sorting and selling trash, as well as a cooperative called the Akademi Kerumahtangaan (AKKT) or the Homemaking Academy, a group of women who developed small home business ventures in the culinary arts and fashion.<sup>136</sup> As activism at Kedung Ombo intensified, Wahya later accompanied Romo Mangun on a number of his more widely publicized trips to Kedung Ombo and Irian Jaya.

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<sup>135</sup> See Rahardjo, Toto. *Sekolah Biasa Saja*. Progress. 2019, 51.

<sup>136</sup> See Rahardjo, Toto. *Sekolah Biasa Saja*. Progress. 2019, 52.

As Christian activists, their work differed from Christian missionary organizations. Debates emerged surrounding the role of Christian missionaries in society that reflected the still salient fear of being seen as “too political” during the New Order. Many Christian groups instead focused on missionary conversion and religious indoctrination over humanitarian assistance.<sup>137</sup> Wahyaningsih and Mangunwijaya strongly opposed that trajectory of depoliticized activism, as Wahyaningsih recounts:

“From my experience in the 1980s, I found that many Christians thought they were not allowed to think about politics. There was a movement for this. There were prayer groups where they would read the bible. They approached problems through prayer. I felt I had to face people. There were so many more things that we could do, especially as youth. I imagined myself taking care of homeless people. But people couldn’t see that the homeless were a consequence of the government system, of policy. There was a correlation between religion and real life until after death. People gradually began to gain new awareness, but these prayer groups still existed.

“Many people said that I was deviant [aliran sesat] because I thought like this. I said that these people were just victims of political policy in our country, there was a conspiracy. They got mad so I was called deviant. At Duta Wacana the measure of service at Code was, ‘how many souls have you saved?’ This made me very mad. What did they mean? They only counted the few people who were baptized. I said religion is an essential right for every person. If you want to give, just give. This is what it was like at church, from outside they would call it ‘Christianization.’ No matter what, you were wrong.

“Romo Mangun was also similar, he had conflict with the church to the point that he didn’t wear his robes any longer. Blending in with society, that was a problem for the church. It also happened in society. Amien Rais wrote about ‘Christianization’ in the newspaper *Kedaulatan Rakyat*” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 18 Mar. 2015).<sup>138</sup>

In 1984-85, Wahya expanded her social empowerment projects beyond Romo Mangun’s community at Kali Code. Just beyond, in fact, working with homeless communities that lived downstream and were similarly comprised of illegal settlements on state land. She met a theological student at Duta Wacana Christian University, Widi Artanto, who also was

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<sup>137</sup> See Widi Artanto, *Menjadi Gereja Misioner Dalam Konteks Indonesia* (2008) for a comprehensive account of these debates. The work, unsurprisingly, contains a forward by Romo Mangun.

<sup>138</sup> “*Saya mengalami pada tahun 80an ada banyak orang Kristen yang karena ada gerakan dimana orang kristen tidak boleh berpikir politik. Lalu ada kelompok tumbuh bersama, kelompok doa, dengan membaca alkitab. Menghadapi masalah dengan doa. Saya harus menghadapi orang2 itu. Banyak hal yang bisa kita lakukan, apalagi anak muda, saya sendiri membayangkan sampai punya pikiran mengurus gelandangan. Tapi orang tidak bisa melihat bahwa gelandangan karena akibat dari sistem pemerintah atau kebijakan. Dan ada korelasinya agama dengan kehidupan nyata hingga setelah mati. Kemudian orang-orang berangsur-angsur mulai mendapatkan kesadaran baru, tapi kelompok ini juga tetap ada.*”

“*Dulu saya sering dibilang aliran sesat karena memikirkan hal itu, dan saya bilang ini juga korban dari kebijakan politik di negeri ini, karena ada konspirasi. Mereka marah, lalu saya dibilang sesat. Jadi dulu ukurannya di Duta wacana. Untuk pelayanan di Code.*”

“*Berapa jiwa yang kamu menangkan? Itu membuat saya marah. Apa maksudnya? Mereka hanya menghitung berapa orang yang dibaptis? Saya bilang agama adalah hak yang hakiki setiap orang. Kalau mau memberi ya memberi saja. Udah di gereja seperti, diluar disebut kristenisasi. Jadi serba salah.*”

“*Romo Mangun juga sama, konflik dengan gereja, sampai tidak berjubah. Berbaur dengan masyarakat. Itu saja jadi masalah di gereja. Itu juga terjadi di tengah masyarakat. Amien Rais yang bilang kristenisasi. Nulis di koran Kedaulatan Rakyat*” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 18 Mar. 2015).

disheartened by the emphasis on conversion among many Christian groups. Together Wahya and Widi established a non-governmental organization called *Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat* [LPPM] or the *Organization for Research and Community Service*.

“Duta Wacana was very close to the slums [at Kali Code where Romo Mangun worked]. There were lots of homeless people in the surrounding areas, as well as many small street-food vendors [kaki lima]. I started by assisting families who were not very poor, but who had small businesses. 50,000 rupiah was already enough [to get started], so I created these joint business groups [kelompok-kelompok usaha bersama]” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 18 Mar. 2015).<sup>139</sup>

They received institutional support initially from Duta Wacana as well as private donors. They focused their work on what we would now call microfinance projects, but at the time there wasn't a structural term for this. Here Wahya describes their economic empowerment projects in Yogyakarta:

“Each one [of these families] created savings, it was like a deposit system. So, for example they would say, ‘Ok, I want to save 100,000RP<sup>140</sup> in one year.’ We would calculate it out and say, ‘You will need to save this much every day in order to reach so much money in one year.’ We worked with an organization in Semarang, Purbadanarta. [...] that printed stamps of different quantities, 100RP, 500RP, 1000RP, 5000RP. Many of the people were illiterate, so they could only differentiate between colors. Red was 100RP, orange another amount, blue yet another. [We] started putting these stamps in a book. I also kept my own record book taking note of what each had saved. Then every month we would add it up. The next month it would have accrued interest. If they wanted to withdraw ahead of time [...] to buy a goat or pay rent, or whatever plans they had, we would say, ‘If you can wait one year, we will be able to add a certain amount to it. But if you withdraw the money before one year, you will only get your money back, without interest.’ This was very motivating.

“I would go around town by bike to meet all of them. I had a membership of 100 homeless people at one point. There were two people at Kali Code in the South who were able to buy homes. Romo Mangun didn't go there, but I went there. After they started saving, I would find donors to match funds. If someone saved one-million rupiah,<sup>141</sup> for example, I would find an additional one-million rupiah and then they would have two-million rupiah.<sup>142</sup> With this they could build a home and didn't have to be homeless any longer” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* March 18, 2015).<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> “Saya mulai dari mendampingi keluarga-keluarga yang tidak terlalu miskin tapi yang punya usaha kecil. Waktu baru modal Rp 50 ribu udah cukup. Kemudian saya bikin kelompok-kelompok usaha bersama” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 18 Mar. 2015).

<sup>140</sup> Roughly 100USD in 1985

<sup>141</sup> Roughly 1000-1250 USD in 1985.

<sup>142</sup> Roughly 2000-2500 USD in 1985.

<sup>143</sup> “Satu-satu mereka nabung, jadi sistemnya kayak deposito. Jadi mereka misalnya, “ok saya mau menabung pada satu tahun yang akan datang saya kepingin punya uang 100 ribu.” Nah kami menghitung mundur, berarti sekarang, kamu setiap hari harus bisa mengumpulkan uang sekian. Terus kami bikin, eh, kerja sama ada lembaga di Semarang, Purbadanarta, sekarang menjadi bank perkreditan. mereka menerbitkan perangkonya. Jadi perangkonya ada Rp 100, Rp 500 atau Rp 1000, Rp 5000 sampai Rp 10.000. Yang nabung, mereka kan buta huruf (tidak bisa membaca atau menulis) sehingga mereka hanya bisa membedakan warna. Warna merah Rp 100, warna orang berapa, warna biru berapa. [...] Terus mulai nempel-nempel perangko. Saya ada bukunya. Saya juga ada buku sendiri untuk mencatat sendiri yang mereka simpan. Kemudian setiap bulan kami jumlahkan. Bulan depan sudah ada bunganya. Tapi kalau dia ambil sebelumnya, kalau dia janji saya tabungan saya tahun depan saya ambil, mau saya pakai untuk beli kambing, bayar kontrak rumah, misalnya dia punya rencana apa gitu. Kita bilang, kalau kamu bisa sampai satu tahun, kita bisa menambah sekian. Tapi kalau sebelum setahun yang diambil ya hanya uang mu aja, tidak ada bunga. Dan itu memotivasi sekali. Saya keliling naik sepeda menemui mereka. Saya punya anggota waktu itu sampai 100 gelandangan. Itu akhirnya yang bisa punya rumah, di [Sungai] Code ada dua. Di

Mangunwijaya expressed hesitation to the nature of their project and, according to Wahyaningsih, he considered it “too capitalistic” (*Oral History* 18 Mar. 2015).<sup>144</sup> Nevertheless, she persisted with the project because she saw the direct benefit it had for families struggling to survive in the cities. “I didn’t speak to Romo Mangun about this because I felt that it was good. It was communal and personal. There was a balance” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 18 Mar. 2015)<sup>145</sup> When I asked if her studies at UGM influenced these small financial projects, she said, “Yes perhaps, but I was more influenced by my parents, my grandmother and my grandfather. From the start, I thought about how to organize something, how to think about other people. I saw how my parents did it. They also created small community groups like this. My studies in economy and finance just strengthened [these ideas]” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 18 Mar. 2015).<sup>146</sup> This commitment to small scale economic initiatives ties back to her upbringing in Klaten, and especially the importance of the rice harvest (*panen*) for their community.

“Every day at my home there would be at least 80 people, during the harvest sometimes more than 200 people working. Our home was never silent. In Klaten, some pounded the rice, some [cut the rice with *ani-ani*] in the fields. At harvest time there would be shadow-play performances [*wayang*] at my home where we had a gamelan and a set of shadow puppets. There was a group in our village that played. There was also a famous shadow-puppet master [*dalang*] and people who would study at our home. [...] The front house was close to the traditional market, so there was a close connection to the market. It was right in front of our home. Before going to school at 7am, I would get up at 5am to go to the market to buy rice and soybeans from the farmers. In the afternoon I would sell them to my grandfather. Since I was young, I was already familiar with these things. My grandfather would say that he would check it. He had two sons and all of his grandchildren were girls. Every few months he would check [our savings] and add to it. If we had saved 100RP, he would give an additional 100RP. If we only saved 50RP, he would only give 50 RP”<sup>147</sup>

“In the end it was very motivating. I could buy shoes. I had so many shoes. I had many friends at school who didn’t want to come to school because they didn’t have shoes. At the time, I didn’t know why I found friends like this. Since school was close to my home, I would invite my friends over to borrow shoes. But they couldn’t bring them home, I loaned them out just for using at school. I had one friend, I forget their name, who didn’t come to school so I visited them. It turned out that their home was a simple hut, every day they would take care of their goats, sometimes missing school for a few days at a time. I found them

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*daerah Selatan, itu Romo Mangun tidak kesana. Tapi saya masuk ke sana, setelah mereka punya tabungan, saya mencarikan donatur, yang tadi untuk dana sesama yang tadi. Misalnya punya tabungan Rp 1 juta. Saya bisa mencari tambahan 1 juta, jadi dia punya uang 2 juta, dengan itu bisa bikin rumah, dan mereka tidak lagi menjadi gelandangan lagi”* (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 18 Mar. 2015).

<sup>144</sup> “terlalu kapitalis” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 18 Mar. 2015).

<sup>145</sup> “Saya tidak bicarakan ini dengan [Romo Mangun] karena saya merasa ini bagus. Ada yang komunal dan personal. Ada seimbang” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 18 Mar. 2015).

<sup>146</sup> “Ya mungkin ada. Tapi saya lebih merasa banyak dipengaruhi orang tua saya, nenek saya, kakek saya. Udah dari awal saya jadi, apa ya, bagaimana berorganisasi dan bagaimana memikirkan orang lain. Kemudian saya lihat apa yang dilakukan orang tua saya. Dia juga membuat kelompok-kelompok masyarakat seperti itu. Nah itu itu dikuatkan dengan saya belajar ekonomi dan keuangan” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 18 Mar. 2015).

<sup>147</sup> “Setiap hari rumah saya paling tidak ada 80 orang, kalau panen bisa sampai setiap hari 200 orang, bekerja di rumah. Rumah tidak pernah sepi. Di Klaten. Ada yang menumbuk padi, ada yang *ani-ani* di sawah. Kalau panen raya, wayangan di tempat saya, punya gamelan dan wayang di rumah. Ada komunitas di kampung yang main. Ada dalang terkenal juga ada yang belajar di tempat kami. [...] Rumah depannya dekat pasar, makanya hubungan dekat pasar. Persis depan rumah. Sebelum sekolah, masuk jam 7. Jam 5 pagi saya sudah bangun ke pasar beli beras, kedelai dari petani-petani. Nanti siang saya jual ke mbah saya. Sejak kecil sudah berhubungan dengan hal-hal itu. Mbah saya bilang, kalau beberapa bulan dicek semua, karena anaknya dua laki-laki, cucunya semua perempuan. Dicek beberapa bulan sekali, beberapa bulan sekali tabungan saya berapa, adik dan kakak berapa. Nanti ditambah saya mbah. Misal diberi 100 akan diberi 100, kalau 50 ya hanya ditambah 50. Akhirnya termotivasi” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 18 Mar. 2015).

and they wanted to go back to school. I had just bought some new shoes, so I loaned them out. I had eight pairs of shoes. Their parents couldn't say anything because I had earned the money myself. Remembering my childhood makes me very happy. My son even did the same. He received a scholarship at one point where they bought him soccer cleats. When he didn't play soccer anymore because he was more interested in music, I asked one day if he would loan his shoes to one of my friend's children. He said, 'Why are you concerning yourself with my shoes?' It turned out that he had already loaned the shoes to his friends" (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* March 18, 2015).<sup>148</sup>

Wahya worked to translate the sense of personal empowerment she experienced being raised among farmers into her humanitarian efforts with the urban poor in Yogyakarta. As Wahya witnessed more and more the plight of the urban poor, she began to interrogate the sources of that poverty. She noticed that all of the various marginalized peoples she worked with in Yogyakarta had in common the fact that they all left behind their homes and families in the village to pursue opportunities in the cities, but instead found even greater economic and social marginalization. They were all physically and symbolically disenfranchised from a sense of personal and communal connection to agrarian livelihoods. Additionally, as the works of Paulo Freire circulated among educated activists in urban areas and many activist projects focused on adult education, she started thinking more about the importance of assisting the children of marginalized communities.

"I had begun by assisting homeless people and prostitutes in Yogyakarta, and all of these people were from villages. Then I started thinking more about how children fared. This was a big shift for me to begin thinking about returning home to the village" (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* March 18, 2015).<sup>149</sup>

In 1987, Wahya married the activist-artist and founding member of Kyai Kanjeng, Toto Rahardjo. While many of her peers at the time completed their degrees, traveled abroad,<sup>150</sup> or became increasingly active in opposing the developmentalist projects of the New Order, she felt there was something more pressing she could do to help disenfranchised communities establish greater self-determination.<sup>151</sup> Inspired by her work with Romo Mangun and informed by her

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<sup>148</sup> "Akhirnya termotivasi. Saya jadi bisa beli sepatu, sepatu saya banyak. Ada teman-teman sekolah yang banyak tidak mau sekolah karena tidak punya sepatu. Waktu itu ga tahu kenapa saya mencari teman-teman yang seperti itu. Karena sekolah dengan dekat rumah, Kamu mampir ke rumah, nanti aku pinjem sepatu. Tapi tidak boleh dibawa pulang, aku pinjem untuk sekolah saja. Saya mencari teman itu, lupa namanya. Sampai ga mau sekolah, lalu saya kunjungi dia, ternyata rumahnya gedek, setiap hari memelihara kambing, kadang beberapa hari ga sekolah, aku cari, lalu mau sekolah lagi, punya sepatu baru lalu saya pinjamin. Punya sepatu 8. Orang tua juga ga bisa ngapa-ngapain, karena ini hasil saya sendiri. Kalau ingat masa kecil senang sekali. Dan itu diikuti oleh anak-anak saya. Jadi pernah anak dapat beasiswa, dibelikan sepatu bola. Tapi tidak ada sepatu di rumah. Dia sudah tidak main bola, karena hanya main musik. Lalu saya tanya, ada anak teman saya, misalnya sepatunya saya pinjam gimana. "Kenapa sih mengurus sepatuku?" Ternyata sudah diberikan terlebih dahulu ke teman-temannya" (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).

<sup>149</sup> "Dan saya mulai dulu dari mendampingi gelandangan dan WTS di Jogja. , dan itu semua orang dari desa. Terus kemudian saya memikirkan terus anak-anaknya bagaimana? Nah, itu yang dulu menjadi perbolakan untuk saya, ketika saya ngomong untuk memutuskan pulang ke desa itu kan itu" (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).

<sup>150</sup> Wahya also turned down a scholarship to study abroad.

<sup>151</sup> In speaking with facilitators at SALAM in Yogyakarta today, many of the women whose husbands were activists and artists at Kedung Ombo shared with me the "domestic side" of the otherwise public facing activism of their husbands. These women recounted that in the late 80s and early 90s, they were mostly at home as caretakers for their children, families, and local communities, but were also well versed in the political dynamics of the time, partially as a result of their husbands' more outward expressions of resistance to New Order developmentalism. It is in this context that these women started to bridge the gap between forms of public resistance and the immediate needs of their local communities, and, from our conversations, they really started to develop an earlier and more

involvement in the greater social movements of the time, Wahya finished her studies at UGM and moved to her husband's hometown of Lawen. She also had to leave her work as a field coordinator at Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) at Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana (UKDW). She describes this as a very difficult transition in her life, for which Romo Mangun gave her the following advice, "If your intentions are decided and you believe that you can do something useful for the people there, then hurry up, don't delay. Later I will come visit you there."<sup>152</sup> The abject poverty Wahya witnessed in the city of Yogyakarta and the realization that so many of these people had abandoned their homes in the villages of Java with the hope of pursuing better opportunities in the city, were important motivating factors in Wahya's decision to continue her humanitarian work in an agrarian context. Wahya's intentions were clear, "her mission was to raise the quality of life in the desa, so that residents did not feel they needed to flock to the cities" (Gernatititi 4).<sup>153</sup>

### ***Sri Returns to the Village: Intergenerational Leadership "Yang Kompak"***

In 1988, Wahyaningsih moved to Lawen to live in the home of her parents-in-law and began working with Soebarno, Rahardjo's father and long-time community leader in Lawen. In the village, poverty was not as visibly apparent as in the cities, but it nevertheless pervaded the lives of people in Lawen.

"I lived in Lawen where people in the area were really very poor. I heard many stories of what it was like from Toto's father who served as village Lurah for over 20 years. [Poverty] influenced everything. Why did people act so inferior [minder], when they were also just as creative? There was something there" (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).<sup>154</sup>

Poverty in Lawen was more than just economic, it was also a reflection of the impoverishment of peasant identity during the New Order. The floating mass policy and programs of "mass guidance" or BIMAS which completely restructured agrarian modes of production, also perpetuated stereotypes of the "backward peasant," unable to advance or make progress within the modern nation without state assistance. For peasants, this meant assistance from a centralized government that was heavily reliant on foreign investment. The economic restructuring of Indonesian society had profoundly personal implications for agrarian communities across Indonesia. Many community members I spoke with in Lawen recounted their feelings of inadequacy in the rapidly expanding economy of Indonesia. Their livelihoods as small-scale

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deeply engaged form of praxis. Wahya is emblematic of this and becomes such an important leader here, but her experience is not unique. I would venture to say that this was the case for many more women than is typically explored in scholarship. A further investigation of the greater "domestic" forms of resistance during the New Order would likely yield a very different and perhaps more subtly nuanced image of activism at the time.

<sup>152</sup> "Kalau niatmu sudah bulat dan kamu percaya dapat melakukan sesuatu yang bermanfaat untuk masyarakat di sana, ya segeralah, tidak usah ditunda-tunda. Nanti aku nengok ke sana." Gernatititi and Wahyaningsih. *Sekolah Apa Ini?* Yogyakarta: INSIST Press, 2019.

<sup>153</sup> "Misi Wahya saat itu sangat bulat: meningkatkan kualitas hidup di desa, agar penduduk desa tidak berbondong-bondong ke kota" (Gernatititi 4).

<sup>154</sup> "Saya tinggal di Lawen, di mana masyarakat di daerah yang sungguh mereka miskin, dan saya dapat cerita dari Bapaknya Mas Toto yang 20 tahun jadi lurah seperti apa. Nah itu kan mempengaruhi semuanya. Dan kenapa orang sampai begitu sangat minder, begitu sangat kreatif, nah ini kan ada sesuatu, gitu loh. Nah itu gak mengalami yang kayak gitu. Ngomong itu susah, loh. Tahu gak SALAM itu sudah jadi besar seperti itu, gitu. Tapi bagaimana dulu? Saya memperjuangkan itu, kayak gitu" (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).



farmers was dwindling, and since they were not rich enough to attend school in the cities, nor therefore smart enough to get a job as a civil servant, yet the village context also ceased to provide competitive opportunities. Many felt they had to leave Lawen in order to progress.

It is important to note the significant intersection of education and agrarian change as a mediating factor in constructing this “backward” image of the peasant and the internalized forms of oppression, i.e. the pervasive mentality of being “*minder*” or inferior, as Wahyaningsih discussed. By the 1980s, the state had already implemented a wide variety of programs in the agrarian context that stifled agrarian productivity, limited the self-sufficiency of peasant economies, and forced compliance with state sponsored programs to modernize and industrialize the agrarian landscape. The structural problems that created these circumstances of impoverishment or “stupidification” as discussed in the previous chapter, were becoming more a part of the activist discourse, but that was still limited to primarily urban centered activisms. The Javanese countryside remained marked by the events of 1965-66, and peasant communities were still entrenched in the oppressive circumstances of the New Order. The Green Revolution, for example, was one of many destructive programs implemented by the New Order state that had profound impacts on the environmental and social structures of agrarian Java.<sup>155</sup>

"A key factor in the New Order government's agricultural policy was the BIMAS ('Mass Education') program which marked the beginning of the so-called 'Green Revolution' with its five-point program (Panca usaha) introducing new strains of rice (IR64 and IR72), the use of chemical fertilizer and pesticides (CIBA and Hoechst were key contributors), and new agricultural practices such as row-planting and simultaneous planting. Credit was extended to enable farmers to purchase these new materials and the government ran an intensive series of penyuluhan (lit. counseling) programs to educate the farmers in how to use the new technology. This new intensification program indeed brought about a 50% increase in the rate of rice production. Thus, the BIMAS was initially regarded as a resounding success as a breakthrough in hastening the introduction of new technology. The model was later extended to other rural sectors such as livestock, fishing and small industries" (Tiwon 101-102).

Mass education programs implemented in villages across Indonesia created a sense of internalized impoverishment among peasant communities. The traditional nature of peasant society set in contrast to the modernization of the nation state, however, also became a strategic area for combating the globalizing and industrializing trends of the New Order. Wahya's observation that “there was something there”, is worth noting in relation to the ways in which the perceived stagnancy of the peasant tradition is also a reflection of the resilience of peasant communities despite large scale shifts in governmental power. As Tiwon recounts in the case of BIMAS programs, the top-down authoritarian implementation of government programs to “modernize the agrarian context” were not always as successful as they seemed on the surface, and peasant traditions retained a culture of resistance beneath that surface.

“Despite this success, BIMAS ran into a silent peasant resistance. In several areas, peasants grew the new varieties of rice only on the outside perimeters of their fields and continued to grow the old strains inside, beyond the control of the BIMAS inspectors and "enlightenment" squads (the penyuluh). In 1978 I was led to view a series of demonstration plots meant to showcase the new varieties in a village in the most important rice-producing area of Central Java; peasants showed obvious delight in showing me plot after plot of vigorous green growth bearing no grain. Peasants would describe their experience with the intensification programs as 'keterjang BIMAS' ('hit by BIMAS')” (Tiwon 101).

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<sup>155</sup> See Gibbons, David S. *Agricultural Modernization, Poverty, and Inequality: The Distributional Impact of the Green Revolution in Regions of Malaysia and Indonesia*. Saxon House, 1980.

Peasants remained playfully resistant to the mass education programs of the Green Revolution. With the community in Lawen, this kind of playful engagement with tradition became an important medium for promoting individual and collective empowerment and at the village level. For Wahya, this meant working closely with her father-in-law, Soebarno, who provided a traditional model of leadership that spoke to the everyday needs and aspirations of the people of Lawen and shifted agency back to the people themselves. Leadership “yang kompak” as Wahya described it to me, or leadership that was cohesive, unified, and resilient.

Family is an important part of Javanese notions of power, and the traditions of inheritance surrounding positions of leadership in Java are still regularly practiced in modern Indonesia. Mbah Soebarno inherited a position of leadership in Lawen from his father. He served as *lurah*, or village head, for over 40 years, but he did not always imagine himself in this position. Mbah Soebarno had unfortunately already passed away many years before my fieldwork, but Wahya shared her memories of working closely with Mbah Soebarno with me during our trip to Lawen over the Lebaran holiday in 2015.

“Lurah is an inherited position here, handed down from grandfather to father. After every period it always stays in the family. People here believe in our family. People used to choose their leaders directly, not like today. The choice is open with other people.

“Soebarno was appointed to be the coordinator of many *lurah*. The position was called “*penatus*,” to coordinate one sub-district of several villages with their own *lurahs*. *Lurah* and village head (*kepala desa*) are the same. *Lurah* is usually in a city, village head is usually in the village. So people called him Mbah *Penatus* (Grandfather *Penatus*) as the lead coordinator of all the village heads.

“I was given his daily journal he used when setting up this place. He wrote about the tradition in which every generation someone must sacrifice themselves and return to the village. He had gone to the city and found work, but he was then called home, and he [felt he] had to because it is a mandate from the ancestors. He could have continued his schooling, but instead returned to replace his father. This was a request from his family and his community. He was the only one with an education. The community believed in him, so in every generation someone must be called to return to the village.

“He had many siblings as well, so no one knew who was going to be called. In his daily journal, he expressed resistance, not wanting to return home. He would tell me how when he lived in the city, he had already attained his dream so resisted returning home, “not me.” He had already received an education and [personal] development in the city” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 16 July 2015).<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> “*Lurah* disini turun temurun, dari Mbah hingga Bapak. Tiap periode habis selalu keluarga. Orang disini lebih percaya dengan keluarga kami. Waktu itu Pemilihannya dulu orang milih secara langsung tidak seperti sekarang. Milihnya terbuka dengan orang lain.

“Bapak diangkat sebagai koordinator dari *lurah-lurah*. Namanya *Penatus*. Itu mengkoordinir satu kecamatan, ada beberapa desa dengan *lurah2nya*, kemudian bapak jadi kordinatornya. *Lurah* dan kepala desa itu sama. *Lurah* itu di kota, kalau kepala desa di desa. Jadi dipanggilnya Mbah *Penatus*, sebagai ketua koordinator semua kepala desa.

“Saya dulu dikasih buku hariannya bapak saat menata tempat ini. Yang ditulis ada tradisi, setiap keturunan harus ada yang mengorbankan diri pulang ke Desa. Waktu itu Bapak sekolah di kota dan lainnya sudah jadi pegawai. Tapi Bapak yang dipanggil untuk pulang, itu harus, karena itu mandat dari nenek moyang. Bapak bisa lanjut sekolah tapi pulang menggantikan Mbah. Ini permintaan keluarga dan permintaan masyarakat. karena yang terdidik hanya Bapak. Kebetulan dipercaya oleh masyarakat. Sehingga setiap keturunan harus dipanggil pulang ke desa.

“Waktu itu kan ada saudara2 banyak, jadi tidak tahu akan dipanggil. Di buku harian itu, Bapak sempat berontak tidak mau pulang. Tapi sayang sekali buku hariannya hilang, tapi sempat cerita kepada saya, karena saat di kota sudah mendapatkan apa yang diimpikan. Berontak sama Mbah, “jangan saya”..tapi sudah mendapatkan pendidikan dan perkembangan di kota. Karena disini belum ada penataan, rumah-rumah masih berdempetan. Sering kebakaran” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 16 July 2015).

As Soebarno was called home by his family, selected by the community to continue a family tradition of leadership in Lawen, albeit reluctantly at first, he respected that tradition and chose to put his personal plans aside. To “mengorbankan diri” or “sacrifice himself” for his family and his community. Recalling the traditional inheritance patterns of local leadership in Java, Wahyaningsih similarly felt called home to lead like her father-in-law, and began working directly with Soebarno in order to address issues of poverty and the “minder” attitude she witnessed among many people.

Soebarno became a highly respected leader not only because he chose to return to fulfill a traditional duty of leadership, but his work with the community brought real improvements to the lives of the people of Lawen.

[In Lawen] there was no organization, the homes were still very close to one another and there were often fires. Soebarno began to organize this place and motivate people to work. He would go to people’s homes and convince them to plant things, at that time the land was still bare and there were not many plants” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 16 July 2015).<sup>157</sup>

Lawen received very little state support for development projects, but Soebarno still managed to implement significant building and roadway projects. One of the most significant projects that many people remember from that time was the paving of the roadway that connects Lawen to the nearest town and local traditional market, Kalibening. Prior to that, the cobblestone road could only be traversed by foot or large trucks that would carry farmed goods to and from the market. His ability to organize and implement programs for community development with little to no state financial support is part of the reason why the community entrusted him as a leader for over 40 years. Much of that time he served as *lurah*, though not all was in an official capacity. Their home was a center for many community gatherings and creative events.<sup>158</sup>

As Wahyaningsih worked with Soebarno, she learned from his traditional model of local leadership. A charisma grounded in praxis, gained through an ability to effect positive change within the community. Reminiscent of Anderson’s “idea of power in Java,” charisma can be shorthand for a kind of leadership that is very different than liberal democratic models of the Western world. According to Wahyaningsih, Soebarno’s “traditional” style of leadership was based on cooperation, mutual understanding and collective action to create a sense of unity and prosperity within the community, despite significant changes in village administrative relationships with the state.

“Soebarno didn’t have a specific method of approaching the community, what was important was that it was cohesive/unified (kompak). When he began, there were many political parties and even more disputes. Before there was voting for the Lurah, members of DPR, or even a Bupati, Soebarno saw extraordinary divisions here. That went on for quite a long time” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* July 16, 2015).

From the early years of Indonesia’s independence through the New Order, Soebarno’s ability to organize the community lessened over time as the leadership role of *lurah* across Indonesia

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<sup>157</sup> “Bapak mulai menata tempat ini dan memotivasi orang supaya bekerja. Datang ke rumah-rumah untuk meyakinkan orang-orang untuk melakukan penghijauan, karena disini waktu itu tanah masih gundul belum ada banyak tanaman” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 16 July 2015).

<sup>158</sup> Lawen also has a long tradition of practitioners in the Javanese arts such as gamelan, wayang, and dance. This would later be an important point of organizing for SALAM. During the few days I spent in Lawen, the community arranged a gamelan performance to commemorate Lebaran and entertain all the people coming home for the holiday. The gamelan set up on the front veranda and field that stands directly in front of the Soebarno family home.

became increasingly administrative throughout the New Order. *Lurah* and *kepala desa* village heads were no longer seen as functional roles in the community, but rather served in more administrative capacities. Wahyaningsih reflects on how their role has changed:

“Today there is not such an obvious difference between cities and villages. The current village laws (UU Desa) brought unprecedented effects. Previously the village had more autonomy, greater self-determination with the *lurah* chosen directly by the people (lit. masyarakat sini). Now it has shifted, people that have the money and interest, and are in a position to nominate themselves, are selected by the Kabupaten. Only after that selection do they then return to the village where the people of the village choose. The ones that graduate to become *lurah* in this way are not really selected by the people.

“[The role of the] *lurah* is restricted now, more administrative: arranging identity cards and population census. They’re just an extension of the hand of the central government. The *lurah* also could not make any decisions on their own, especially during the New Order, and now, honestly, there’s not much change” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 16 July 2015).

In the seventies and eighties, however, Soebarno had some flexibility in his role because of the relatively remote location of Lawen. His interests were very much aligned with the needs of the community in Lawen as he helped to combat the growing centralization of the New Order government by consolidating community efforts in Lawen.

“He was concerned that the people from the village were seen as objects [by the state]. They needed a united voice (*suara yang punya massa*), yet the people didn’t have any interest. If a political party won, it didn’t change people’s lives here. The important thing was self-determination of their own fates without interference” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* July 16, 2015).

These ideas resonated with Wahya’s goals from the start and in time, her work made her a recognizable leader to the community. Many people in Lawen expected she would become the next *lurah*. That she is a woman, not traditionally the inheritor of leadership positions in Java, in her case shows the efficacy of her work within the community. It is of course significant that she assumed this role of leadership based on her work with the community, but the lasting effect of her organizing in Lawen relates more to the ways in which she fostered critical consciousness among the community. Addressing the needs of the community was a deeply political act at a time of increased de-politicization of the agrarian context. Instead of feeling personally responsible for their marginalization, the residents of Lawen retained a critical awareness of the political and economic structures that perpetuate their marginalization.

Building on the world of her father-in-law and traditional notions of village collaboration and consensus decision making, known as *musyawarah* or *rembuk*, Wahyaningsih explained how the community Lawen organized themselves in order consolidate their efforts and develop increasing political awareness in group forums.

“...the residents started to hold regular community meetings or consultations every Saturday of *Wage* [part of the Javanese calendar]. Various issues ranging from economics, education, to criticizing the work of local governments were often the main topics. One of the critical movements of the Lawen residents in responding to corruption in the region was that it had caused a nearby *lurah* to heed a warning from the district government which eventually led to the resignation of the [corrupt] sub-district head” (Gernatititi et al. 10).<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> “Warga juga mulai menyelenggarakan musyawarah atau rembuk warga secara berkala tiap malam Sabtu Wage. Berbagai persoalan mulai dari ekonomi, pendidikan, hingga mengkritisi kerja pemerintah daerah kerap menjadi topik utama. Salah satu gerak kritis warga Lawen dalam menyikapi tindak korup di wilayah bahwan sempat

Political education became an important feature of social movement activism more broadly, reflected in the publication of works by Mansour Fakih, Roem Topaitmassan and Toto Rahardjo discussed in the introduction.

### ***Extending and Advancing the work of Romo Mangun: Laku as Embodied Praxis***

Returning briefly to the narrative with which I began this chapter, as Bram, Waryo and myself returned from our walk tracing the rivers around Lawen, I sat with Wahyaningsih in the kitchen of their family home. I was told during my visit to Lawen that this kitchen in the Soebarno family home was used to feed revolutionary fighters traversing across the landscape of Java in the war for Indonesian independence from the Dutch in the forties. Forms of embodied care, a term which I borrow from Hamington, which here involve families, homes, caregivers, a web of interpersonal connections, and a deep awareness of and desire to facilitate and advocate for the human rights of marginalized rakyat kecil communities, is an important element to the transformative movement that is often overlooked in larger narratives of social movement organizing. What might be called a kind of embodied praxis in this context, as I sat with Wahya in the kitchen of the Soebarno family home became more immediately apparent to me. As we glanced through an album of family photographs and projects from the years SALAM operated in Lawen, we happened upon a few images of Mangunwijaya during his visits to Lawen. Wahyaningsih shared that he would visit Lawen often, just as he had promised when Wahya first left Yogyakarta to return to Lawen. Wahya's previous involvement with Romo Mangun and the Kali Code community in Yogyakarta remained a point of inspiration for her work in Lawen. Humanitarian values and liberation theology were at the forefront of his humanitarian advocacy during the New Order. Through architectural projects, Mangunwijaya brought visibility to communities displaced and pressed on by the rapid urbanization of Java at the height of New Order developmentalism, as well as broad public attention to human rights issues facing Indonesia's most marginalized urban communities. As a public persona, the writings and public works of Romo Mangun did a great deal to advance popular considerations of the needs of impoverished communities, not only by bringing public attention to the plight of the rural and urban poor to wider audiences throughout Indonesia, but also by involving himself closely with marginalized communities throughout Indonesia, especially Java. He used his public persona as a tool within the social movement. As Toto Rahardjo writes in his introduction to a collection of published essays by Mangunwijaya, his writings serve "as a media of learning through dialogue, more or less functioning as a kind of ignition to spark a reaction, whether by reason, affection, or preference that, hopefully, can move some kind of self-involvement and responsibility aligned with our various positions and abilities" (*Gerundelan* no page).<sup>160</sup> In other words, Romo Mangun

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*menyebabkan seorang lurah menunai peringatan dari pemerintah kabupaten dan seorang camat megundurkan diri"* (Gernatititi et al. 10).

<sup>160</sup> "Sebagai media belajar untuk dialog setidaknya berfungsi semacam pemantik untuk menyalakan reaksi, baik yang berasal dari nalar, afeksi maupun cita rasa yang, mudah-mudahan mampu menggerakkan semacam keterlibatan diri dan bertanggungjawab sesuai dengan kedudukan serta kemampuan kita masing-masing" (*Gerundelan* no page).

did a great deal to revive the discursive frameworks for interrogating and questioning the status quo that had been long suppressed throughout the New Order.

Wahyaningsih also recounted to me, however, that what Mangunwijaya was doing in Kali Code she felt to be not quite enough. Some of his ideas and writings remained too theoretical to be accessible to local communities. His education in Germany did much to advance activists' awareness of the necessity of humanitarian goals within the movement, but modes of praxis that shifted agency into the hands of local community stakeholders were still weak. As with many charismatic modes of leadership, the movement ceases to continue without a centralized leader. It needed greater decentralization. The larger discursive advancements were important on a national scale, but the transformative aspect of the social movements grew through more localized forms of praxis such as the ones which take place in kitchens and many other “out-of-the-way places.” Wahyaningsih is a figure, a leader, who became more immersed in the everyday lives of the people of Lawen. She learned through her father’s political organizing among farmers in Klaten that in order to facilitate any kind of change, one had to learn from the everyday needs and circumstances of village life. More than what she learned from theoretical approaches to combating poverty from Mangunwijaya and the more public facing activists at the time, it was in the home and domestic everyday spaces in which her transformative work really thrived. It is here that I bring in the idea of embodied care as a useful framework for understanding how Wahyaningsih’s leadership, importantly as a woman, is illustrative of the kind of ethic which underscores methodologies of praxis which drew from an agrarian imagination in order to facilitate transformative change among communities who still had some semblance of a connection to their agrarian origins. This was simply not possible for communities living in squalor on the banks of the Kali Code River. These communities had already abandoned their villages, or were forced by the military to abandon them. This is not to say that either approach was better or worse, merely different, but points to the ways in which notions of the *rakyat kecil* are also not a monolithic category. Education was central to both Wahyaningsih and Mangunwijaya’s projects working to lift up the marginalized and oppressed *rakyat kecil* during the New Order, but the differences in context presented different obstacles and therefore necessitated different approaches to their empowerment projects.

For the *rakyat kecil* in the rural agrarian context of Lawen, impoverished families did not want to put their children in state schools, not only because the cost of admission (buying uniforms, shoes and tuition) was prohibitive, but the curriculum did not have real world relevance for agrarian livelihoods. Considering also the pressures of transportation to and from schools, which often necessitated travel across long distances as well as economic constraints, elementary education was the highest level of formal education available within Lawen, as was also the case for many rural communities. If residents could afford for their children to continue their education beyond elementary school, they sent them to the cities for middle and high school, often to live with relatives or take on the additional cost of living in a boarding house. Most families could not afford this, and even the local elementary schools had high rates of drop out. Child marriage was still practiced in the eighties and nineties in Lawen and high rates of poverty meant that many young people began working from a very young age, either to assist their families at home or as farm labor, or move to the cities for work to then be able to send money back to their families in Lawen. Wahyaningsih recounted her frustration about formal education in Indonesia at the time and her desire to create an educational platform in Lawen that addressed the needs of the rural agrarian community more directly. “[S]chools just created laborers (*buruh*). [...] Why doesn’t school respond to real life issues? Isn’t the goal of school to

humanize people? Meaning school should open awareness to improve their lives?”<sup>161</sup> In order to do this, she wanted to create what she called a “sekolah hadap masalah,” a “school to face problems,” that is to develop an educational system that would help eradicate poverty and foster a sense of empowerment in the village context so that new generations would not feel they had to move away from the village in order to become successful in the first place.

The family home of Soebarno and the traditional community networks he fostered in Lawen provided a foundation for Wahya to organize. Inspired by her previous work with Mangunwijaya at Kali Code and her own projects to provide small business loans for communities in Yogyakarta, her work in Lawen began with projects oriented towards adult residents of Lawen designed to empower community members to reclaim a sense of agency and pride in the village. This began with small scale economic empowerment projects. They developed small home-based businesses and organized micro-finance projects generated by and for the community as an alternative to the system of *simpan-pinjam* (savings and loan) implemented by the New Order state that effectively tied rural communities to continuous cycles of debt. They worked with local farmers to transition to sustainable organic farming by diversifying crops and lessening their dependence on industrial agricultural inputs. This in turn created more nutrient rich foods for distribution among the community in Lawen and for sale at local markets, rather than monocrops for export that had become the norm.

A large part of Wahyaningsih’s success in Lawen had to do with her ability to harness the potential of the local people and local resources. In this sense, she was still very much inspired by the work of Mangunwijaya. His work at Kali Code was noteworthy for its embrace of accessible design practices. During an era of large-scale state developmentalism, his focus on creating buildings for impoverished communities was a radical idea. He incorporated easily accessible building materials (wood, bamboo, bricks, and cement), and combined traditional and modern architectural elements, finishing many of the structures with colorful paint to bring visibility and a sense of levity to the otherwise oppressive atmosphere on the urban margins of society within. “Romo Mangun’s advice was simple: be creative and make use of what you have around you.”<sup>162</sup> In Lawen, lumber was a resource that the people had in abundance. For many generations the community farmed lumber, mostly pine sold to factories in the cities that would later be used to make furniture. The lumber they sold at very low prices, but the furniture would be sold for significantly higher retail value. Furniture making was one of the first major projects Wahyaningsih facilitated in Lawen that illustrates a model of education in which people learn by doing. She bought and traded for a few pieces of nice furniture that they could deconstruct in order to see how they were made and fabricate their own versions for themselves and to sell at nearby markets.

“We broke [the furniture] down and people discovered that, oh, it turns out the wood was from our own forests. We were working on a budget, so they didn’t have to make it exactly the same, we used what we could find. This is how they came to understand. ... We can make it ourselves, so why do we try to find it elsewhere. From the kind of awareness/realization [penyadaran] we just started by taking apart one chair to see for ourselves, that ‘oh, this is actually wood grown here that we bring [to the factory] and then it is brought here again!’ Haha. By making furniture we were able to fund the school. The free school came

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<sup>161</sup> “...sekolah hanya mencetak buruh. ‘Apa yang salah dengan sekolah kita? Mengapa sekolah tidak dapat menjawab persoalan hidup? Bukankah tujuan sekolah adalah memanusiakan manusia? Itu artinya sekolah seharusnya dapat membuka kesadaran untuk memperbaiki kehidupan,’ begitu ungkap Wahya setiap kali berkisah tentang keprihatinannya akan Lawen” (Gernatititi, et al. 5).

<sup>162</sup> “Pesan Romo Mangun singkat: jadilah kreatif dan manfaatkan yang ada di sekitar” (Gernatititi, et al. 9-10).

from our efforts. And now almost everyone in Lawen has the furniture that we used to make. It's more durable. ... We made it" (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).<sup>163</sup>

Wahya built trust with the community and her leadership was important for helping to shift the mentality of residents not to feel so dependent on the state or external sources for their own personal and collective growth, but rather for residents of Lawen to feel pride in the projects they created on their own. The Sukarnoist ideals of *berdikari*, the notion of "standing on ones own two feet" which was so important to Wahyaningsih's father, was revived among this small agrarian community.

This kind of engagement of direct participation of the rakyat kecil in Lawen is precisely the kind of praxis which the transformative movement then adapts on a wider scale, which I will return to in the context of KBQT and the leadership of a local kyai in Kalibening. Here it is important to consider how praxis is already being negotiated in Lawen through the many educational and economic initiatives facilitated by Wahyaningsih. The effectiveness of these movements in helps to rewrite typical narratives of social movement actors applying theories developed largely in the West within the marginalized communities for their empowerment. The examples from Lawen present a subtle yet instrumental revision which allows for greater agency initiated by peasant actors which explodes the the scholarly binary of theory versus practice, to the negotiations of praxis which reflections on actions are integral to transforming theory and practice. Wahyaningsih explains how the direct implementation theoretical considerations within peasant communities, a practice many activists such as Mangunwijaya attempted in Indonesia. It was was a flawed notion from the start when considering traditional patterns of leadership and limited access to education on the rural and urban margins of Indonesian society. I'll return briefly to the example of the furniture building projects in Lawen to illustrate the importance of collective experience in negotiations of praxis for peasant communities.

"We continued making furniture because we liked buying chairs in the models like you found the cities. ... We created jobs in this way, people didn't need to go to the city, they could make use of their own lumber. This is what we now refer to as *penyadaran*. It became PKBM. It wasn't an issue of illiteracy, they needed to live/survive. Farming projects were also like this. They started from asking, 'why do we need to buy fertilizer? Can't we make it ourselves from our cows? The waste was mixed with leaves [from the local lumber industry] and eventually they made a product that was far better [than kind you could buy]. It also [made food that] was better for our health. What villagers could you just hand theory too? They needed to feel it, to taste it, then they would believe it" (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> "Kami bongkar dan orang itu tahu, oh ternyata kayu yang diambil dari kebun mereka sendiri. Nah kemudian dan itu juga garapnya/anggarannya<sup>163</sup> nggak harus akan kami bikin. Nah mereka jadi mengerti, terus ini yang bisa bikin epuk...pakai karet ban bekas mereka juga punya di situ, gitu kan. Haha. Kita bisa bikin sendiri, kenapa kita harus cari ke sana. Nah dari penyadaran itu jadi kayak gitu. Jadi tak tunjukin saya mengorbankan satu kursi, nggak apa-apa. Bongkare, terus mereka melihat sendiri, aaah, ternyata kayu dari sini bahwa ke sana, tak bahwa ke sini lagi!' Haha. Dari bikin mebel bisa jadi membiayai sekolah, kan sekolah gratis. Nah, kami dari usaha itu. Dan sekarang hampir semua orang Lawen ya punya mebel yang dulu kami bikin. Itu memang lebih awet, kayak gitu loh...Kami yang bikin" (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).

<sup>164</sup> "Terus kemudian kita bikin karena kita suka banget beli kursi yang kayak gitu, kayak di kota, Nah kita kan menciptakan lapangan kerja situ, orang nggak harus pergi ke kota, bisa memanfaatkan kayu sendiri. Nah, akhirnya, penyadaran dari situ, gitu loh. Jadi PKBM. Tidak sekedar buta huruf aksaraan aja gitu loh. Tapi ya mereka bener-bener jadi hidup. Terus pertanian juga kayak gitu. Mulai dari, ngapain harus beli pupu, cari...kita bisa biki pupu sendiri, dari sapi yang ada di sana. Kotorannya yang dari daun-daun yang banyak di sana. Nah, akhirnya mereka, oh ya, dari itu jauh lebih bagus. Bagus untuk kesehatan untuk apa. Tapi orang desa mana bisa yang dikasih hanya teori? Jadi mereka merasakan, dan dicicipin. Baru mereka percaya" (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).



This is a critical point about the difference between applying theoretical considerations as a method to alleviate the struggles of peasants of Java versus enabling praxis as a relational strategy between theory, action and reflection which is most importantly felt by peasant communities. *Penyadaran* or “awareness raising” was a concept used by many activists attempting to emancipate peasant communities, and PKBM or Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat (Centers of Activity for Public Learning) are formalized centers administered by the National Department of Education in Indonesia which attempted to standardize the kinds of methods Wahyaningsih describes. In name these kinds of activities sound similar to what was going on in Lawen, but in the shared affect which they create among peasant communities, the differences are immense.

To underscore the ways in which the work of high-profile activists and government bodies often receive the greatest attention from scholars in attempting to understand movements for social change in Java, I want to return to one final example from Mangunwijaya’s involvement with the community in Lawen, who would often return to work with Wahyaningsih in the early permutation of Sanggar Anak Alam. Wahya recalls how he found Lawen to be an idyllic and peaceful place, and even imagined spending the final years of his life there. He would occasionally bring guests from the Netherlands, Germany or Switzerland. Community members remember how he would sit around chatting and drinking coffee for hours at a time with the people in Lawen. On these trips, he would also work with Wahyaningsih and Soebarno to assist on some of their larger structural projects.

“Based on his sketches, Wahya built her first home directly in front of the [SALAM] ‘classroom’ that was actually the home of her parents-in-law. It was built predominantly from bamboo and other materials that were easily available in Lawen” (Gernatititi, 9-10).<sup>165</sup>

This home turned into the meeting space for SALAM, a small library, and place for students to study and guests to stay when needed. Mangunwijaya also worked farmers in the area to create open access irrigation that would be accessible for the community to build and upkeep themselves. In my visit over 20 years later, it was indeed still operating.

In addition to helping design the SALAM schoolhouse, library and irrigation system, he would also send resources to Wahya, many of his essays and short stories later published in newspapers, as well as books to supply the SALAM library. In speaking with former students of SALAM, they shared with me how these books were one of the main reasons that they were first attracted to the SALAM community. Without a school in the community, there were very little resources or reading materials for students. Even going to school in the local towns of Kalibening and Wonosobo, books were limited. During my trip to Lawen, I too sat on the front porch of Soebarno’s family home drinking coffee, a group of former students at SALAM described the importance of having books available in the village.

"I'll never forget the books when we came here. Wahya brought so many books. To us, books were a luxury! Before that, we only knew of children's books and magazines. In school at that time, the books were limited. One bench, one book. But here, there were so many books. Books were the first thing that really drew me to SALAM. I remember she brought the books of Arswendo, with all of the sequels. We learned about philosophy of life from them" (SALAM Alumni, *Oral History* 16 July, 2015).

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<sup>165</sup> “Maka berbekal sketsa, Wahya membangun rumah pertamanya tepat berhadapan dengan ‘ruang kelas’ pendapa rumah mertuanya. Rumah itu dibangun dengan dominasi material bambu, material yang sangat mudah didapat di Lawen Alhasil, rumah itu terbangun asri, menyatu dengan alam” (Gernatititi, et al. 9-10).

The collection contained many of his own essays and works of fiction by Manguwijaya. He would often send early drafts to Wahyaningsih for her and Rahardjo to comment before publication. His writings are relatable because he incorporates themes from his experiences working with communities like those in Lawen; stories and essays inspired by the everyday. He would playfully weave together multiple and diverse narratives of Java into culturally rich literary tapestries of histories, myths, stories, and experiences. These narratives resonated deeply with the residents of Lawen.

Wahya recalled the playfulness of his writing, but also the ways in which the forgotten heroes of Java, as discussed in the previous chapter, were of particular relevance to the Soebarno family.

“Jokes became writing for Romo Mangun. He would send his writings for Kompas and other newspapers to me, many of which he discussed injustices or told stories of guerrillas in the villages prior to independence. In this house, the kitchen became a public kitchen [during the revolution]. Toto’s mother and father had to evacuate their home and take refuge in a nearby village at the time because their home was used by the army. Before independence, public kitchens like this provided everything for the army, including cattle, rice, whatever they needed. This was before independence. Romo Mangun was angry about how the people who rendered these services were not provided the same facilities by the state after independence” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 16 July 2015).<sup>166</sup>

It is with a sense of deep care in which empowerment is enacted. The reason the rakyat kecil are not remembered for their services during the revolution is precisely what makes it possible for Wahyaningsih to organize in Lawen at a time during the New Order when it was very dangerous to do so, it is because of the marginality to the nation. Wahyaningsih’s personal desire to care for the needs of marginalized communities and foster a sense of empowerment within an otherwise impoverished agrarian community in Central Java, which led to the establishment of SALAM, is the very same care enacted and embodied by the mothers (*simbok-simbok*) which Manguwijaya identified as the forgotten heroes of Java.

At its peak from 1990-1996, SALAM grew to include 160 children actively engaged in projects at the community school in Lawen. They began by teaching the students to read Indonesian but found it not to be productive since instruction in Indonesian language was disconnected from the everyday use of regional Javanese language in the lives of people in Lawen. The arts became a more central medium of learning and empowerment at SALAM. When Wahyaningsih first moved to Lawen, she knew that the people of Lawen had a high appreciation for the arts. There used to be a strong tradition of art practice in the community, as described by Harti and reflected in “Ilmu Iku” at the introduction, but which had been lost over time with the imposition of centralized educational standards and the violence inflicted upon peasant communities of agrarian Java. The Javanese landscape is full of these kinds of thriving creative communities that are either economically or geographically marginal to the major art centers of Java, such as Yogyakarta, Solo, Jakarta or Bandung. When I met with many of the alumni from SALAM over the Lebaran holiday in 2015, many recounted how their families had

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<sup>166</sup> “Lelucon jadi tulisan oleh Romo Mangun. Setiap tulisan yang di Kompas, pasti dikirim ke saya. Yang dibahas ketidakadilan, atau bahas orang desa yang gerilya sebelum masa merdeka. ini rumah menjadi dapur umum, bapak ibu mengungsi sampai melahirkan di pengungsian karena tempat ini dipakai tentara. Kemudian dapur umum menyediakan semuanya termasuk sapi, beras apapun kebutuhan tentara. Itu jaman sebelum merdeka. Setelah merdeka, orang-orang yang dulu berjasa tidak diberi fasilitas oleh negara, itu kemarahan Romo” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 16 July 2015).

a background in traditional Javanese arts. One whose mother was a *dalang* puppet master of the wayang shadow plays, another whose father was an avid *gamelan* musician. Harti similarly recounted the creative atmosphere of traditional arts she grew up with in Lawen. As a child she learned to sing as a Javanese *sindhen* to accompany *gamelan* and wayang performances alongside her father, who was also a *dalang*. Everyone I spoke to in Lawen remembers their town as always being full of artists, dancers, singers, and musicians of Javanese arts and performance. Despite its existence as an everyday feature of life in Lawen, traditional arts had been overlooked and displaced by the large-scale reorientation towards state and urban centers of culture and knowledge production. Here we see a reification of the stereotype of traditional “backward” peasant culture internalized by the community itself. Traditional arts were, however, already an important feature of life in Lawen that remained constant throughout different periods of political and economic change.

When Wahyaningsih returned to Lawen, she remembers how “People really missed the arts [...] art made them happy” (*Oral History* 16 July 2015). Traditional arts projects therefore became an important feature of the broad contextual education at SALAM, mobilized in this case for the purpose of pinpointing local sources of knowledge and learning. In many of my discussions with Rahardjo and Wahyaningsih, they spoke about the integral role of the arts at SALAM as a “media belajar” or media of learning. They found that they could use traditional art forms to help build confidence in young children. Exploring their creativity, finding value in their work and the work of their community helped the kids believe in themselves and work together to build something bigger than prescribed notions of what kids from the village were capable of. They also found that alternative ways of learning could be more easily accepted through the arts on an individual and community basis. AT SALAM in Lawen, performance events became a regular gathering space which brought the community together in the atmosphere of arts that was an integral part of their sense of collective identity in Lawen.

“The results of [students’] performance arts creations were performed 2-3 times per month. For a village that only owned one television which was only used to watch *ketoprak*, performance arts activities became a very entertaining spectacle. All of the residents would gather, bringing food or whatever else they had. These activities taught Wahya an important lesson, that art could be a media of study for them. The children could feel how learning was a necessity” (Gernatititi et al 6).<sup>167</sup>

The students of SALAM came to appreciate that their families and the greater community had already sustained a local tradition Javanese art forms. Traditional arts in this case enabled an important meeting point between tradition, self-expression, and emancipation from the developmentalist goals that had been institutionalized by the New Order and dominated work life and education for the people of Lawen. As I sat listening to many stories of these performances from alumni, it was clear that the time they spent learning at SALAM was a formative moment in their lives.<sup>168</sup> They referred to this time as the “jaman emas” or “golden age” of Lawen.

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<sup>167</sup> “Hasil kreasi seni pertunjukan dipentaskan secara berkala 2-3 bulan sekali. Bagi sebuah desa yang hanya memiliki satu untuk televisi yang hanya digunakan untuk menonton *ketoprak*, kegiatan pentas seni menjadi tontonan yang sangat menghibur. Semua warga berkumpul dan membawa makanan apa yang mereka miliki. Kegiatan ini mengajarkan satu hal bagi Wahya, bahwa kesenian dapat menjadi media belajar yang merdeka. Anak-anak merasakan bahwa belajar adalah suatu kebutuhan” (Gernatititi, et al. 6).

<sup>168</sup> They also spoke about how things changed, how today all the kids have motorbikes and mobile devices, rarely do people gather together as they used to. The nostalgia for SALAM was palpable. One community member had created a facebook group (anane29Lawen) and scanned photographs from that time to share and reminisce. Wahyaningsih joined us later and the group reminisced together like family.

In 1991 Wahya was awarded an Ashoka Fellowship under the criteria “pendidikan rakyat” or “people’s education.” The fellowship promotes work by individuals and organizations that demonstrate social entrepreneurship, empathy and changemaking, as well as organizing for changemaking. Wahya was able to use the award to fund an entire year of activities at SALAM. The Ashoka Foundation cited the ways which she worked to foster “independent-thinking, creative, equal, collaborative citizens” in Lawen through democratic and participatory methods. Additionally as a Christian woman in a predominately Muslim community, she gained respect and a measure influence in the community because of her work helping to empower village residents. Religious difference, according to Wahya, was not an obstacle in Lawen. The nature of religious practice at the time was not as dogmatic as some of the more urban religious movements, but as she established a public leadership role in the community, she began to experience external scrutiny, first from surrounding communities and later from the Indonesian Armed forces.

### ***Subversive Movements: Accusations of Christianization and Attempts at Incorporation***

Wahyaningsih, though she was not originally from Lawen, she was accepted as an integral member of the community. This was, however, a time of increased Islamic orthodoxy in Indonesia, neighboring communities expressed a sense of unease towards the community at SALAM that began to undermine Wahya’s work in Lawen. In 1993, suspicions circulated that Wahya was attempting to “Christianize” the community through their organizing projects.

“Toto’s hometown is Muslim, 100% Muslim. I am Christian. This wasn’t a problem for people there. Most didn’t really see the difference between those who were Muslim and those who were Christian. They all did activities together and engaged in their own rituals. But people from outside saw me there, that I am a woman, and at that time in Muslim society, women could not yet become leaders. They felt threatened by my presence” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).

Speaking with members of the community at SALAM in Lawen, it was hard to trace where and exactly how these rumors were started, but they spread rapidly. Since SALAM had received some international recognition and funding from an Ashoka fellowship, this could have inspired resentments from neighboring towns. Her association with Mangunwijaya could also have reinforced these rumors. The fact that Mangunwijaya often visited Lawen and was very involved in some of the infrastructural projects with SALAM, such as the irrigation channels, it is possible that his presence also contributed to the accusations of Christianization. His work at Kedung Ombo, as discussed in the previous chapter, was highly publicized and politicized at the time. Growing Islamic intensification promoted by the New Order state created religious tension in the agrarian context where previously there had been a great deal of peaceful coexistence. Additionally, as Wahya recounts, paternalistic notions of leadership created unease towards her leadership role in Lawen. At the time her husband, Toto Rahardjo, was working at Kedung Ombo with the Small Community of Pak Kanjeng, as well as volunteering in Timor-Leste. While she was not working alone, according to the indoctrinations of the new order Panca Dharma Wanita, her work with these community project could be perceived as neglecting her “duty” as woman to be the primary caretaker for her immediate family. Even though she was accepted by the immediate community in Lawen, neighboring villages and local leaders who were indoctrinated into the centralized New Order administrative and cultural hegemony, found her presence threatening. Wahyaningsih reflects the paternalistic patterns of traditional leadership in Java that were exacerbated during the New Order.

"I was quite young when I worked with the villagers, and they really felt that this was something that they needed. [...] I was working alone in Lawen. Society was rather paternalistic there, men had more power. Suddenly there was this women who became important. [...] At that time there was a *lurah* that called a meeting, most people who came didn't know what was going on but I was aware. They said this person has come and is being reckless, like that, they were really just jealous. Now there tried to scare me but how, they didn't really know. I was good and that community had already accepted me. In the end the issue that emerged was "Christianization" (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).<sup>169</sup>

These suspicions couldn't have been further from truth, they were not trying to "christianize" Lawen, but with Suharto's sudden turn to Islam in the early nineties, Islamic orthodoxy and paternalistic notions of leadership were also reinvigorated among traditional leaders in Java.

It is most likely that the rumors of Christianization had more to do with the political nature of organizing in the agrarian context than it had to do with religious dynamics. Whatever the cause, the rumors traveled fast and Wahya's activities in Lawen eventually caught the attention of the Indonesian National Armed Forces.

"Eventually some kind of intelligence agent came to my home and I was called to KORAMIL, the sub-district level office of the Indonesian National Armed Forces. They lectured at me. I asked about education. 'As a community member I have the right to educate the people [mencerdaskan bangsa]. What is my mistake?' In the end they just created confusion for themselves. I had a letter proving that I reported these activities to my *lurah*. They thought I was doing something wild ["kegiatan liar"]. I said, 'Go ahead and break up what we are doing. Break it up right now and you will have to face the people. If you break this up, they will all probably revolt.' Eventually they returned [to Lawen] and I was given permissions" (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* March 15, 2015)<sup>170</sup>

A peasant uprising was precisely the greatest fear of the military controlled New Order government at this time. Wahya was able to use that fear strategically to continue her work in Lawen, showing not only a great deal of bravery, but also continued resilience in facing, adapting to, and working around the authoritarian controls that would otherwise restrict her

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<sup>169</sup> "Tempatnya Mas Toto itu kan Muslim, 100% Muslim, gitu ya. Saya disana saya Kristen. Nah, orang disana, kalau orang disitu nggak masalah. Mereka nggak tahu apa sih Islam Kristen, semua melakukan aktivitasnya, melakukan ritualnya masing-masing, gitu ya. Tapi orang dari luar kemudian melihat saya, apalagi saya perempuan, dan waktu itu masyarakat Muslim perempuan itu masih belum bisa dijadikan kayak pemimpin gitu ya. Mereka jadi terancam begitu"

"Kalau saya malah sangat mudah kerja sama dengan orang desa, dan mereka sangat sangat merasa bahwa ini loh yang saya butuhkan sebetulnya, gitu. [...] Saya sendiri lalu saya disana di Lawan, dan kemudian kan biasanya yang, ya, masyarakat paternalis disitu ya, yang lebih berkuasa laki-laki. Tiba-tiba saya ada perempuan yang punya ...yang cukup besar. [...] Waktu itu ada Lurah yang mudeng rapat aja belum tentu orang datang, tapi saya begitu sadar, orang datang langsung meluluhkan kayak gitu kan ada jealous-jealous yang kayak gitu. Nah sehingga mereka menggoncang tapi dengan cara apa, mereka nggak tahu kan. Saya baik. Di masyarakat udah diterima. Akhirnya isu yang dimunculkan, 'Kristianisasi' kayak gitu" (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).

<sup>170</sup> "Sampai akhirnya ada datang dari kayak intel-intel ke rumah saya, dan saya dipanggil ke KORAMIL [...] dari TNI di tingkat kacamatan. Disitu ada polisi ada tentara ada sidang-sidang itu. Saya juga malah diorasi. Saya mohon tentang pendidikan dan apa. Saya sebagai warga masyarakat saya punya hak untuk serta mencerdaskan bangsa. Apa kesalahan saya? Dan dia akhirnya bingung sendiri, dan ternyata saya juga ada surat yang saya lapor ke lurah saya ini. Nah dianggapnya saya ada kegiatan liar. Nah, silahkan kalau mau membubarkan, membubarkan sekarang. Mereka berhadapan dengan masyarakat kan, kalau dibubarkan mesti mereka akan bererantak semua. Akhirnya justru datang memberi ijin" (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015). This incident is also described in Gernatitati, et al. *Sekolah Apa Ini?* INSIST Press, 2019, 12.

work. By focusing on education, she not only dispelled the rumors of “Christianization,” or any potential accusations of being communist, but Wahya also revealed the confusion of the military and their administrative roles in agrarian Java. She deploys the language of the nation that appears valid (*laku*) in the eyes of these officials and military officers. Her use of the phrase “mencerdaskan bangsa” or “to educate the people” is a deployment of *bangsa* (citizens), explicitly not *rakyat*. She packages the project of SALAM in the language of the nation state and even provides official documentation to appease them because the written record is authoritative. She establishes that she is playing by their rules, and in doing so she undermines their authority and reveals how even they didn’t really understand the state policies they were meant to implement. They could not explain why what she was doing was illegal. These are the same kinds of cultural strategies of resistance to authoritarian controls enabled by Thukul, Mangunwijaya and Kyai Kanjeng which enable *plesetan* slips of meaning and reappropriate the already appropriated discourses of the New Order.

The example of Wahyaningsih to stand up to the military and administrative officials was perceived by the community in Lawen as a major reorientation of the ways in which they imagined their relationship to the state and its mechanisms of military and administrative control. Her work within the community was not particularly radical when seen from the perspective of a resilient traditional community that had always worked towards collective betterment. It is only in the context of New Order policies that her work was “perceived as subversive” (Gernatititi et al. 12). After that moment, however, Wahya knew she could not continue working alone. She recruited friends and family to come work in Lawen, many of whom were originally from Lawen but had moved away for work or education were asked to return and assist in facilitating different kinds of programs based on their own experiences, and many of which did not have even an elementary school diploma. Harti was one of these individuals who had moved away to try and become a schoolteacher, but found difficulty getting her teaching certification. Instead, she became an informal teacher of Javanese arts, a much lower paying job but one that connected her to her upbringing in Lawen. Wahyaningsih invited her back to Lawen to teach Javanese singing and became one of her closest companions in Lawen. Harti, who had felt defeated from not becoming a teacher because of the difficulty gaining an official teaching certificate, was emboldened to teach again in Lawen and, in my interactions with her, expressed a deep sense of gratitude to Wahyaningsih for recognizing her potential to become a community leader through their educational projects in Lawen.

Wahya additionally created weekly training programs for her new team of teachers at SALAM, but this too gained the attention of local government officials [DINAS]. They came to Lawen to dispute their use of teachers without elementary school diplomas. Wahya’s response was “If you have graduates that want to come work here, they are more than welcome.”<sup>171</sup> Despite government oversight and attempts to halt the activities of SALAM in Lawen, they continued their efforts and created a team of teachers accustomed to an education based on everyday circumstance. This kind of unregulated educational system was political. Wahyaningsih suspects that the local government officials would have continued to harass and “terrorize” them had she not been there to defend the community in these circumstances (*Oral History* March 15, 2015). Wahya was fiercely protective of the local community and their right to learn and empower themselves, which served as a model for residents to overcome their own fear of government officials.

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<sup>171</sup> “*Saya bilang, kalau ada sarjana mau ke sini, silahkan, saya bilang itu toh*” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).

“At the start, they were very afraid if an official came. They would have to welcome them, have to give them a reception and offer them tribute. They were truly afraid. There was a turning point when they started becoming braver. There was actually no problem with what they were doing, it was good that they were taking control, as citizens they should be allowed to do that. You don’t have to agree with [the officials], you can criticize them. This was new. It was a political lesson for them” (Wahyaningsih, *Oral History* March 15, 2015)<sup>172</sup>

“Wahya advised her cadre friends: ‘We don’t need to be afraid, because we are honest and responsible with what we are doing. The truth will always prevail’ (Gernatatiti et al. 12)<sup>173</sup>

They even organized a number of small demonstrations at the district government office.

“Since then, they have remained critical. At the district office in Banjar Negara, Lawen is well accounted for [i.e. strongly represented]. [The officials] won’t dare to do anything anymore.”<sup>174</sup>

The participatory and village-based efforts of SALAM in Lawen may have attracted the attention of ABRI, but they had no legal basis to stop SALAM projects in Lawen. Instead, the state tried to incorporate their projects under the umbrella of official state sanctioned village development programs. The kecamatan sub-district head and their staff came to visit Lawen in an attempt register SALAM as a TK Pertiwi, part of the New Order program, *Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga* (PKK – Family Welfare Guidance). PKK served as an administrative mediating force to implement state programs at the village level through primarily women and families. As Suryakusuma highlights in her work on social constructions of womanhood during the New Order:

“PKK was the sole vehicle appointed by the New Order government through which programs for women at the urban and rural village grassroots level could be channeled ... PKK was appointed as one of the carriers of this vision, as a vehicle to transpose Indonesian families from ‘backwardness’ to a renewed state: that of ‘prosperous families.’ ... [it] was a branch of a state bureaucracy that exercised power through the control of citizens. In the case of PKK, a hierarchy of gender was overlayed on top of the bureaucratic hierarchy. The New Order social construction of womanhood ... was given shape in the form of PKK, embodied in its ten programs and disseminated throughout all the villages of Indonesia. ... While PKK claimed to be a vehicle for women and families, in fact it was an organization made for women by men, and contained within a militaristic, hierarchal state structure, with controls at all levels” (25, 40-41).

Again, this speaks to the difficulty of talking about social movement organizing more broadly in Indonesia. The rhetoric was easily coopted by the state or private interests. Much of the grassroots activist criticism of the shape of social movements around the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is that the mass movements that unseated Suharto and the “reformasi” movement that followed was not in line with these prior movements taking place in agrarian Java. Engagement with a

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<sup>172</sup> “Awalnya kan mereka sangat takut kalau ada pejabat yang datang. Jadi kalau ada pejabat datang itu mereka udah menyambut, udah harus memberi, apa, jamuan. Tapi juga nanti akan harus memberi upeti. Dan mereka, ketakutan bener-bener kepada pejabat. Nah, saat itu titik balik mereka jadi berani, ternyata ngak apa dan itu harus menjadi kontrol yang baik sebagai warga masyarakat kita boleh gitu loh. Ngak sepaham dengan mereka, boleh kritisi, nah itu baru. Itu jadi pelajaran politik yang baru kayak gitu bagi mereka” (Wahyahingsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).

<sup>173</sup> “Dari kejadian itu Wahya berpesan kepada teman-teman kadernya: ‘Kita tidak perlu takut, karena kita jujur dan bertanggung jawab dengan apa yang kita lakukan. Kebenaran pasti akan menang’ (Gernatatiti et al. 12).

<sup>174</sup> “Nah sejak itu sampai sekarang mereka jadi kritis. Dan di Kabupaten Banjar Negara, Lawen sangat berhitung. Iya, jadi ngak berani macam-macam. Hahaha” (Wahyahingsih, *Oral History* 15 Mar. 2015).

more transformative mode of social movement organizing has not been represented in the more public social movement activism nor within scholarship. When accusations of Christianization reached a fever pitch in 1995, Wahyaningsih and the community of SALAM in Lawen had no immediate solution and it was a major reason why she decided to conclude her work in Lawen and relocate the community school to Yogyakarta. Much like the banning of *Pak Kanjeng* at Kedung Ombo, however, this moment inspired and motivated much of their continued work and led Wahyaningsih to be more explicit about outlining the interfaith goals of their future site of SALAM in Yogyakarta.

### ***Conclusion:***

The notion of a return to agrarian Java discussed in this chapter is one in which the physical return—that is the movements of one woman’s journey to a village homeland—is emblematic of a larger shift in the ways in which forms of cultural resistance are renegotiated among a multiplicity of small-scale actors. The reasons for such a shift can be attributed, and often are by social movement scholars, solely to the force of the dominating state, in this case the New Order. There is no denying that the political forces of physical violence and economic marginalization inflicted upon Indonesian people during that time, especially the *rakyat kecil*, is a major determining factor in pushing social movement actions further and further into the margins of society. As a strategy of resistance, cultural action found expression in increasingly clandestine and subterranean ways, especially among the high-profile cultural workers who engaged in direct actions against the state. Following the small movements of return to agrarian Java, however, provides a view of resistance that is not directed at the state, but rather the communities of *rakyat kecil* themselves. It is a process enacted by slow and gradual steps toward transformation. A process through which communities of *rakyat kecil* are able to realize, for themselves, how they have been marginalized, as well as to see how it does not define them.

The establishment and operation of SALAM from 1988-1996 in Lawen, offers instructive examples of the challenges and opportunities of activism in rural Java during the New Order. Unfortunately, Lawen proved not to be the long-term home of SALAM, for strategic reasons Wahyaningsih chose to discontinue their efforts in Lawen and relocate to their current location in Yogyakarta. The accusation of Christianization shows the salience of New Order indoctrination at the time. As Suharto embraced Islam in the early nineties, it had the effect of radicalizing Muslim communities. This in turn created schisms across Indonesia through rumor and the spreading of disinformation. As Wahyaningsih and members of SALAM reflected on this moment, they learned how better to strategize their movements. This includes their turn towards greater emphasis on children in the contemporary school of SALAM.<sup>175</sup> Part of the resilience of SALAM, and of the transformative movement more broadly, has to do with an ability to change, adapt and reflect on lessons learned.

The examples included in this chapter from the experience of one woman’s return to a family homeland in Java help to illustrate in more embodied and participatory terms how transformation is enacted among communities of *rakyat kecil* in Java. Her life story serves as an

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<sup>175</sup> Learning from problems is key part of the larger growth of the transformative movements. The published works of Mansour Fakih, Roem Topatimassang and Toto Rajardjo helped to solidify many of these methodologies, but they were enacted most directly by communities like the one in Lawen. See Fakih, Mansour, et al. *Mengubah Kebijakan Publik*. First, INSIST Press, 2000. ---. *Panduan Pendidikan Politik Untuk Rakyat*. INSIST Press, 1999. ---. *Pendidikan Populer: Membangun Kesadaran Kritis*. Cet. 1, Read Books: Insist: Pact Indonesia, 2001.



important baseline for understanding the activism beyond the visibility of primarily urban-centered movements. As the role of women became increasingly confined to the domestic sphere as mothers, household caretakers, and educators during the New Order, paired with restrictions on movement and organization at the village level, the movements of this woman were dangerous and quite radical for the time. Her return to the agrarian context, to a domestic sphere in a village context as a site of empowerment rather than restriction, is an instance of re-appropriating the rhetoric of state ideology. Her turn towards the domestic sphere appropriates the conditions under which women were supposed to operate under the auspices of Panca Dharma Wanita and instead uses that domestic position to undermine national regulations and limitations on movements in the agrarian context to shape new narratives of empowerment. She and a generation of activists who developed creative strategies of adapting to, resisting, and evading authoritarian restrictions, worked within these confines to undermine them, in turn collapsing the sharp distinction between public and private, urban and rural. What other distinctions fall by the wayside when scholars recognize the important and often invisible work of women in sustained projects for local empowerment? What new patterns emerge?

A function of the method of following one woman's journey, is that it rewrites typical scholarly narratives that generally follow the movements of charismatic individuals or groups of individuals, very often men, without mention of families or intergenerational communities. Following the movements of Wahyaningsih illustrates important gaps within social movement scholarship and unravels a different story of activism in Java in the late twentieth century. This woman's biography is important for understanding the ways in which people gain critical perspective within authoritarian political circumstances. She is an individual who helped to create a shared bridge between national and local concerns, public and private, urban and rural, theory and practice. Her story opens spaces for understanding the multiplicity of experiences that go into not just enacting but embodying processes of empowerment in Central Java, helping to sustain long-term forms of activism. Wahyaningsih and members of SALAM in Lawen serve as an example of grassroots movements that attempt to return a sense of autonomy, self-determination, and critical perspective among marginalized communities in the rural Javanese context.

### 3 | Seeding Transformative Movements in Nitiprayan, The Goddess of Rice and Rituals of Return

In this chapter I shift attention to the contemporary community of SALAM and the ways in which a physical return to Java, initiated by one woman, is transformed into a symbolic return to the cultural traditions of Java. A new figure emerges in this chapter who exists in imagination as an embodiment of agrarian Java, the goddess of rice, Dewi Sri. I invite comparison between these two “Sri’s” (Sri Wahyaningsih and Dewi Sri), to illustrate how the physical return to agrarian Java—a form of resistance to counter the regulations and authority of the authoritarian state—is transformed into a symbolic return to agrarian Java, one that represents already embedded forms of solidarity within cultural actions of peasant communities. From physical to symbolic notions of return to the agrarian traditions of Java, actions of resistance are transformed back again into actions of resilience. The narrative of “Sri’s Return”—which finds expression in both courtly and agrarian traditions in Java—is enabled as an important element of symbolic cultural capital that underscores the participatory educational dynamics at SALAM as situated and embedded in community, both its everyday experiences and imaginings.<sup>176</sup> In this section I bring forward the myths of Dewi Sri alongside my fieldwork with SALAM in 2015 in order to show how their revival of agrarian rituals serves not only as a form of resistance to the cultural hegemony reproduced by the nation, but also as a revival of cultural resilience.

In approaching the circulation of stories, rituals, and performance arts surrounding Dewi Sri at SALAM, I draw from Laurie Sears’ work, *Shadows of Empire*, the notion that rearticulations of tradition are sites for cultivating new voices of authority. In this section I invite comparisons between Dewi Sri and Sri Wahyaningsih for the purpose of illustrating the ways which village prosperity is reframed by communities of *rakyat kecil* actors. Participatory education becomes an important medium of enacting these symbolic transformations at SALAM. What is most significant about these transformations are the ways in which community members of SALAM reflect on their lived realities through the traditions of agrarian Java. In so doing they shape new forms of empowerment for themselves and the community around them. The familial and intergenerational nature of their work which involves participation from a multiplicity of actors further grounds the transformative goals of education at SALAM through individual and collective negotiations of change in Java. Dewi Sri and Sri Wahyaningsih are integral to the symbolic and physical revival of agrarian traditions that members of SALAM incorporate into their model of emancipatory education. These rituals, as sites of learning and transformation, are enabled in schooling at SALAM to raise critical awareness and support the sustained resilience of *rakyat kecil* communities.

#### *On the Edge of a Rice Field*

SALAM is located in the neighborhood of Nitiprayan, in the Kasihan, Bantul sub-district (*kecamatan*) of southwestern Yogyakarta. Nitiprayan is a suburban-agrarian space that feels strikingly rural even though it is less than 5 kilometers from the sultan’s palace and the busy central shopping corridor of Jalan Malioboro. It is an area where many artists live and where rice

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<sup>176</sup> I draw the notion of “cultural capital” from the work of Guillory, John. *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*. University of Chicago Press, 1993.

fields are tucked into the neighborhood alongside contemporary art galleries, artist collectives, and individual studios that continue to grow in number as Yogyakarta becomes increasingly more visible to the international art world. SALAM was established in 2000 at a site which sits on the edge of a rice field.

As a school, SALAM is in an unassuming location, set off about 500 meters from the road and tucked between adjacent rice fields. As you approach the property, there is a small tin signpost hanging to the side of the road that simply reads “Sanggar Anak Alam.” To enter the property and approach the school complex one walks down a narrow path parallel to a small irrigation channel that runs between the rice fields. Three open-air buildings surround a rather large courtyard with a small play structure set off to the side of the courtyard. The first building one comes upon has a large wall that faces the direction of the main road, on it there are a number of large and colorfully painted murals,<sup>177</sup> one of which contains the phrase “*nglemu kelakone kanthi laku*,” or “knowledge embedded in practice”, the same concept drawn from the tembang “Ilmu Iku” discussed at the introduction of this work, and which reflects the resonance of experiences from the first permutation of SALAM in Lawen, Banjarnegara. The open-air buildings which serve as classrooms are constructed with cement floors and woven rattan walls. Passing by this first complex of buildings to turn right to cross a small footbridge over the irrigation channel, one begins walking towards another set of SALAM buildings. It is a precarious pathway that is often also populated with children running around and fishing in the irrigation channels below. There is another large stretch of rice fields on the left, and two more buildings located on the right. The first is the family home of Sri Wahyaningsih and Toto Rahardjo who purchased this property in 1996 after discontinuing the community school in Lawen. Their home was constructed by Wahyaningsih in which she modeled the colorful and utilitarian architectural styles of Y.B. Mangunwijaya. Their home is connected to the kindergarten area of the school, and beyond it there is a two-story building with classrooms above and a large community kitchen below where snacks and cooking project are prepared daily for students, and where community meals are prepared for special events.

Walking to and from the school along the narrow channels of the wet-rice irrigation network invites one to imagine a space beyond typical educational boundaries. For members of SALAM, the open architectural design and location of the school set between rice paddy fields is important for how they position themselves within the immediate surrounding agrarian community. As Rahardjo writes in *Sekolah Biasa Saja* (2014), the location of the school standing on the edge of a rice field is a spatial imaginary which they use to establish a lineage of emancipatory education in Central Java. Represented in the phrase, “from the banks of a river to the edge of a rice field” (49),<sup>178</sup> members of SALAM trace a lineage of educational activism that connects the work of Wahyaningsih with Mangunwijaya at the Kali Code community in Yogyakarta in the eighties and her movements to Lawen in the nineties with the current configuration of their community school in Yogyakarta. This sense of marginality—being “on the edge,” so to speak—is an important gesture which members of SALAM reclaim in order to decenter the discourse of education in Indonesian and of knowledge production more broadly. In my reading of the movements of return to agrarian java in the last chapter, this woman’s physical return to Lawen represents an important backdrop for how the contemporary school operates today. In their current configuration located on the outskirts of the city of Yogyakarta, they continue to reflect a shared sense of pride and prosperity in the agrarian context as they

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<sup>177</sup> See Appendix C, Figure 1.

<sup>178</sup> “*dari pinggir kali ke tepi sawah*” (Rahardjo, *Sekolah Biasa Saja* 49).

incorporate a variety of community-based projects into the educational curriculum. Just as the leaders in Lawen, Wahyaningsih and Soebarno, found their calling to serve their communities by returning home to their families in the agrarian context of Lawen, the community at SALAM also envision themselves as an extended, intergenerational family invested in sustaining educational practices that reflect the needs of the immediate local context by returning to a sense of symbolic connection to the agrarian traditions of Java. Participatory learning at SALAM is embedded in the everyday realities of the surrounding agrarian community and being “on the edge of a rice field” is an important physical and symbolic gesture towards those goals.

The vision and practice of education at SALAM is inclusive of a diversity of symbolic marginalities: urban and rural, global and local, traditional and modern. It is imagined as an ideal educational environment, a “garden of learning” as Rahardjo writes, where environmental awareness is linked the emancipatory goals of learning (*Sekolah Biasa Saja* 2). “Schools should be a kind of oasis, like a shady place or a source of water in the middle of the desert to unwind. Schools should be a place where people can quench their thirst for curiosity, realize their dreams and imagine their craft” (Rahardjo, *Sekolah Biasa Saja* 1).<sup>179</sup> The educational oasis Rahardjo envisions is set in opposition to, what they see as, restrictive state and religious educational institutions that are distributed in mass throughout the archipelago with very little consideration of the diversity of the region.<sup>180</sup> The “natural” educational environment of SALAM at play in the name Sanggar Anak Alam (“Alam” meaning “Nature” or “Natural”), is conceived both in terms of the environment of their local cultural embeddedness, as well as within a revived ecological orientation towards Java’s agrarian history. The agrarian context, historically marginalized by developmentalist discourse of the New Order, is reclaimed as a central site of learning and knowledge production. Emancipatory education is a medium through which they work to reclaim spaces, turning so called “margins” into new centers of learning, sites of critical reflection, and spaces for the cultivation of greater self-determination for marginalized communities.

The agrarian traditions which had been central to the lives and livelihoods of many peasant communities in Java were largely coopted by the cultural dominance of the New Order state. According to one of the most widely read and reproduced scholars of Java, Clifford Geertz asserts that the rituals of *slametan* are “at the center of the whole Javanese religious system ... a simple, formal, undramatic, almost furtive, little ritual: the *slametan*” (11). These so called “little rituals,” however, are what largely constitute the shared affect of communitarian values among peasant communities in Java, the *abangan*, yet another Geertzian distinction which gets reproduced extensively in scholarship as the “proletarianized” peasants of agrarian Java (11). Geertz’s full framing of *slametan* in the case of the village of Modjokuto is worth including here to exhibit the ways in which ritual is constructed as a kind of social glue among “traditionalized” peasants in Java (11).

“The slametan is the Javanese version of what is perhaps the world’s most common religious ritual, the communal feast, and, as almost everywhere, it symbolizes the mystic and social unity of those participating in it. Friends, neighbors, fellow workers, relatives, local spirits, dead ancestors, and near-forgotten gods all get bound, by virtue of their commensality, into a defined social group pledged to mutual support and cooperation. In Modjokuto the slametan forms a kind of social universal joint, fitting the various aspects of

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<sup>179</sup> “*Sekolah selayaknya semacam oasis, seperti tempat teduh dan sumber air di tengah padang pasir untuk melepas lelah. Mustinya Sekolah merupakan tempat di mana orang-orang dapat memuaskan dahaga keingintahuannya, mewujudkan impian-impian dan imajinasi karyaannya*” (Rahardjo *Sekolah Biasa Saja* 1).

<sup>180</sup> See Pemberton, John. *On the Subject of “Java.”* Cornell University Press, 2018. Or Siegel, James. *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution.* Princeton University Press, 1997.

social life and individual experience together in a way which minimizes uncertainty, tension, and conflict – or at least it is supposed to do so. The altered form of twentieth-century urban and suburban life in Java makes it rather less efficient as an integrating mechanism and rather less satisfying as a religious experience for many people; but among the group here described as *abangan* – the more traditionalized peasants and their proletarianized comrades in the towns – the *slametan* still retains much of its original force and attraction” (Geertz 11).

These rituals as outlined by Geertz are integral to the maintenance of order and stability in the Javanese worldview, but as Pemberton asserts, “the privileging of stability and order as dominant characteristic of Javanese culture has an ethnographic history whose assumptions, in many respects, anticipate those of *tradisi* (tradition) in New Order cultural discourse” (14), and “the now common interpretation of *slametan* as a Javanese key to cultural order coincides almost perfectly with New Order discourse” (15). This has profound implication for how the logic of New Order discourse had the effect of producing “a constant rearticulation of things cultural, ... a conspicuous blank space in the cultural map, that produces a sense of incompleteness that motivates the New Order certainty that ‘traditional’ village customs must be recovered and maintained” (Pemberton 13, 14). The recovery of the Javanese peasant as it was packaged in New Order discourse, primarily oriented towards a global discourse of development and implemented through such ideological frameworks as the floating mass concept, which I will discuss shortly, and large-scale development projects such as Kedung Ombo discussed in chapter one, all of which did very little to effectively help peasant communities and in most cases only exacerbated their economic and social marginalization within the nation. For my purposes here, it is important to consider that Javanese ritual is a site of incredible contestation throughout the New Order, and while the coaptations of ritual constituted much of the salience of New Order cultural dominance, they also open space for the reappropriation of coopted traditions for strategically transformative goals.

The physical return to agrarian Java enacted by the figure of Wahyaningsih is firstly emblematic of a larger shift towards grassroots organizing in agrarian Java in the late eighties and early nineties. At SALAM today, the physical movement of return to agrarian Java is transformed into an important symbolic return to notions of agrarian prosperity that are explicitly tied to the economic interests, politics and cultural expressions of peasant communities. The revival of rituals surrounding Dewi Sri at SALAM today carry important symbolic value in the process of renegotiating cultural traditions that had been coopted by the New Order state, in order to disentangle forms of cultural hegemony of the state from the emancipatory goals of their community. Rituals are enacted in the participatory educational context of SALAM and redeployed as a countermovement to the kinds of global, economic, capitalist notions of prosperity which underscored New Order developmentalism that not only impoverished peasant communities, but also took hold of the imaginative possibilities of Indonesian citizens. Where the symbolic movement of return to agrarian traditions through the figure of Dewi Sri gains salience is not only in how it is a response to the economic and social disenfranchisement felt by peasant communities during the New Order, which it is, but also in the way that it resituates peasants as central agents of prosperity. The agrarian imaginary is revived for the purpose of reconstituting a sense of agency and self-determination among peasant communities.

At SALAM, reclaiming sites of agrarian prosperity is done most centrally through a revival of rituals and cultural expressions surrounding the goddess of rice, Dewi Sri or Mbok Sri, as she is called in Central Java, though she is known by many names throughout Southeast Asia. *Pesta Panen Wiwit*, or *Wiwitan*, is a traditional celebration of the rice harvest in agrarian Java

that is celebrated annually as part of the educational and participatory community projects at SALAM. The two-day festival brings students, parents and facilitators together with surrounding community members of Nitiprayan to gather for a revival of agrarian cultural traditions. The event is held at SALAM in early March, though traditionally it would take place at least two to three times per year as determined by the cycles of the rice harvest. Celebration of the *wiwitan* rice cutting ritual is signaled when the once green fields of irrigated rice turn to a golden color, and additional calculations are made according to the Javanese calendar to ensure an auspicious time for the celebration, indicating that the rice is ready to harvest and, symbolically, that Dewi Sri is prepared to “return home.”

Members of SALAM in its current configuration in Yogyakarta revive oral traditions and rituals surrounding the rice cutting ceremony as a means by which to underscore the importance of the agrarian context as a site of learning and knowledge production. There is an important connection between the revival of these traditions surrounding Dewi Sri and the ways in which the community interpret their own history through the personal journey of Wahyaningsih. Coincidentally both named “Sri,” Dewi *Sri* and *Sri* Wahyaningsih stand as important figures through which the SALAM community shape a cultural critique of the long term effects of developmentalist policies of the late twentieth century. The physical and symbolic gestures of return to an agrarian homeland that are represented in stories and rituals surrounding Dewi Sri are replicated in Wahyaningsih’s journey to Lawen and reproduced in ritual celebrations of the rice harvest in the curriculum at SALAM. The return to agrarian Java as told simultaneously through personal history and mythic imagination, are enabled as a means by which to reorient notions of power and authority in Java through their educational efforts at SALAM. As discussed in the previous chapter, Wahyaningsih’s physical return to agrarian Java to establish the community school in Lawen initiated a symbolic return to agrarian Java as a significant site of social empowerment among rural communities.<sup>181</sup> Her grassroots movements during the New Order were particularly dangerous at that time because of the increased scrutiny of agrarian communities across Indonesia. The globalizing and industrializing trends of the New Order culminated in a sharp decline in national economic power during the Asian financial crisis from 1997-1998 but were felt most strongly and much earlier in the agrarian sector. Set against this backdrop of New Order developmentalism, Wahyaningsih’s story of return is instrumental in shifting notions of agency back to the agrarian context as a central site of prosperity, autonomous (to a degree) and self-determined in the face of national disenfranchisement. At SALAM in Lawen and now also in Nitiprayan, agrarian communities are positioned as agents in this process, rather than passive recipients of national development. In many ways, the displacement of agrarian livelihoods parallels the displacement of traditions surrounding Dewi Sri. To understand how that gradual displacement has happened and then to see how it is being revived in the contemporary community of SALAM, it is important to widen the historical frame beyond just the impacts of New Order developmentalism. In the next section I look at the ways in which shifting notions of power throughout Indonesian history—from periods of colonial domination to the formation of the Indonesian nation, through the authoritarianism of the New Order—have impacted notions of prosperity to become oriented more towards global capitalist expansion over local, on-the-ground *rakyat kecil* community interests, and so have had a profound impact on the shape and sustainability of agrarian livelihoods, in this case, in Java.

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<sup>181</sup> Other activists and artists replicate this return to rural/agrarian based actions tied to educational programs. The visual artists Moelyono return to rural actions, such as the visual artist Moelyono. See Moelyono. *Pak Moel Guru Nggambar*. INSIST Press, 2005.

## *The Goddess of Rice in Java: Shifting Notions of Power and Agrarian Prosperity*

In 1971, W.S. Rendra, a prominent poet and activist during the New Order, wrote a play entitled *Kisah Perjuangan Suku Naga*, or *The Struggle of the Naga Tribe*, a story of village level resistance to national and international development in Indonesia. The play stages a direct confrontation between a modern developmentalist state striving for modernity and progress, and the unique cultural heritage of the kingdom based on a traditional agrarian village. As the story goes, the Naga tribe had historically lived in peace and with relative autonomy within and alongside the developing democratic kingdom of Astinam. The traditional agrarian society, however, is threatened by government development of a large-scale copper mining industry supported by foreign investment. In the opening, the *dalang* puppet-master, who serves as a kind of internal commentator within the actions of the play, explicitly states that “This story does not—I stress once again, does not—take place in Indonesia” (Rendra 3). The play is, however, quite obviously a satire of New Order developmentalism and the negative impacts of Western capitalist expansion on a traditional agrarian community. The actions take place in the mythic land of Astinam, a variation on the name Astina which is where the Pandawa and Kurawa brothers were raised in the Bharata Yudha stories which form the basis of the wayang repertoire discussed in the last chapter. The invocation of the wayang repertoire is deployed through hyperbole to convey an unveiled satire of the New Order, that is of the evil ruler of a kingdom whose interests are aligned with foreign notions of prosperity and development set against the good peasant community whose traditional agrarian livelihoods of subsistence farming and communitarian values are threatened. Throughout the play, Rendra creates a stark antithesis between Western countries and the agricultural country (Astinam, read Indonesia) that is the setting of the play.

“Meanwhile, across the sea, in the lands of the ogres—  
I mean Europe, and America, and Japan too: Life is different.

We are an agricultural country, rich in produce and minerals.  
They are industrial countries, rich in capital and in machines that produce commodities” (Rendra 5).

The influence of foreign notions of power and progress are reiterated throughout the work as Rendra captures a sense of how increased industrialization of the “traditional” agrarian context of Indonesia are enacted through political engagements of powerful international stakeholders. The Ambassadors, represented by European, American, and Japanese figures, articulate the drive towards developmental goals, progress and modernity that are tied to a near religious obsession with global capitalist expansion. The accumulation of debt, emphasis on resource extraction, and environmental destruction are all tied to the ambassadors’ notion of prosperity and progress.

“The Ambassadors’ Chorus”

“Hallelujah! Hello! Hello! Hallelujah!  
We are Here, hallelujah!  
We are progress, hallelujah!  
We are friends of the world!

“Prosperity we dispense  
Progress we teach

Help we offer.  
We are ambassadors of peace.” (Rendra 8).

...

“Developing countries’ ambassadors  
Their task is to look for debts.  
Hallelujah!  
Developed countries’ ambassadors  
Their task is to sell goods.

“Markets! Markets! After markets!  
Cut down forests!  
Dig up mines!  
Empty the seas!  
Grab up raw materials!  
There are our first tasks!

“Progress—that is the key to this century!  
This nation will not be left behind by another.  
We are prepared to assist your country’s holy efforts.  
Loans can be negotiated.” (Rendra 10).

These ambassadors who serve in an advisory capacity in the play and who are most closely likened to members of IGGI, the Inter-Governmental Group in Indonesia, work closely with the ruler of Astinam and her ministers in efforts to “update” the kingdom in order to align with Western notions of progress. In one example, the Queen and her ministers plan to make a modern hospital to cater to the increasing ailments of those in power. In response, the *dalang* articulates the disconnection between Western progress and the very real poverty experienced by the people of the kingdom.

Dalang: “What’s the use of all this for the ordinary people? Most people in this country still live in poverty. What they need is not the most modern hospital in all Southeast Asia, but more small hospitals in each district. One luxury hospital could mean fifty simple hospitals available to all.  
Prime Minister: Your Majesty, we must have Progress!  
Dalang: Progress does not mean living in luxury! Progress means an increasingly equal level of prosperity and welfare. What is not useful for the majority is wasteful. There is no need to give it priority.”  
Prime minister: Your Majesty, to ensure the security of development, the people must be further put in order. Colonel Srenggi, Minister of Security, wishes to see you to put forward his plans for security” (Rendra 27-28).

Progress for the sake of progress articulated by those in power, not for the sake of the people, is a theme reiterated throughout the play. This is contrasted with notions of prosperity tied to agrarian livelihoods that is brought forth by a chorus of villagers speaking together with their village leaders.

“A progressive farmer is one who loves his land.  
A progressive farmer is one who is able to protect his fellow farmer.  
A progressive farmer is one who can lead his village to prosperity.  
A progressive farmer is one who quickly discovers new plants and new ways to protect his environment”  
...  
“Land is the basic need of a village society, and because of that, ownership of land must be organized and controlled by the village concerned” (Rendra 18).



The close connection between village society, subsistence farming, and collective control over land are precisely the notions of prosperity which are infringed upon by the developing state. Rendra's work importantly gestures toward the dichotomy between the subsistence orientation of peasant economies and the global economies of increased industrialization that was a feature of developmentalist discourse throughout the New Order, but which had its origins in the histories of agrarian change and differentiation which far predate the New Order. I bring Rendra's work in here as a frame for understanding how cultural productions, here in theatrical form, are enabled to comment on the shifting notions of power and therefore agrarian prosperity in Java. These dynamics were in fact most exacerbated during the New Order but had a much longer history rooted to the institutionalization of global capitalism in Indonesia.

In understanding the history of agrarian change in Java, Geertz's model of "agricultural involution" is an important starting point for extending the historical frame of peasant resistance beyond the immediate impacts of New Order developmentalism. Geertz highlights the ways in which the Dutch cultivation system, or *cultuurstelsel*—colonial policies for the extraction of land, labor, produce and taxes from village economies (1830-1870)—imposed an export crop economy in Indonesia that solidified a "dual economy" defined by a capital-intensive Western sector and a labor-intensive eastern sector (53). Geertz focuses his work on the ways in which Javanese peasant society adapted to the colonial system as well as the ecological basis that facilitated a gradual intensification of wet-rice agriculture in Java by drawing a distinction between the wet-rice agriculture of Java (where involution developed) versus swidden or slash-and-burn agriculture in the Outer Islands. His observations point mainly to the capacity of *sawah* (wet-rice agriculture) to respond to labor-intensification, not lessening soil fertility but creating the capacity for a greater number of cultivators and therefore more productions, as well as the mutualistic relationship between sugar cane crops and rice that included both the compatibility of growing these crops together, and the functions they served as agricultural products (sugar for capital, and rice for sustenance). As Dove highlights, "although the *cultuurstelsel* [cultivation] system was formally abolished around 1870, in practice an obligatory rotation of wet rice and sugarcane persisted throughout the twentieth century. The imposition of sugar cultivation on Javanese wet-rice farmers was a chief reason for their historic 'involution' instead of development" (126-127).

There are a number of revisions to Geertz's work—namely an ecological revision of the different environmental conditions required for sugar compared to rice production,<sup>182</sup> as well as the absence of modes of agrarian differentiation in the involutorial model which would account for how power relations are integral to understanding notions of agrarian change through shifts in patterns of control over the means of production, as well as the accompanying social division of labor (White 19). What Geertz's work does accomplish, however, is to recognize the significance of the 1870s Agrarian Law that set into motion a pattern which enabled foreign corporations to lease land from the government for as long as seventy-five years. This opened Java up to foreign private enterprise and ended the cultivation system. The Dutch set the process of involution in motion, instituting the cultivation system for the cheap extraction of labor and agricultural

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<sup>182</sup> For a detailed analysis of the ecological implications of the dichotomy between swidden and wet-rice cultivation in Indonesia see Dove, Michael R. "Culture, Agriculture, and Politics of Rice in Java." *Bitter Shade*, Yale University Press, 2021, pp. 110–30. See also White, Benjamin. "'Agricultural Involution' and Its Critics: Twenty Years After Clifford Geertz." *Institute of Social Studies*, vol. Working Papers Series No. 6, Feb. 1983.

products for capital, which continued through the Japanese occupation and the New Order. In 1960, Sukarno implemented the Basic Agrarian Law (*Undang-Undang Pokok Agraria*) which attempted to reinstitute the social function of land and resources, with state management of land ultimately in line with the interests of the people. In the New Order, however, Suharto placed greater emphasis on national interests wherein people's interests became equated with the state and greater attention was given to private interests. Suharto never repealed the Basic Agrarian Law, however, so among scholars and activists in Indonesia there has been a persistent conversation on agrarian reform to return to the tenants of the 1960s Basic Agrarian Law, though a great deal of contestation has emerged over the relationship between the state, the people and their mediators, typically NGOs and organizations for agrarian reform (Lucas and Warren 96). Nevertheless, from the Dutch cultivation system to the institution of the Agrarian law of 1870, patterns of land management were set in motion which allowed the state (Colonial or National) to be able to lease out lands to corporate entities which would, during the New Order, serve as a basis for the industrialization of Indonesia economy, both in terms of agrarian and factory production.

Other important features of the history of agrarian change in Java are the accompanying shifts in the gendered division of labor. Regarding the Dutch cultivation system and 1870s Agrarian Law, as White articulates, "the extraction of colonial 'rent' required fundamental reorganization of the household's division of labor. There is evidence of a high degree of women's involvement in smallholder cultivation and in the increasingly important off-farm activities of trade, handicrafts. It is reasonable to suppose that as male labor was diverted from indigenous production to fulfill colonial demands it was replaced both by increased involvement of women in direct income-producing activities and by larger family sizes through increased rates of reproduction" (White 17). During the New Order, the gendered division of labor which accompanied the industrialization of agriculture and increased factory production is even further exacerbated, as outlined by the activists Hafidz and Krisnawati in their 1989 policy study on *Women and Development in Indonesia* as well as Wolf in "Javanese Factory Daughters: Gender, the State and Industrial Capitalism." As more women moved into cities for factory labor, there was also an accompanying decline in the agrarian labor force, a dynamic which also contributes to the decline of agrarian traditions surrounding the goddess of rice. I raise this issue again here as a lead in for my close analysis of the rituals surrounding Dewi Sri and the ways in which a gendered narrative of return to agrarian Java is enabled at SALAM to underwrite a long history of disenfranchisement in the agrarian context in Java that impacted many peasant communities but in many ways doubly impacted women, as discussed by Hafidz and Krisnawati as the *peran ganda* or dual role women were forced to play in the rapidly modernizing economy of the New Order. In my reading of the revival of Dewi Sri at SALAM, it is important then to return to the cultural terms by which power, and specifically a Javanese notion of power, were coopted by Suharto during the New Order, in order to see how agrarian traditions surrounding Dewi Sri are strategically redeployed within the transformative movement at SALAM today as a response both to the immediate impacts of New Order developmentalism, as well as long-term agrarian changes in Java.

"The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture" by Benedict Anderson, discussed in chapter one, is an important starting point for understanding how cultural and social actions are reflected in negotiations of power in Java. Anderson paints a "picture of social and political life seen through traditional Javanese lenses," namely the ability for those in power "to concentrate his own personal Power, to absorb Power from the outside, and to concentrate within himself

apparently antagonistic opposites” (1-3, 13). For Suharto, large scale projects such as Kedung Ombo and the Green Revolution are key examples of the ways in which his concentration of power culminated in developmentalist projects, guided by local technocrats and international development organizations,<sup>183</sup> were designed to bring peasant communities into the modernizing movements of global capitalist expansion. The depoliticization of peasant communities instituted by the “floating mass” concept and paternalism of the military, however, relegated peasant communities to strictly economic endeavors with very little outlet for political expression.<sup>184</sup> The real impact of these programs, however, did anything but elevate the peasants’ economic circumstances, instead it caused abject poverty and led eventually to economic crash.<sup>185</sup> During the New Order, notions of agrarian prosperity were tied solely to large scale economic development interests. Economic expansion and the depoliticization of peasant communities were central to the disenfranchisement of peasant communities, and the terms by which these negotiations of power were packaged in distinctively Javanese cultural frameworks had the added impact of coopting, in cultural terms, notions of agrarian prosperity to serve the developmentalist interests of the state. As Pemberton highlights, “one of the most distinctive features of New Order rule is the remarkable extent to which a rhetoric of culture enframes political will, delineates horizons of power” (9).

Drawing from and extending the work of Anderson, Pemberton goes on to highlight how the “success” and “general appearance of order” during the New Order “depends, to a significant extent, on the everyday sense of customary orderliness and stability that has accompanied the post 1965 emergence of a cultural discourse routinely anchored in constructions like ‘tradition,’ ‘origins,’ and ‘ritual’” (10). Pemberton focuses his analysis on the ways in which during the New Order, notions of power which had previously been articulated in very specific ritual practices “involving tutelary spirits crucial to a village’s autonomy” were abstracted during the New Order into ambiguous and ultimately controllable forms of state power; “in New Order Java one discovers a shift away from the discrete significance of individually empowered village guardian spirits ... and towards the sense of abstracted cultural power posed as a singularly dominant force; offerings now are made quite matter-of-factly expressly on behalf of ‘tradition’ or, more

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<sup>183</sup> For an overview of the ways in which technocracy and greater emphasis on STEM fields were implemented in the developmentalist agenda of the New Order, see Shiraiishi, Takashi. “Technocracy in Indonesia: A Preliminary Analysis.” *RIETI Discussion Paper Series*, no. 06-E-008, Mar. 2006.

<sup>184</sup> As Harold Crouch observes, in September 1971, the political party system was collapsed in Indonesia and the “floating mass” concept was disseminated by Golkar, headed by Ali Murtopo. “According to the floating mass concept, the mass of the people would be ‘floating’ voters permitted to express their political preferences in general elections once every five years. Between elections they would have no political role and therefore, in theory, would be able to devote all their efforts to economic development. Unable to organize their supporters in the rural areas, the parties would eventually wither away. Although Golkar, too, would not be permitted to organize in the villages, it in fact had relied on the local administration and military to mobilize its votes and could expect to do so again in future elections. The floating mass concept was never officially endorsed by the government and, in deference to civilian feeling, was excluded from the ‘general outline of state policy’ adopted by the MPR in 1973” (272). After 1975, the floating mass concept was introduced by army leaders “*tut wuri handayani*—to describe their relationship with nonmilitary organizations and the people in general. The Javanese phrase refers to the guidance given by a parent to a child learning to walk, where the parent does not actually support the child but is always ready to save him from falling” (Crouch 272). For an authoritative account of these changes see Moertopo, Ali. *Some Basic Thoughts on the Acceleration and Modernization of 25 Years’ Development*. 1st ed., Yayasan Proklamasi, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1973.

<sup>185</sup> See Anderson, “From Miracle to Crash.” *London Review of Books*, vol. 20, no. 8, Apr. 1998, pp. 3–7. For an earlier view of the Indonesian “miracle economy” among other Southeast Asian nations, see World Bank, editor. *The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy*. Oxford University Press, 1993.

precisely, *tradisi* itself' (11). The "compulsion of 'tradition'" instituted by the abstraction of cultural authority is most directly associated with such New Order formulations of "diversity" (*keaneka ragaman*) and projects such as the creation of Taman Mini "Indonesia Indah" (the "Beautiful Indonesia"-in-Miniature cultural theme park) as a "dedicated, unitary recuperation of difference within a representational framework of the local" (Pemberton 12). Java, in the representational sense, becomes a parody of itself, as indicated in the title of Pemberton's work, *On the Subject of "Java,"* and which is also reflected in the parody of Rendra's *Suku Naga*. Parody, as we've already discussed in the use of plesetan (puns) and samaran (linguistic disguise), are important tools of cultural resistance.

In my analysis, I pair the cultural discourse of Javanese tradition as a key arbiter of shifting notions of power and prosperity alongside reflections on the history of agrarian change in Indonesia, and especially Java, work together to set the stage for the institutionalization of global capitalism in Java, and therefore within notions of prosperity that perfectly culminated in the cultural hegemony of the New Order state. In the revival of stories surrounding Dewi Sri at SALAM, both an engagement with *tradisi* and with plesetan operate together to reconstitute Javanese ritual within the transformative movement. Myths surrounding the goddess of rice, which had circulated largely through oral traditions, including the Panji stories which are epic tales of the kings and gods of Java but which regularly employ trickster figures who regularly employ plesetan (pun) and samaran (disguise) to engage a multiplicity of meanings as strategies to undermine notions of the centralized authority of kings and embed lessons for everyday rakyat kecil communities. Dewi Sri, as we will see, is a beloved figure to peasants because she represents the sustainability of agrarian communities. Her stories fell out of fashion during the New Order, but her revival at SALAM reflects an important renegotiation of tradition redeployed as a strategic tool for transformation.

In the wayang repertoire of shadow-plays, Dewi Sri is the daughter of King Prabu Mahapunggung, an ancestral king of Java, and her story is represented in the episode entitled, *Sri Mulih* or *Sri Returns*. Typically, the story begins with her fleeing the kingdom because her father has attempted to betroth her to a prince. Her brother, Sadana, follows her into the countryside, and they attempt to establish a new agrarian settlement.<sup>186</sup> There are many versions of the story, all of which revolve around marriage practices that would sustain the future prosperity of the kingdom.<sup>187</sup> In some versions the siblings go on an extensive search for varieties of seed throughout the countryside. In others, she is kidnapped and a fight between her suitors ensues. In most versions, her departure from the kingdom displeases the gods, so they punish the kingdom by sending pestilence and drought to earth. In one version, the gods curse the king by turning Dewi Sri into a rice paddy snake and Sadana into a swallow bird. As a snake, she gains the good favor of the gods by helping a village Kyai and his wife conceive a baby girl after many unsuccessful years of trying. She later defends the baby from being sacrificed and in honor of her good deeds the god Batara Guru entrusts her to be the protector of all farming and agriculture. Dewi Sri eventually returns to the kingdom and is betrothed to a prince, therefore fulfilling her duties as princess by ensuring the future stability, peace and prosperity of the kingdom. Common

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<sup>186</sup> See Pemberton, John. *On the Subject of "Java."* Cornell University Press, 2018.

<sup>187</sup> In Pemberton's work he draws a direct connection with marriage rituals and Dewi Sri stories based on his ethnographic work with a *dhukun* "ritual specialist" on the southern coast of Central Java. "For her, the powers of procreation inherent in wedding practices are essentially the same as those that motivate rice harvest customs. 'People generally call the rice harvest practice *methik* a 'rice-stalk wedding' for Sri. You know who she is, don't you?' Without waiting for my response, the *dhukun* began her rendition of the well-known 'Sri-Sadana' story" (205).

in each of these versions is her association with agrarian prosperity and fertility, her departure always brings great misfortune to the kingdom, and her return brings great prosperity for the kingdom in that food will continue to grow to sustain the people of the kingdom and that the kings genealogical line will continue.

The Panji stories are part of the courtly traditions of Java that date back to at least the 12<sup>th</sup> century Majapahit empire, if not before then as they are part of a long tradition of oral storytelling in the greater Malay world. The return of Dewi Sri, and by extension the return of agrarian prosperity and fertility to the kingdom, often involves her eventual submissive return to the authority of the king and his court. The fertility of the agrarian context is incorporated into the greater prosperity of the kingdom through her story of return. When she disobeys her father by fleeing the palace and venturing out into the agrarian “wilderness,” meaning areas that were not under the direct control of the king, her departure brings misfortune to the kingdom from the perspective of the power and authority of the king and his court. The court was, after all, largely supported by the fealty of the peasantry.<sup>188</sup> The peasantry, in turn, looked to the king for the management of water for irrigating fields of wet-rice cultivation, a distinctive feature of the Majapahit empire in Java. These patron-client relationships have been widely theorized by many of the early scholars of Southeast Asian studies and Indonesian studies more specifically. Rice cultivation is one of the major technological advances which made it possible for the Majapahit empire to grow to be one of the largest and most powerful kingdoms in the region, and it is likely due to the development of wet-rice cultivation. I bring attention to these dynamics here because I want to underscore not just the deep cultural embeddedness of *Sri Mulih* within Javanese culture, but to draw attention to notions of prosperity and the politics of power that undergird the circulation of these stories that were largely composed for the greater authority of the kingdom.

As these stories are reproduced in ritual form, however, one gets a sense of the ways in which Javanese peasant communities take *tradisi* (in the most abstracted sense of either courtly traditions or the national “court” of the New Order) and infuse it with everyday meaning. Dewi Sri is the tutelary spirit of rice whose birth and death sustains the future, most literally in the creation of seeds for continued cultivation, and symbolically through her embodied transformations in the community rituals and stories surrounding her return. As Anderson highlights, “the social signs of the concentration of Power [in Java] were fertility, prosperity, stability, and glory” wherein “Power is the ability to give life” (“Idea of Power” 19), and Dewi Sri is perhaps the most quintessential giver of life within the agrarian traditions of Java. Pemberton describes the life giving qualities of Dewi Sri in his analysis of the rice harvest practice called *methik*, which is worth quoting at length to show the progression of rituals surrounding Dewi Sri, many of which are also reproduced at SALAM.

“The *dhukun* [Javanese shaman] then cuts several handfuls of stalks [of rice] and braids them together, weaving in fragrant blossoms that transform the braided rice-stalks into Sri the ‘bride.’ Wrapped in batik, shaded by a small parasol of the sort used for protecting infants, and cradled in the *dhukun*’s arms, Sri is finally taken home and placed in the house of the rice field’s owner where weekly offerings will be made on her behalf. Here she remains until the seed of her dried figure are later added to others for planting in

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<sup>188</sup> Scott, James C. “Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia.” *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 66, no. 1, Mar. 1972, pp. 91–113.

Tambiah, Stanley. “The Galactic Polity.” In *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*. Cambridge University Press, 1976.

Heine-Geldern, Robert. “Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia.” *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (November 1, 1942): 15–30.

subsequent seasons and another newly constructed rice-stalk Sri replaces her. The rice contained in the figure is never consumed. To do so would mean that one had joined the ranks of Sri's enemies: an army of rodents, birds, insects, and other predators that feed directly on her, bringing disaster to the fields. Instead, the seeds of the Sri figure are reserved and eventually planted, repeating the process of agricultural abundance..." (Pemberton 208).

Pemberton goes on to highlight in his ethnographic work with a Central Javanese village on the south coast of Java, how "once proffered as a sign of productive harvests, Sri stories presented an active means to prosperity" (251), were gradually replaced by Bharatayuda stories, and so rituals were also replaced by moralizing lessons, especially in the aftermath of 1965-66 communist killings (247-252).

Notions of prosperity in the Indonesian nation as discussed above, are tied closely with dynamics of political power that are inflected very differently than the cyclical and regenerative notion of prosperity in the stories and rituals surrounding Dewi Sri. The New Order administration invested a great deal of cultural capital in reviving the courtly traditions of Java. Done first to justify a quick transition of presidential power as with the mythic signing of SuperSemar, as well as through policies that ensured Suharto remain in power for over 30 years. Throughout his presidency he imagined himself as a new king of Java, a self-proclaimed "ratu adil" or "just king." He surrounded himself with Javanese mystical paraphernalia, sacred objects to bolster his symbolic authority, *dhukun* to guide and direct his actions according to indigenous Javanese *kejawen* beliefs and surrounded himself with an inner circle of trusted companions, by and large military generals who helped to ensure his position as president in 1965. The New Order administration revived feudal culture within the framework of the modern nation-state, and notions of prosperity were reinforced by the feudal cultural basis of New Order authoritarianism. Prosperity in the story of Sri Mulih is framed in terms of fealty to a god-sent king, to an abundance of resources (and labor) that fall under the greater authority of the kingdom. Prosperity in the New Order meant growing Indonesia's economy according to the standards of Western capitalist enterprise. Technocracy, cronyism, corruption and nepotism became standard practices throughout that time, and one could argue are lasting legacies that remain deeply entwined in the Indonesian political arena, even after Suharto's resignation and the subsequent Reformasi period. Feudalism was never erased, even before the New Order. The feudal court traditions of Java were most notably strengthened during the colonial period. As the Dutch enabled local aristocracies as an extension of their administrative control in Java and throughout the archipelago, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and later the Dutch colonial administration could exploit natural resource and manpower just as the pre-colonial kings of Java had done previously, but expanded the enterprise through the cultivation system to a global scale and with the assistance of steam-ships.<sup>189</sup> Even Sukarno, the heroic anti-colonial revolutionary leader and first president of Indonesia can be seen to expand notions of Indonesian prosperity along the lines of exploitation of land and labor in the archipelago, namely in the persistent national claim to Papua New Guinea because of the lucrative natural resource available there.<sup>190</sup>

The developmentalist agenda of the New Order prioritized modernization and industrialization according to Western capitalist standards of development which initiated deep cultural shifts in terms of notions of prosperity in the agrarian context. Suharto imagined himself

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<sup>189</sup> Ricklefs, M. C. *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200*. 4th ed., Stanford University Press, 2008.

<sup>190</sup> An area which remains lucrative for the state with the continued operation of the Grasberg mine, as well as a site of persistent struggle for independence by the Free Papua Movement but which are heavily censured by the Indonesian state today.

as the “Father of Indonesian Development” / “Bapak Pembangunan Indonesia,” responsible for guiding the “floating mass” towards greater modernization. Rapid economic expansions facilitated by western capital investments (both corporate and World Bank sponsored as was the case at Kedung Ombo) shifted value systems as traditional notions of agrarian prosperity were devalued over modern industrial agricultural techniques. Agrarian communities were most dramatically affected by these changes, disenfranchised both from the modern economic goals of the state as well as from cultural traditions embedded within agrarian livelihoods. The BIMAS programs of the late sixties and early seventies,<sup>191</sup> for example, were perhaps some of the most detrimental in terms of the importation of western developmentalist standards in agricultural practices that had far reaching effects on cultural practices in Java.<sup>192</sup> Stripped of economic agency and forced into cities for low-wage factory work, these changes were also environmentally devastating to local ecological practices and symbolically devastating to local traditions surrounding agrarian cultivation.

Despite the longstanding importance of agrarian livelihoods within peasant traditions of Java, *cerita rakyat* (folk stories) had largely fallen out of circulation in Java. Toto Rahardjo notes how the absence of popular knowledge of folk stories surrounding Dew Sri is directly linked to changes in agrarian production throughout Indonesia, most notably the impacts of the Green Revolution on rice production in Java.

“They’re all gone! They started disappearing when farmers lost their seeds. When suddenly they got seeds from the state, farmers stopped understanding their origins, didn’t understand their genealogies. It is usually the women who would be the experts in selecting seeds for the next harvest and teach their children. They would ‘teach’ so to speak, but would really just have their children help and then they would learn from doing. This doesn’t happen anymore. Everyone buys seeds, no one selects them” (Rahardjo, *Oral History* 5 Mar. 2015).

The changes in access and distribution to seeds he discusses are most immediately the result of the Green Revolution in Indonesia, which profoundly altered the shape of agrarian livelihoods during the New Order. The introduction of high-yield rice hybrids were designed to optimize and industrialize agrarian practices in Indonesia. While these strains could produce greater quantities of rice on smaller plots of land each season. They also quickly depleted the fertility of the soil and could no longer propagate viable seeds for further cultivation, and it became a criminal act even to replant the seeds. Fields then needed to lay fallow for longer periods of time and changes to the structures of access to seeds instituted greater dependence on chemical inputs of fertilizers and pesticides.<sup>193</sup> This created a cycle of dependence on input-heavy resources in agrarian

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<sup>191</sup> BIMAS is an acronym for either *Bimbingan Massal* (Mass Guidance) or *Bimbingan Masyarakat* (Community Guidance).

<sup>192</sup> “BIMAS is a system of agricultural expansion, planned on a mass scale, that aims to raise agricultural production, and at the same time to increase the prosperity of farmers (specifically) and of society (in general)—all in the context of building a just and prosperous society based on Pancasila, by the will of god. Soedarsono Hadisapoetro, 1967” as quoted in Rieffel, Alexis. “The BIMAS Program for Self-Sufficiency in Rice Production.” *Indonesia*, no. 8, Southeast Asia Program Publications at Cornell University, 1969, pp. 103–33. For a detailed account of the unintended and widespread consequences of the BIMAS program in Java see Hansen, Gary. “Episodes in Rural Modernization: Problems in the Bimas Program.” *Indonesia*, no. 11, Southeast Asia Program Publications at Cornell University, 1971, pp. 63–81.

<sup>193</sup> Frossard, David. “In Field of Freezer? Some Thoughts on Genetic Diversity Maintenance in Rice.” In *Conserving Nature in Culture*, 144–66. New Haven, Conn: Yale University, Southeast Asia Studies, 2005.

production for small farmers who in turn accumulated greater amounts of debt because seed had to be bought.

Rituals surrounding Dewi Sri, as noted in the example from Pemberton above, are about safeguarding the seed, the harvest, and therefore the future sustainability of agrarian communities. As a tradition, they are less a reflection of the past than they are about ensuring future agrarian sustenance and cultural sustainability. With increased competition over natural resources, especially waters diverted towards industrial factories and large-scale agriculture during the New Order, such as was the case at Kedung Ombo, the long-term effects of the Green Revolution meant that many farming communities were effectively stripped of whatever economic agency they still retained. It is important to remember that these are the communities that were impacted by the violence of 1965. Their survival was a form of resistance, but it was followed by the rapid stripping away of anything they had left as peasants were reduced to “bare life.” The panicles of rice we see in the woodcut from Boyolali at the start of chapter one foreshadow the graves rising from memory discussed in Thukul’s poem from Kedung Ombo, it is the dead who speak louder than the people who remain alive and are silenced. This is also represented in the figure of Pak Kanjeng, whose refusal to speak leads to his only redemption in death. It is in these kinds of reflections, as peasants begin to speak again, listen and reflect on their situation and come to agreements on how to enact the next steps in which laku as praxis is most enlivened, and the next steps (*laku, laku’an, lakon*) are imagined. The critical recuperations of tradition at SALAM are a performative resistance and expression of resilience.

Rahardjo connects the deprivation of seeds with the deprivation of folk stories to discuss the ways in which patterns of ecological and cultural loss reflect the economic changes of the New Order felt most dramatically among agrarian communities. *Sri Mulih* performance traditions also experienced a decline in circulation during the twentieth century. They were replaced instead by state programs to disseminate information about the use of modern IRRI hybrid seeds, fertilizers and pesticides. Forms of resistance to these industrialized agricultural methods as well as the devastating effects of the Green Revolution also came through modes of Community Integrated Pest Management.<sup>194</sup> What’s important note here is the way in which Rahardjo’s anecdote highlights how stories, rituals and practices surrounding Dewi Sri carry forms of learning that are embedded in the everyday. Members of SALAM revive the narratives and rituals of return to agrarian prosperity in the context of education at SALAM in order to recover from these cultural and ecological losses and highlight the ongoing resilience of peasant communities. Their contemporary revival of agrarian traditions surrounding Dewi Sri are part of a larger project of transformative social change that attempts to return to the agrarian context as a site of local empowerment and social betterment in the lives and livelihoods of urban and rural communities alike. At SALAM they teach most centrally through cultural forms, artistic expressions, student research projects and collaborations with the surrounding community. Rituals and arts are “media belajar” (learning media), outlets of self-expression that open spaces for the development of transformative and emancipatory learning models. The arts are thus an important element in the adaptation of critical pedagogies that facilitates a process of coming into consciousness of the dynamics of marginalization and oppressions, what Freire termed “conscientization” in the Latin American context. They work to facilitate in students and the surrounding community the emancipatory tools of learning that is embedded in the local context.

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<sup>194</sup> See Fakhri, Mansour, et al. *Community Integrated Pest Management in Indonesia: Institutionalising Participation and People Centered Approaches*. IIED ; IDS ; REaD, 2003. See also Ooi, Peter A. C. *Beyond the Farmer Field School: IPM and Empowerment in Indonesia*. International Institute for Environment and Development, 1998.



Members of SALAM do this in order to reorient power dynamics surrounding knowledge production and education in Indonesia,<sup>195</sup> a thread that connects many different activist communities across the global south. The alternative educational project of SALAM similarly works to relocate the subject position of marginalized communities (inherently “on the edge”) as central to the production of knowledge. This kind of activist discourse operates in tandem with strategic marginality of SALAM located on the edge of a rice field. Embracing the multiplicity of their educational praxis is a movement toward the rural-urban interface.

The movements of Sri Wahyaningsih between Lawen and Yogyakarta are tied most notably to agrarian sustainability and are defined by the community of SALAM by a kind of cultural efficacy within the practice of local community traditions. She is a leader in her community, as well as a model of behavior and practice. Through the myths, stories and traditions surrounding rice in Java, Dewi Sri is imagined as a source of fertility and agrarian prosperity. At SALAM there is a play between the person, Sri Wahyaningsih, and the myth of Dewi Sri that highlights the ways in which the community of SALAM work to provide alternative models of agrarian prosperity and transform the circumstances of marginalized communities in Central Java. The symbolic return to agrarian Java that is so emblematic of the Sri Mulih stories also reinforces Wahyaningsih’s movement of return to Lawen as well as a larger return to grassroots efforts in the agrarian context that are an important part of recuperating from multiple generations of disenfranchisement from agrarian livelihoods in Java. In some ways, their idealization of the agrarian tradition is a strategic re-writing of historical traumas such as the physical violence of 1965-66 as well as modes of economic displacement from agrarian livelihoods during the New Order that exacerbated poverty among rural communities. In their recreation of idealized agrarian traditions surrounding Dewi Sri, members of SALAM appeal to a wider nostalgia of the broadly defined agrarian origins of Indonesian identity, as well as of Javanese identity more specifically.

Wahyaningsih’s personal story is repeated and idealized at SALAM because of the ways in which it brings attention to the resilience of peasant communities. For example, Wahya grew up in Klaten and as she recounted her childhood memories, she placed a great deal of emphasis on the importance of the rice harvest for her family and the surrounding community. Here she describes the day-to-day activities of her family’s farm in Klaten, and the ways in which the rice harvest strengthened community solidarity and the vitality of their agrarian livelihoods.

“Every day at my home there would be at least 80 people, during the harvest sometimes more than 200 people working. Our home was never silent. In Klaten, some pounded the rice, some [cut the rice with ani-ani] in the fields. At harvest time there would be shadow-play performances [wayang] at my home where we had a gamelan and a set of shadow puppets. There was a group in our village that played. There was also a famous shadow-puppet master [dalang] and people who would study at our home. [...] The front house was close to the traditional market, so there was a close connection to the market. It was right in front of our home. Before going to school at 7am, I would get up at 5am to go to the market to buy rice and soybeans from the farmers. In the afternoon I would sell them to my grandfather. Since I was young, I was already familiar with these things. My grandfather would say that he would check [our savings]. He had two sons and all of his grandchildren were girls. Every few months he would check [our savings] and add to it. If we had saved 100RP, he would give an additional 100RP. If we only saved 50RP, he would only give 50 RP.”<sup>196</sup>

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195 Authoritarianism of the New Order was perhaps the most aggressive and directly oppressive example, but the persistent elitist and bureaucratic dynamics of education in Indonesia is similar to many post-colonial contexts. See Darmaningtyas above.

The rice harvest was economically as well as culturally stimulating for their family farm in Klaten. As a gathering of the community, the rice harvest facilitates the continuation of agrarian livelihoods. This idealization of agrarian origins and connection to rice harvest rituals also plays in the realm of *samaran* in the way that it repackages a rather revolutionary movement of reclaiming peasant agency (as a cultural agency and in terms of agrarian production) in a fashion that is easily recognizable by officials and centralized forms of authority and power in Indonesia, which I will discuss in greater detail in my ethnographic description of Dewi Sri rituals momentarily. I learned later that part of the reason why there were so many people at her home engaged in the harvest festival is because her family owned a tobacco farm. Wahyaningsih had packaged an ideal image of agrarian prosperity, which was immediately recognizable to me, but excluded an element of discomfort from her family's role as Muslim landowners. Looking back to the history of agrarian change in Java, large-scale agrarian production of cash crops such as sugar and tobacco in Java were a major source of increased rural inequalities in Java.<sup>197</sup> This is largely due to the fact that cash crops hold a very different market position for export sale compared with sustenance crops such as rice which circulate more in local peasant economy.<sup>198</sup> Owning a tobacco farm carries a heavy-laden history of agrarian change associated with the disenfranchisement of many rural communities, but her reflection on her own background also contributed to her ability to see the effects of those changes firsthand in Klaten that, on a large scale, led to the contemporary erasure of peasant traditions surrounding the rice harvest. Her modestly surrounding the position of authority her family held in Klaten was indeed a latent discomfort with the position of Muslim landowners during the New Order which came to a violent climax in 1965. The reason why the massacres were so violent in places like Boyolali, where peasant organizations such as BTI (Farm Workers Front) were so prominent, is because their demands for land reform were in direct odds with Muslim landowners' interests. The role of the Muslim elite in the communist killings is difficult topic to grapple with,<sup>199</sup> but for Wahyaningsih, this discomfort became a source of later reflection, in terms of praxis, and therefore a source of later actions. This is also paired with her choice to convert to Christianity, as discussed in the last chapter, which caused a significant rift with her parents. The idealization of these stories is a strategy through which Wahyaningsih and the SALAM community are able to create the conditions through which collective and personal traumas to find expression, to be voiced instead of silenced, as a step in the process healing and enacting transformative change.

There is also a strong tradition in Java regarding how people who are economically better off are seen as leaders and therefore as benefactors.<sup>200</sup> Critical theorists might see benefactors like Wahyaningsih's family as providing some form of charity for peasant communities, when in actuality this relationship is hugely constitutive of the creation of community in the Javanese

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<sup>197</sup> See for example Knight, G. Roger, and Colin Brown. "Commanders and Subalterns: Foreign Capital, the Sugar Industry, and Farmers and Workers in Rural Java, 1931–59." *Indonesia*, no. 101, Southeast Asia Program Publications at Cornell University, 2016, pp. 85–102.

<sup>198</sup> See Barbier, Edward B. "Cash Crops, Food Crops, and Sustainability: The Case of Indonesia." *World Development*, vol. 17, no. 6, June 1989, pp. 879–95.

<sup>199</sup> In *Kidung Para Korban*, for example, a group of Muslim activist and scholars enable performance arts and literature to attempt to raise awareness of personal stories of communities victimized by the violence of 1965 in order to address the ways in which Muslim communities, especially from the mass organization Nahdlatul Ulama, were involved in the killings in attempts to recognized and heal from those traumas. Setiawan, Hersri. *Kidung Para Korban: Dari T tutur Sepuluh Narasumber Eks-Tapol*. Pustaka Pelajar, 2006.

<sup>200</sup> See Anderson, Benedict. "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture." *Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, Cornell University Press, 1972.

village context, as reflected in Wahyaningsih's memory above. In "All that is Gone," a short story by Pramoedya Ananta-Toer, for example, he recounts his mother's family who were also Muslim people with land and their connection with a tradition of stories surrounding sultans as benefactors who in times of economic crisis and epidemics (*pagebluk*), would play an important role to feed the people. For Wahyaningsih, her hesitation to share the details of the relative wealth of her family is also a reflection of the ways in which, as a newer generation, she was critical of the older generations, as well as how through the transformative movement "charity" and "benevolence" is shifted towards empowerment in the Freirean sense. Empowerment in this context does not involve merely extending a helping hand, as envisioned in the relations of power within a patron-client model, but rather is a subversion of the hierarchies of patron-client relationships which redefines the patron-client relationship in terms of its role as a failsafe for collective survival in times of crisis.

The movements of return to an agrarian homeland enacted by Sri Wahyaningsih, in many ways parallel the return of Dewi Sri in terms their movements of resistance to central authority (be it kings or states) but serve to invert relations of power in conceptions of prosperity. The importance of Wahyaningsih's return is that she refocuses the point of return to a decentralized site of agrarian prosperity, rather than to the court, nation or other centralized forms of authority, and even her own centrality to the formation of SALAM. The agrarian context in this case is also a site that has and continues to change. It is no longer a space within which true food sovereignty (*kedaulatan atas pangan*) is even possible to accomplish, but the revival of the symbolic return to agrarian traditions through the revival of ritual surrounding Dewi Sri is a strategy through which members of SALAM package a transformational discourse of empowerment in the terms of tradition that is at once recognizable by both state bureaucrats and peasant communities. It is only when traditions are erased, or "updated" as in Rendra's *Struggle of the Naga Tribe*, in which the values of prosperity and power are inverted. This is also what happens in the larger discourse of new social movements, their newness is an erasure of peasant traditions deemed incapable of being updated to the "modern," "progressive" and "liberal" ideals of Western society. Through a revival of rituals surrounding Dewi Sri at SALAM, they work to decentralize and transform relations of power by recalling prior notions of agrarian prosperity where the power and agency lies with the people themselves and return to an imagination of futures which had been displaced by the loss of seeds. Their revival of stories and rituals surrounding Dewi Sri are not, however, without critical reflection, in fact they are transformed into a medium by which individuals can interrogate and shift notions of prosperity to reflect small-scale needs, rather than the large-scale tendencies of modern nation-states that tend to exploit the labor of the people and resources of the land. This is no small task, but by focusing on the small-scale dynamics, the agents of change become the people, the peasants, the farmers, the laborers, rakyat kecil, etc. It requires repetition, intergenerational connections, and critical reflection. In the Indonesian context it is working to undermine the indoctrination of the New Order, but also the more pervasive effects of global capitalism and liberal ideals embedded in the agrarian context. In the next section, I turn to reflect on my ethnographic encounters with the revival of Dewi Sri rituals at SALAM in 2015 in order to show how tradition is enabled as a strategy of resistance and resilience in the cultivation of transformative paradigms through participatory education.

### ***Celebrating the Goddess of Rice at SALAM***

*Macapat Dhadhang Gula*<sup>201</sup>

*“Ditungi panyebaring wiji  
Dipun jongko jangkep titi mongso  
Dimen kelis tulus wase  
Ki nabul dipun watun  
Lori lunga ama sakelir  
Mrih mrajak cekap toya  
Trubus lemu lemu  
Tandur subur ama lunga  
Jejel riyel awoh mbiyet ngemohi  
Dewi Sri baring boka*

*“Titi wanci amboyong Dewi Sri  
Among tani mulya audum boga  
Acecawis ing lumbunge  
Sri mulih dipun pethuk  
Sinjang wilis rikmo rinakit  
Ron jati sakembaran  
Lelambaran ipun  
Among tani suka suka  
Deso rejo murah boga Sri mulih  
Berkahing gusti lewosa” (Sutini)*

“Count the seeds we cast  
Calculate the perfect timing  
For everything to run smoothly  
To bring what is wanted  
For the pests to be gone  
For there to be enough water  
For the plants to flourish  
Fertile plants free of pests  
Growing full  
Dewi Sri gives them food

“Now is the time to bring Dewi Sri  
For the farmers to share  
Prepare the granary  
Sri returns home to be picked up  
Green cloth and fastened hair  
A pair of teak leaves  
As a base  
Farmers are joyful  
Village prosperous food plenty as Sri returns home  
Blessings from the almighty God”<sup>202</sup>

In my return to the cultural components which are enabled within the transformative methodologies of participatory education that is the central focus of my research, I present the above *tembang* as an entry point into my ethnographic interactions with members of SALAM in Nitiprayan, Yogyakarta. This *tembang* was composed to commemorate the *pesta panen* rice harvest festival in 2015. In the enactment of rituals surrounding Dewi Sri, known as *wiwitan*, the *tembang* serves as an example of the ways in which Javanese tradition is enabled as a medium of transformative change. Written and performed by Sutini, a community member of SALAM, the *tembang* adheres to formal aesthetics of traditional Javanese composition while creating space for adaptation and new elaborations by the composer who invokes an imagination of the myths, arts and agrarian practices surrounding Dewi Sri. The composer (who in this case is also the performer), reflects on the cultivated agrarian landscape through the artistic tradition of Java to bring a world of ideas, myths, stories, and traditions surrounding Dewi Sri into the contemporary celebration of the rice harvest at SALAM. In form, the *tembang* is structured by a line-by-line syllabic structure and rhyme scheme of ending vowel sounds—1. 10i, 2. 10a, 3. 8e, 4. 7u, 5. 9i, 6. 7a, 7. 6u, 8. 8a, 9. 10i, 10. 7a—of which the pattern is repeated twice. Within each stanza, the syllabic and rhyming scheme is nonsymmetric, momentarily disjointed without an initial pattern, but with the repetition of this structure in the second stanza the *tembang* establishes a complex 10-line cycle. Musically it is composed according to *dhandang gula*, a formal melodic pattern from the Javanese gamelan tradition that is considered appropriate for moments of celebration

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<sup>201</sup> Written and performed by Sutini, Pesta Panen SALAM, 17 March 2015.

<sup>202</sup> My English translation was created in collaboration with Margareta Widhi Pratiwi, an author of Javanese literature and facilitator at SALAM. She works with the kindergarten students (TK) at SALAM. When we translated the Javanese poem into Indonesian together, we sat in tiny chairs next to a group of kindergarteners sculpting with clay. At regular intervals we took a break from our conversations to talk with the kids about their artistic creations. Much of the learning process at SALAM happens in this way as a kind of fluid blending of many kinds of educational activities amongst a wide range of age groups and levels of ability. On this day in particular, I became a student of Javanese at SALAM for the purpose of generating this translation.

and cheerfulness. Within the prescribed melody, the composer creates new lyrics to incorporate imagery of agrarian Java and the *wiwitan* ritual. The composer elaborates on the dynamics of preparing for the rice harvest; surveying the progress of plants, calculating appropriate timing, remaining hopeful that environmental factors and human efforts in cultivation throughout the season will ensure a fertile harvest. These practical considerations of the rice harvest are described alongside imagery of the mythic goddess, Dewi Sri. She is embedded in the Javanese pastore, idyllic but not static, alive in cyclical patterns reflected in the formal aspects of the *tembang*, embellished in the free lyric compositions that follow the steps of the harvest as a means by which to initiate Dewi Sri's symbolic return, embodied in the rice itself, her sacrifice and rebirth are what sustain the life of the community.

This *tembang* illustrates the ways in which Javanese traditions are recast as a tool for critical reflection in the education at SALAM. The composer deploys aspects of the mystical Javanese tradition known as *kejawen* that are widely recognizable in Java. In *Mysticism in Java*, Mulder discusses the ethical and social philosophies from the tradition of *kejawen* Javanese mysticism that shape a prevailing view of social life embedded in Java.

“The common dictionary gloss for *kejawen*, or *kejawaan* in Indonesian, in 'Javaneseness', and 'Javanism'. This last word is a descriptive label for those elements of Javanese culture that are considered to be essentially Javanese and that define it as a unique category. These elements are generally thought to hark back to the Hindu-Buddhist period of Javanese history and are combined into philosophy—in the sense of a particular system of principles for the conduct of life. As a system of thought, Javanism is singularly elaborate, containing a cosmology, a mythology, a set of essentially mystical conceptions, and suchlike. These give rise to a particular Javanese anthropology: a system of ideas about the nature of man and society that, in its turn, informs ethics, customs and style. In short, Javanism provides a general universe of meaning; it is an integrated body of knowledge that serves to interpret life as it is and as it appears to be” (Mulder, 16).

His definition and subsequent discussion of the term in relation to the construction of authority in the New Order state is worth noting in relation to the revival rituals at SALAM. What is key here is the interpretive potential of what Mulder refers to as “Javanism” that both reflects back on the Hindu-Buddhist period of Javanese origins, and which orients new meaning as it is reframed in the contemporary enabling of those traditions. The composer in this case becomes an important interlocutor in the negotiations of precisely how tradition is recalled, and then also how it is reoriented towards the future. On the surface, the above *tembang* “as it appears” has the effect of appealing to the nostalgia of idealized and primordial traditions of agrarian Java, but in effect is redetermining meaning and resonance for members of SALAM involved in the reenactment of agrarian traditions as directly linked with the transformative pedagogies of SALAM today. In a sense it is a trickster move, not unlike Mangunwijaya or Semar, in which what it seems is not entirely what it means. The *tembang* then creates space within which adaptation, change, and redetermination of meanings do not reflect back on the “original” court traditions of Java but are instead re-situated within the participatory educational context of SALAM.

To articulate this point in greater detail according to the formal aspects of the *tembang* within Javanese mysticism, it is significant to highlight the prominent interplay between traditional artistic forms derived from Javanese *kejawen* mysticism and new innovations by the composer. The interlocking melody, rhyme and syllabic structure, for example, operate together as an incantation or spell, intended to bring into being the alignment of divine and human

forces.<sup>203</sup> “*Titi mongso*” or “appropriate timing” points to the significance of finding an appropriate and auspicious time for a ritual celebration of Dewi Sri (Sutini). The timing of the harvest festival is calculated in the Javanese calendar by a complex mapping of cycles that align with musical expressions and daily cycles of life in Java.<sup>204</sup> Aligning the rituals with the timing of the harvest works to protect the relationship between humanity and the divine, restore harmony, and ensure the continuation of life and of future rice cultivation. Spiritual, natural, cultivated, ephemeral, material, divine and human interactions become the rhythms of the poem. Together the formal and non-formal aspects of the *tembang* create space for reflecting cycles of human and divine intervention, of the natural world and agriculture in Java. The imagery, rhythm, sounds and repetition in this *tembang* work to bring into being a new assembly of relations that are part of contemporary Javanese cultural practices. The imagery and formal features work to revive an imagination of agrarian stories, myths, arts, culture and practice that the community asserts have been eroded and erased by decades of change in Indonesia, most especially in the agrarian context. Repetitions of traditional forms such as the *tembang* and *wiwitan* ritual combined with new creative innovations are an important part of the way in which tradition is reinscribed within educational projects at SALAM. In turning to the preparation of events leading up to the harvest festival, it become more apparent the ways in which tradition is change in action, that is within the steps of laku as praxis at SALAM.

The above *tembang* was performance at the opening invovation of the two-day pesta panen festival at SALAM in 2015. As the *wiwitan* ritual and *pesta panen* harvest festival are celebrated alongside a variety of educational projects at SALAM, tradition is therefore reinscribed in participatory action. The event is designed to foster greater awareness of largely forgotten traditions of agrarian Java, but perhaps most importantly it actively generates a great deal of community involvement in which adults, children, local bureaucrats, and peasants all participate together, sharing in the creation of new meaning as situated within the contemporary community of SALAM. As a participatory method used to empower the community, the bounds of empowerment extend far beyond the elementary students who are the stated focus of the event at SALAM, and in fact comes to include a multiplicity of actors.<sup>205</sup>

In the weeks preceding the *pesta panen wiwit* rice harvest ritual and festival, preparations are incorporated into the curriculum at SALAM. Students, parents, facilitators, community members, educators, and farmers, go through a great deal of preparation in order to host this annual event. Students learn about traditional arts such as dance, song, and visual arts as part of their daily curriculum, as well as how to prepare traditional foods and decorations that serve a symbolic function in the rituals, as well as participate in the ceremonial rice harvest cutting itself. Educational outreach programs are also incorporated in which groups of women farmers gather to discuss techniques in growth, production, and sales of rice harvests within local and regional markets, and parents are invited to cultural seminars to learn about the symbolic details

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<sup>203</sup> For a detailed account of the ways in which musical expressions map onto existing epistemological patterns in Java see Hoffman, Stanley Brian. “Epistemology and Music: A Javanese Example.” *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 22, no. 1, University of Illinois Press, 1978, pp. 69–88. Important for consideration here is the way in which recognitions of melody precedes the meanings derived from the linguistic content. As Hoffman writes, “during a performance, many Javanese can recognize a meter by its melodic contour before the necessary linguistic information” (71-72).

<sup>204</sup> See Becker, Judith. “Time and Tune in Java.” *The Imagination of Reality: Essays in Southeast Asian Coherence Systems*, edited by A. L. Becker and Aram A. Yengoyan, Ablex, 1979, pp. 197–210..

<sup>205</sup> See Appendix D for my full ethnographic descriptions of the two-day *pesta panen* rice harvest festival and *wiwitan* rice cutting ceremony. I have included here a summary of key details drawn from that narrative in order to construct reflections on the meaning and significance of the event in this chapter.

of the ritual itself, as well as their meaning and significance within Islamic and Javanese cultural frameworks. These kinds of educational outreach programs are a common occurrence at SALAM, as students, parents, local neighbors, artists, researchers, friends and family are invited to learn collectively, illustrating another facet of the ways in which traditional cultural practices are reinscribed within their transformative and emancipatory educational projects that extend beyond the immediate confines of the school itself.

On the day of the *wiwitan* rice cutting ceremony, there is a lively buzz of excitement from students and community members. Preparations for the rice cutting ritual are facilitated by a few of community elders who are responsible for enacting the ritual itself. The elementary students of SALAM are of course central to the event, and their learning process is importantly situated within the intergenerational knowledge transfer from elders who held these traditions in the past, now teach the ritual actions to this next generation. After the ritual, the *pesta panen* festival is an all-day event in which traditional and contemporary performances take place by students and community members, local foods are shared and there is a large informal market which sets up in the main courtyard of SALAM in which farmers sell their goods alongside many small entrepreneurial projects by parents of SALAM. The multiplicity of actors and stages which are incorporated within the *pesta panen* harvest festival and *wiwitan* rice cutting ritual are emblematic of the ways in which traditions surrounding Dewi Sri are transformed into actionable sites of praxis at SALAM.

There is one additional figure that I want to situate within the revival of traditions surrounding Dewi Sri that serves as a counter to the “idealization” of agrarian traditions, that is, the image of a grotesque and ugly peasant. This is a topic which I have discussed in previous chapters regarding the notion that the derogatory image of the “backwards” peasant caught in the trappings of tradition was reproduced not only by the New Order, but also within Western scholarship of new social movements. During the *wiwitan* ritual I attended in 2015, however, this image manifested in literal form. There was a member of the surrounding community of farmers in Nitiprayan who helped to assist in the ritual actions. What was most notable about his presence was the mask that he wore during the event; a mask which depicted the ugly features of a peasant with comically large teeth, an exaggerated chin, wide eyes and dark colored skin.<sup>206</sup> This kind of ugly peasant depiction is a stark contrast to the beautiful and elegant refinement of courtly characters that are more commonly seen in Javanese arts, perhaps most especially in the *wayang* tradition. It is, however, more like depictions of the *punakawan* clown gods whose coarse and bulbous features, most especially of Semar, are indicative of their close connection to the *rakyat kecil*. As tricksters, the *punakawan* are able to traverse between the world of the gods in heaven and the profane realities of earthly existence. This ugly peasant figure I observed at the *wiwitan* ceremony at SALAM also stood out quite prominently as a point of contrast to the beautiful and traditional ceremonial actions of the *wiwitan* ceremony and the small totem of bound rice which represented Dewi Sri, but in so doing embodied the trickster persona of the *punakawan*. The masked figure was simultaneously peripheral to the ritual actions—it played no official role in the *wiwitan* ceremony—and yet was central to the actions, standing closest to the ritual itself in a posture which seemed to oversee all the crowd of students, parents, officials, and other guests like myself which gathered around to witness the ceremony. Easy to dismiss, this figure is in fact the transformative figure. The one whose lowly comical expression is in fact a reflection of the same pained expressions of the peasant figures in the Boyolali woodcut or the silent tragic figure of Begejil in *Pak Kanjeng*. Their coarse expressions reflects pain, suffering,

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<sup>206</sup> See Appendix C, Figure 4.

anger, and oppression. Oppression constituted by those in positions of power and authority over the fate of peasant communities.

I bring this peasant figure up again here to reflect on the significance of a group of government officials who attended the pesta panen wiwit at SALAM in 2015, as well as a group of police officers who tried to stop it from taking place. This event brings a great deal of visibility to SALAM, and so also attracts the attention of local and regional government officials. I want to include now a short section of my ethnographic notes here to illustrate how tensions still emerge in the revival of agrarian traditions, but the ways in which the trickster-like ability of figures such as Wahyaningsih as well as the masked peasant mentioned above work to displace and disorient officials who interact with these kinds of transformative movements at SALAM. This section of text I include here took place immediately after the wiwitan rice cutting ritual.<sup>207</sup>

*Off in the distance, I noticed a group of officials from the local agrarian land bureau standing in the center of the rice field overlooking the ritual process. The day prior, these same officials had performed an assessment of the projected yield of this particular rice field. On the day of the ritual, they seemed to be visibly touched by the community actions of the wiwitan rice cutting ceremony. After the ritual was complete, they asked if they could cut the padi (rice) themselves, mimicking the movements of the elder and posing for pictures to proudly display the fronds of fertile rice they had just cut with their machetes. In playful contrast to the officials stood a local man standing in the middle of an adjacent rice field with a carved wooden mask depicting a kasar (coarse looking) peasant figure. As I observed this revival of agrarian traditions, the mask brought my attentions to the longstanding antagonism between peasants and officials in Java, be they modern state bureaucrats, military personnel, or ministers of court traditions in Java. Here in this moment, the bureaucrats and peasants each enjoyed this revival of agrarian cultural practices together in a manner that seemed to transform traumas of their past relationships into something shared and now enjoyed by both. This is no small feat considering the violence that lay just under the surface of memory in Java, stories of agrarian disenfranchisement that older generations of farmers in Java experienced throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The nurturing figure of Dewi Sri brought out through these rituals felt like a bridge working to heal the rift between disenfranchised agrarian communities and state authority in contemporary Java, at the same time the ugly peasant mask assumed a role of cultural trickster who transformed the official oversight of bureaucrats at this event into a playful and nostalgic reenactment of how they imagine their own shared agrarian origins.*

The officials I witnessed on that day playing through the performance of the rice cutting ceremony were such a sharp contrast to my knowledge of state bureaucratic control over peasant traditions. It is generally more common that officials would impede such an event. Wahyaningsih, in fact, shared with me after the fact that a group of police had indeed come earlier in the day searching for a certificate for the event. They asked about parking permits and some sort of problem which was going on with someone blocking the road, which she asserted to the police that SALAM could not be held responsible for because they have their own parking lot. She suspected the police were trying to bribe her for money but, of course, it didn't work. The coarse peasant mask, with laughter and sadness mixed into the figure's expression, resonated deeply with these kinds of continued points of conflict and tension that are not perfectly or ideally healed by the invocation of Dewi Sri. Most of the parents of SALAM are no

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<sup>207</sup> See also Appendix C, Figures 4-8



longer farmers, they are predominantly artists, self-employed, or also work as civil servants. These are communities that are already disenfranchised from a sense of agrarian livelihood. The revival of pesta panen and the wiwitan provide a sense of re-connection to traditions in Java that predate agrarian changes of the twentieth, but it is important not to essentialize *the* wiwitan *or* circulations of narratives surrounding Dewi Sri. These are not fixed or static traditions, they are actively being renegotiated in the present moment.

The invocation of Dewi Sri in ritual, song, and agrarian practice at SALAM work to ensure the sustainability of a rich and fertile contemporary educational environment that foregrounds the agrarian context as a central site of learning. Alongside the coarse peasant figure, the ideal revival of agrarian traditions can be seen not as a naïve return to tradition, but as a strategy of resistance and of continued resilience. The ways in which members of SALAM connect traditional notions of agrarian prosperity in Java with the goal of promoting *kedaulatan atas pangan* or food sovereignty within the curriculum at SALAM represents an important complication to the “idealized” narrative of return to agrarian Java. Food sovereignty is regularly discussed in conjunction with the pesta panen at SALAM, as well as within much of the curriculum design. Each day they provide lunches for students that are sourced from their small plot of land as well as surrounding farms. Their emphasis on food sovereignty is important for resituating educational processes within the immediate context of agrarian Java, as well as provides a link with international social movements such as La Via Campesina in the ways in which they highlight the intersections of food sovereignty with environmental, social, and political concerns. While most of the students at SALAM do not come from farming families, the revitalization of agrarian ideals at SALAM is linked to their critique of long-term processes of historical change in the agrarian context. The effects of globalization, the Green Revolution, as well as colonial and national legacies of systemic oppression that are among many causes of large-scale disenfranchisement from agrarian livelihoods in Java are regularly discussed and incorporated into the curriculum at SALAM. This not the exclusive focus of education at SALAM, but a starting point from which much of their educational efforts begin.

There have been so many irreversible changes to the agrarian landscape of Java over the past century that have made true food sovereignty an unattainable ideal, for members of SALAM or anywhere in Java for that matter, and yet it is something that needs to be remembered. Members of the greater community of SALAM are not primarily farmers, even though they are promoting education surrounding agrarian practices and cultural traditions. From a purely utilitarian view, these rituals of return to an unattainable ideal of agrarian Java may appear “meaningless.” Why bother when the prospects of local food sovereignty are a distant dream? For the community of SALAM, however, these rituals create an important critique and an alternative imaginary in which the performance of tradition is integral to create and sustain communities of resistance and of resilience. As a form of critical reflection, they incorporate critical engagements with how food systems have been historically manipulated by those in power to create dependence on low-quality, cheap foods for peasant communities in Java. The stories of Dewi Sri and the rituals of return to agrarian Java serve as a cultural template for students to learn about nutrition, local farming practices and seasonal food consumption. Rather than being a hard and fast return to some form of primordial or original cultural tradition, they are gestures towards critical reflection. This is another example of how the “ideals” of a return to agrarian Java are an entry points into a critical discourse of greater awareness surrounding, for example, notions of food sovereign and notions of Javanese tradition. These rituals also are generative in their performative aspect. They create a form of knowledge-based sovereignty,

*kedaulatan atas pengetahuan*, in which the agents of knowledge production are independent from centralized forms of cultural hegemony reproduced through educational institutions. Here lies another key transformation. Their emphasis on food sovereignty is less about true food sovereignty, and more about returning the means of knowledge production into the hands of local rakyat kecil community actors. It opens space for imagining different ways of existing. This is done in incremental steps, not by an already imagined space such as the nation, but by keeping their imaginations open, rethinking and recalling memories of a time in which the greater well-being of peasant communities was central to life in Java, whether or not that actually happened, is still realized in the minds of community members as a site of possibility for imagining future prosperity. They turn that desire into something that is imaginable for these young kids, the next generation, and are therefore “seeding” the future.

### **Conclusion:**

I return to the notion of laku as an indigenous framework for understanding the symbolic actions enacted through rituals surrounding the goddess of rice, Dewi Sri, in the case of SALAM. Participation in a revival of agrarian traditions produces symbolic action within the learning process at the contemporary school. The meeting point of *budaya rakyat* (folk culture) and *budaya masyarakat* (the culture of Indonesian society) is an area which has historically fallen in a strict hierarchy in which national community supersedes the rakyat community. This is, however, an area in which the community of SALAM have come to redefine the terms of that interaction, decentering those hierarchies by placing the needs and actions of a multiplicity of rakyat kecil actors over the abstracted ideals of the state.

“[A]t SALAM we revive folk cultures [*budaya-budaya rakyat*], like the *pesta panen* [...which] was almost extinct and rarely held in Nitiprayan. SALAM tries to revive this tradition. It’s not just a ceremony. In addition to containing lessons that are full of meaning for the children, it is also very good for inviting the involvement of the surrounding society. Additionally, this is in fact the community’s desire. If foreign cultures enter [our community], we become very susceptible [to their influence]. Local culture has to be strengthened because of this, and the children are of course also involved. What is really exhilarating is when the surrounding community is also enthusiastic with this idea. They welcome this idea with pleasure. At every event at SALAM [we] always attempt to involve society [*masyarakat*].”<sup>208</sup>

By locating sites of learning and transformation within the preexisting traditions of agrarian Java, members of SALAM also open space for critical reflection on changes that have and continue to occur in contemporary Indonesia. The connection between western cultural influences and the loss of tradition is an important point of reflection that points back to contentious histories of agrarian change in Java. Art works are an important medium of critical reflection for students and community members of SALAM, and the educational goals of their community continue to

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208 “Sebagai misal, di SALAM kami menghidupkan kembali budaya-budaya rakyat, seperti pesta panen. Sebelumnya, budaya ini nyaris punah dan tak pernah diadakan lagi di Nitiprayan. Lalu SALAM mencoba memunculkan Kembali tradisi ini. Ini bukan upacara semata. Selain mengandung pembelajaran yang sarat makna bagi anak-anak, juga sangat bagus untuk mengundang keterlibatan masyarakat sekitar. Apalagi ini sejatinya adalah hajat masyarakat. Dan jika budaya-budaya asing masuk, kita menjadi sangat rentan. Sebab itu budaya local harus dikuatkan dan anak-anak juga mesti dilibatkan. Yang lebih mengembirakan karena masyarakat sekita juga antusias dengan ide ini. Mereka menyambut gagasan ini dengan senang hati. Dan setiap kegiatan SALAM selalu diupayakan untuk melibatkan masyarakat.” Toto Rahardjo, *Sekolah Biasa Saja*, 63.

echo ideas of emancipatory learning and critical pedagogies that have circulated widely throughout the global south.

While SALAM in Yogyakarta began as alternative educational outlet for elementary aged students, today it has grown into a community of over 250 students from kindergarten through high school. The curriculum at SALAM is created and adapted each year based on the needs of the students and the community. In July of 2015 I attended part of a series of curriculum development workshops that took place at SALAM. Wahyaningsih and Rahardjo, facilitators, and parent volunteers gathered for three days of meetings to arrange their curriculum for the following year. Broken down into groups by class, the parents built out large seasonal schedules within which students would then develop individual research projects. Collaborative projects and events are incorporated into the schedule. That year they were planning to involve some collaborations with KBQT as SALAM looked to expand their school to include high school level study. Curriculum design at SALAM is a very collaborative and adaptive process, and yet also very structured. The process of curriculum development is a dynamic process as the SALAM community regularly adapt their learning to the individual needs of students (including students with learning disabilities), changing economic, social and political circumstances, as well as to incorporate new opportunities for learning that present themselves in the surrounding community. The “school of life” model Wahyaningsih imagined when first working in Lawen is a reality today. Rahardjo writes about the shared hope at SALAM that their adaptive and participatory curriculum based on lived experience can be a model for other community schools.

In 2020, the community at SALAM also began conceptualizing a university oriented educational program. Through their sustained efforts, Wahyaningsih and the communities of SALAM in Lawen and Nitiprayan, are models for many other communities in Central Java working to cultivate independent educational initiatives outside of the purview of state or religious institutions. Since 2015, SALAM has limited its growth in Nitiprayan by setting a cap on new students but have also helped to create a sister school called *Sanggar Anak Akar* (SEKAR or The Rooted Children’s Studio) in the nearby neighborhood of Panggunghardjo. Wahyaningsih and Rahardjo are also regularly invited to visit and consult with new or developing community schools throughout Java. During my fieldwork, they visited a Montessori school in Semarang, an alternative elementary school in Salatiga called Lebah Putih (White Bees), as well as KBQT in Salatiga, each of which were working to model in some capacity the praxis oriented, student guided, emancipatory educational model at SALAM.

Finally, I draw attention to an image Dewi Sri created by Nano Warsono and Christopher Statton. It forms part of a collaborative mural exchange between Indonesia- and San Francisco-based mural artists called Bangkit/Arise, and their specific work with the Geneng Street Art Project in Yogyakarta.<sup>209</sup> Warsono is a lecturer at the Indonesia Art Institute in Yogyakarta (ISI) and father to one of the students participating in the sister school of SALAM, Sanggar Anak Akar. Statton is a San Francisco based mural artist and activist. In their collaborative mural with community members of the Geneng village, Dewi Sri is represented with a face from the Javanese wayang tradition. Her serene, down-cast expression and notably pointy nose and ears are symbolic of refinement and beauty. She carries newly sprouted rice plants as well as mature rice with golden panicles ready for harvest, representing a complete cycle of rice cultivation. This representation strays slightly from her depiction in Javanese wayang, however, as her four arms place her image outside of a typical Javanese imagination, closer to her Hindu counterpart, Lakshmi. Here she is holding the tree of life and an apple. These additions remind audiences of

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<sup>209</sup> See Appendix C, Figures 11 and 12.

Dewi Sri within a pre-Islamic context, opening possibilities for subtly challenging notions of Javanese tradition which is often tied exclusively to Islam in contemporary Indonesia. The image of a white cow at her feet harkens sacred symbols of the ancient world, predating the death of the golden calf by Abrahamic religions. Floating in the clouds, sunlight casts rays on a fertile rice terrace comprising her headdress, physically embodying the land, Dewi Sri is represented here in hyper-mythical form. Panning out to the full mural, Dewi Sri stands in opposition to a multi-headed monster reminiscent of a mickey mouse-like character. One of the heads is a pig with a top hat, another a snake gazing out from behind. The sharp-toothed creature is grabbing for a pot of water in the traditional Javanese *kendi* water pot, like the one used to bathe the totem of Dewi Sri in the *wiwitan* ritual at SALAM. The water pours out haphazardly under a cloud of rain where another monster stands beneath the shower carrying a spigot and money bag. A hammer in the monsters' hands, working under the guise of development, their eyes bulging as they gaze towards the money bags show their true intentions. The title above reads, "Air Sumber kehidupan, bukan untuk kerakusan", "Water is the source of life, not greed."

Here the fertility and prosperity of Dewi Sri stands in contrast to the water-wasting and money-grubbing monsters. Further complicating traditional representations of Dewi Sri, the images gain political meaning in their juxtaposition. Dewi Sri situated within a narrative of the contemporary agrarian context and the politics of water use in Java. The serene Javanese *wayang* mask she wears now carries an heir of sadness, yet independence, standing separate and self-contained but dangerously near the monster and a political struggle over water. The sun and sky surround her, the water that flows around her is contained within the terraces she embodies. The mural is in a rural part of Yogyakarta on the edge of an irrigated rice field, audiences of local farmers and residence are reminded of countless stories of the mismanagement and extrapolation of natural, agrarian, and cultural resources. This work was part of a series of public art project aimed at facilitating collaboration between village residents and artists in Yogyakarta. The scale of the image is noteworthy as it stands over 12-feet tall at the edge of a rice field in a small corner of the Ganang neighborhood of Panggunghardjo, Bantul, Yogyakarta. Dewi Sri is here transformed, from submissive to autonomous, gaining a political voice to comment on water politics. Larger than life in her mythic form, standing autonomously in the rice fields of Java and in opposition to the monsters of capitalist development.

Conceptually returning the beliefs and rituals surrounding Dewi Sri into popular cultural imagination, members of SALAM continue a tradition of cultural resistance and resilience that is embedded in the small-scale movements of a multiplicity of actors working at the interface between rural and urban Java. From the urban margins of the Kali Code community to the rural village of Lawen, and now in the suburban context of Nitiprayan in Yogyakarta, members of SALAM position the local needs of the community, and of children most especially, as part of their central organizing principles. Cultural traditions of the *rakyat kecil*—broadly defined as both urban and rural communities—are important sources of authority at SALAM. My focus in chapters two and three of this work constitute to two significant dimensions of a return to agrarian Java as part of a greater trajectory transformative social movements. The first dimension involves a physical return to a small village in Central Java. The second is a more conceptual return to agrarian Java. Rituals, arts, and traditions of agrarian Java, as they are reenacted and remembered by community members, are situated as significant sites of knowledge and learning. They are a source of critical reflection on agrarian change in Java, as well as a site through which symbolic resilience is constituted.

My focus on Wahyaningsih in chapter two mirrors the way in which the community of SALAM shape their own history around her story. The trajectory of her movements of return to agrarian Java also help to shape a wider understanding of the ways in which grassroots activists respond to and resist authoritarian policies. The manipulations of the concept of family, home, and what it means to be from agrarian Java that were solidified during the New Order, as well as the complete restructuring of notions of agrarian prosperity towards developmentalist goals, are all part of an important backdrop for understanding the contemporary community of SALAM. Through their continued efforts to shape an autonomous educational system at SALAM, their work locates a number of important features of transformative social movement activism in Java. These include, but are not limited to, the sustained resilience of agrarian communities, the importance of family, home and intergenerational learning, the enabling of tradition as a means for critical reflection and change, and the assertion of autonomy and self-determination for urban and rural peasant communities. They continue these transformative modes of grassroots educational activism most notably through a revival of narratives and ritual surrounding the goddess of rice, Dewi Sri. Wahyaningsih's own return to agrarian Java is emblematic of a symbolic re-vivification of the goddess Dewi Sri, that works to counteract the more paternalistic ideas of family and home that were reproduced during the New Order.

By creating new educational models drawn from older forms like the *Sanggar*, *tembang*, or *pesta panen wiwit* rituals of Java, the community at SALAM does more than merely preserve cultural traditions (“*melestarikan tradisi*”), they transform those traditions into sites in which the small steps of laku constitute new forms of knowledge (*ilmu*) for contemporary communities in Java. By embedding the participatory educational process in these everyday sites of learning, the school at SALAM is designed to “continue to sustain” (“*kembali lestari*”), a cultural space where education is part of life, family, and home.<sup>210</sup> Using their small plot of land in Yogyakarta, they work to suit the educational goals to the local context. Opening a variety of spaces for community involvement that extends beyond the school itself.

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<sup>210</sup> “Kembali Lestari” is a term drawn from one of the cultural workshops surrounding the *pesta panen* at SALAM in 2015.

#### 4 | **Participatory Learning and Village Empowerment, Transforming Notions of Kyai Leadership in Kalibening**

Komunitas Belajar Qaryah Thayyibah, The Learning Community for Village Empowerment, or KBQT for short, is the second case in this research. In the last chapter, I ended with reflection on an image of Dewi Sri set against the water grubbing monsters. This image provides an important connection between the cases of SALAM and KBQT. The history of contestation over water is an undercurrent to the growth of transformative social movements in Central Java. At SALAM and KBQT, in addition to the face-to-face connections, workshops, trainings, and educational outreach that facilitates the growth of the transformative rhizome, there is also an important connection created by flowing waters. At SALAM, it is within the waters that flow between the rice field irrigation canals in which students are today emboldened to play and learn from their carefree adventures scouting out fish and other small creatures in these interspaces of flowing water. But there also lies a very unnatural and contested history of water that is a longstanding source of struggle for many small-scale agrarian communities in Java. It is not easy to walk along these narrow channels. It takes attention to walk along the pathways that lead to SALAM, just as it takes attention to see how the waters that flooded the banks of Kedung Ombo also submerged a history of peasant resistance in the region in chapter one, or the ways in which the building of an open access irrigation network in Lawen discussed in chapter two is a continued source of life for the community despite the petty ideological differences that made it impossible for Wahya to continue her work there in the nineties. I draw attention now to the ways in which these waters both literally and figuratively continue to flow through submerged politics of contestation in Java. Following their paths reveals sites of resilience and change that are slowly eroding the histories of trauma and struggle that lie within the agrarian landscape. Despite contestation or damning, the waters continue to flow just as Wahyaningsih was able to shift her attention to Yogyakarta and expand her work to an ever-growing network of empowered communities.

The establishment of KBQT has a close connection to the history of contestation over water in the region. The school grew as an offshoot of a larger sister organization also located in Kalibening. Serikat Paguyuban Petani Qaryah Thayyibah (SPPQT) or the Farmers Association for Village Empowerment was established in 1999, most notably in response to the construction of Damatex, a large textile factory near Kalibening that threatened to divert and pollute the waters that flowed to farmers in the area. This farmers union is one of the largest in the region, which includes membership from farming communities in Boyolali, the area where BTI was once an organizing center for farmers prior to the New Order. Initially KBQT grew school to provide free education for the children of farmers in the region. It has since grown into its own entity that works independently from and collaboratively with its parent organization but retains a memory of connection to the agrarian activist origins of the school. The empowerment projects which operate in Kalibening today include both the learning community of KBQT that is the focus of my research as well as a farmer's union which I will discuss in brief to foreground how the participatory learning models emerge in Kalibening.

In this chapter I explore the ways in which transformative methodologies are implemented to facilitate village empowerment and shift notions of traditional Muslim leadership in Kalibening. Another figure emerges here whose personal history is integral to the

initial formation of the farmer's association and the community school. His name is Ahmad Bahrudin. He is known in the community as Pak Din or Kang Din. He comes from a landowning kyai family of pesantren leaders in Kalibening, located on the outskirts of the city of Salatiga. He was also part of a growing movement of social movement activists who began to engage in more concerted ways with the methodologies of transformative social movement organizing in the nineties. I follow the movements of Ahmad Bahrudin to demonstrate how a new type of kyai figure and transformative leader emerges in the engagement between traditional pesantren leadership and agrarian activism in Java. In scholarship, kyai leaders occupy a subject position that is typically overdetermined by representations of centralized and patriarchal patterns of leadership, and so this example reflects a very different starting point than discussed in the previous chapters. Nevertheless, similar transformations are constituted through symbolic actions. I focus especially on the ways in which traditional notions of power and authority are deployed to initiate transformative change and encourage greater participation by farmers and women. The symbolic actions of village empowerment in Kalibening—reflected in the name Qaryah Thayyibah—illustrate an important interruption to the dominant developmentalist logic of the New Order. My analysis of the case of KBQT contributes to broadening scholarly understanding of the ways in which decentralized community empowerment models support sustained movements of transformative action in Java.

### ***The QT Village Empowerment Model: Organizational Formations in Kalibening***

Kalibening, Central Java, is a village on the outskirts of the city of Salatiga. I call it a village because that is how the community position themselves, but this village was incorporated, in an administrative capacity, into the city of Salatiga during the New Order as a *kelurahan* (urban village). This shift is emblematic of the blurred lines and fuzzy distinction between what constitutes rural and urban Java. It also reflects an attempt by the regional (and by extension national) government to incorporate more closely the administrative oversight of a “village” like Kalibening, and an inherent discomfort, by centralized government officials and national institutions, as to the in their view of the “margins” of Indonesian society. The margins here are only marginal to the centralized authority of the state, and so embeds a latent distrust of the actions of peasant communities, a historical construct of colonial domination, New Order authoritarianism, as well as the contemporary nation state. The bureaucratic lines are constantly shifting, and Kalibening is situated on one of those lines.

The name “Qaryah Thayyibah” is a term derived from Arabic that means “desa yang berdaya” or “empowered village.” It was coined by Ramond Toruan, an activist and journalist for the Jakarta post who worked closely with the community in Kalibening in the formation of Serikat Paguyuban Petani Qaryah Thayyibah, The Farmers Association for Village Empowerment, or SPPQT for short. SPPQT was established in 1999 by a group of farmers and community organizers from Kalibening, alongside a group of activists from larger regional and national networks, all led through the coordination of Ahmad Bahrudin. Bahrudin is the leadership figure that is the subject of this chapter and whose role in the community I will discuss in greater detail throughout. Here it is important to note that he comes from a family of kyai because much of the strategies of community organizing in Kalibening enable decidedly Muslim identity formations to situate transformative projects within the cultural terms that are most acceptable to the community. Kalibening is a predominantly Muslim community associated closely with the traditionalist Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, and so negotiations of

cultural action in Kalibening also begin with Islamic framing. The term Qaryah Thayyibah appeals to Muslim audiences with its undeniably Islamized word choice, but the message works to frame notions of social transformation within familial, traditional, and plural cultural and religious change for the community in Kalibening. The name holds a great deal of strategic value for the community because of the way in which it both appeals to traditional Islamic values in the region and frames a discourse of transformative social movements within the organization. Ramond Toruan who coined the term, is not Muslim, nor is he from Kalibening; he is a catholic from Jakarta, but he suggested the term largely because of its resonance among the predominantly Muslim community of farmers in Kalibening. While the term is derived from Arabic, it does not indicate religious exclusion, in fact it comes to stands for a more pluralist sense of empowerment as evidence from the catholic man who gave the name, to the Christian woman who served as director of SPPQT from 2014-2017.<sup>211</sup>

Village empowerment, as the name suggests, is a central organizing principle for both SPPQT and KBQT, which takes a variety of forms including educational and economic initiatives, advocacy efforts, and a history of grassroots resistance to administrative restrictions set on the Kalibening community. SPPQT was initially created in response to agrarian changes in Java of the late twentieth century, namely the corporatization of agricultural industries and widespread trends in the movement of labor from farms to factories across Indonesia. The massive growth of factory industries during the New Order was especially impactful in Kalibening because of its proximity to Salatiga and the greater Semarang area. The port of Semarang is one of the most active ports in Java and therefore a major center of economic industry in the region. The main road that leads from Semarang to Salatiga is also one of the most densely populated industrial factory areas in Indonesia.<sup>212</sup>

In Kalibening there are two events that are remembered by the community as major turning points in the village relationship to larger economic and agrarian shifts of the New Order. The first was the incorporation of Kalibening into the greater administrative organization of the city of Salatiga, mentioned previously. These shifting administrative boundaries made it easier for corporate investment in factory production the region and the second event which led more directly to the establishment of SPPQT. This involved a dispute over farmer's access to water in response to the construction Damatex, an internationally owned garment factory built on the South-Western border of Kalibening. The corporate diversion of water into their factory created a water crisis among local famers in Kalibening. It not only exacerbated water scarcity at the time, but also polluted the remaining accessible water resources for farmers in the area. This was a major locus of activism among farmers in Kalibening which led to the establishment of SPPQT as an organization that could work to resist the legacies of uneven development practices in Central Java. The name "Kalibening" itself also means "Clear waters," so the irony of the clear waters of Kalibening being polluted by the industrial waste of capitalist expansions in the region was not lost on the community of farmers.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> At KBQT, interfaith dialogue is also an important part of their education, and Bahrudin regularly receives visitors and collaborates on projects with catholic and protestant leaders and schools in the region.

<sup>212</sup> This is the same region which Diane Wolf writes about in "Javanese Factory Daughters: Gender, the State, and Industrial Capitalism" in *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia*, ed. Laurie J. Sears (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

<sup>213</sup> This region has a great deal of natural spring formations in the foothills between the Ungaran and Merbabu mountains. This chain of volcanoes which connects with Java's most revered and active volcanic mountain, Merapi, is an area of great change in a landscape shaped by centuries of volcanic activity, which makes the land such a fertile site for agrarian production. The pristine waters that emerge naturally from the landscape in this region attract



Bahrudin became increasingly involved in advocating for the needs of rural farmers in Kalibening. The imposition of the Damatex factory in Kalibening was one of the main reasons for the establishment of the Association of Farmer's Unions (SPPQT) to serve as a more united front for farmers in the region to advocate for their own interests. Today SPPQT unites over 16,000 members across Central Java and operates as a center of advocacy designed by and for farmers at the local, national, and international level. They do a great deal of political, economic, and social organizing around issues related to the shifting agrarian landscape of Java, as well as serve in various educational capacities to ensure farmer's rights are upheld in changing economic circumstances. They regularly advocate for the needs of farmers within regional and national regulatory decisions. The Indonesian state places strong regulations on the agrarian market which has historically been a site of great disenfranchisement for small-scale farmers, and so as a mass organization of farmers SPPQT carries greater influence when attempting to shift regional and national regulatory decisions towards the interests and needs of small-scale farmers rather than state or corporate interests that typically dominate those interactions. Since SPPQT is constituted by farmers themselves, they are also more than an advocacy organization, they are themselves farmers representing their own interests. They also serve in the capacity of public outreach as a bridge between critical theory in movements for social change among farming communities and the concerns of farmers negotiating those realities in their everyday. In their advocacy efforts, SPPQT also serve as an intermediary organization between national and local regulatory bodies as they work to disseminate knowledge around policy changes, host farmer trainings around production techniques that promote greater autonomy for farmers, as well as organize trainings for members of SPPQT at the administrative level and among the local paguyuban groups. They hold public events and regularly publish their research findings and day-to-day activities in on open-source web-based platforms, facebook groups, and other online media content.

The paguyuban is an important organizational structure for SPPQT because it maps onto existing collectives of farmers. Local groups retain control over local agrarian issues, and they each send representatives to take part in the larger umbrella organization of SPPQT. These efforts are designed to ensure that community selected representatives have a voice at the SPPQT organizational level. The autonomy these farmers have over their livelihoods is very different than the kind of autonomy which was promoted through the New Order programs of *otonomi daerah* (regional autonomy) which never really decentralized things, instead it created a network of local administrative centers that syphon state funds away from reaching local communities. The paguyuban ensures that there is a collective notion of authority. Nevertheless, Bahrudin remains a central leader in the community who, as I will show in this chapter, strategically enables and subverts expectations of his role in the community, both in public view and within Kalibening.

*Komunitas Belajar Qaryah Thayyibah* (KBQT), or the Learning Community for Village Empowerment, inherits part of its name from SPPQT. It is in Kalibening as an extension of the home of Bahrudin which is directly in the center of the community. It was started in 2003 by Bahrudin and his son Rasih Mustaghis Hilmiy. As the story is told by Bahrudin, it was Hilmiy who first initiated the idea to start a school. As an elementary student, Hilmiy was dissatisfied with his education in one of the preferred state schools in Salatiga. When Hilmiy graduated elementary school, he did not want to continue into the state middle school, nor did he want to

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people for recreational activities and corporations for factory production; the CocaCola company and RedBull, for example, both have major factories located in this region.

attend the local pesantren established by his grandfather in Kalibening. Bahruddin gave Hilmiy the option to continue his studies outside an educational institution, either state or religious, that he could instead work to develop his own alternative schooling. Bahruddin said to him, “Boleh putus sekolah, asal tetap belajar” / “You may drop out of school, as long as you continue to learn.”<sup>214</sup> Hilmiy then recruited eleven of his friends in the community, mostly the children of local farmers who could not afford schooling beyond elementary education, to study together with the guidance of Bahruddin. As Hilmiy recounts, they started the school to provide free education for the children of farmers in the surrounding area, but it has since grown to include local students as well as students from around Java who live in dormitories located above the learning spaces (Hilmiy, *Oral History* 13 May 2015) First established in 2003 as the *Sekolah Menengah Pertama Alternatif Qaryah Thayyibah* (Alternative Middle School for Village Empowerment), the name was later changed to erase the word “school,” and highlight the community basis of their education. The students expanded the community to include high school aged students, and are today known as Komunitas Belajar Qaryah Thayyibah, the Learning Community for Village Empowerment, KBQT or Q-Tha for short.

Participatory learning is the hallmark of education at KBQT. The pedagogical approach at KBQT positions local communities as active producers of knowledge and learning guided by creative projects designed by the student themselves to foster critical discourse within the greater Kalibening community. The empowered village locale is an important site within which they situate their educational practices at KBQT as they work to foster a greater sense of empowerment among student members and the surrounding community. They regularly employ the distinction that they are “not a school, but a learning community” / “bukan sekolah, tapi komunitas belajar,” as a strategy to distinguish their style of participatory learning from state and religious educational institutions, a form of resistance to what they see as a system that continues to reinforce hierarchies of knowledge production and the marginalization of peasant communities. They do not employ a traditional teacher – student relationship, in fact they altogether avoid using terms like guru and murid (teacher and student) to reinforce a more collaborative and non-hierarchical learning process. At its core, it is a participatory educational system based on creative projects designed by students, facilitated by the surrounding community, and that is simultaneously rooted to agrarian, Islamic and activist histories in the region.<sup>215</sup>

Qaryah Thayyibah, or village empowerment, is as the name suggests, a model of village empowerment enacted through the direct participation of peasant communities. Both of these organizations are broadly influenced by the legacies of grassroots activism of the eighties and nineties. The atmosphere of cultural action surrounding Kedung Ombo not only influenced the activist networks which Bahruddin later interacted with in the nineties, a subject I will return, but Kedung Ombo is also located in the very same region where SPPQT unites farmers. It is not a coincidence that these are some of the same areas in which the violence of 1965 took place, this region has always been a nexus of peasant, and especially farmer, organizing and actions of resistance. Boyolai, for example, which used to be the site of the Barisan Tani Indonesia (BTI Indonesian Farmer’s Front) discussed in chapter one is also incorporated into SPPQT. The

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<sup>214</sup> This is a popular phrase repeated often by members of KBQT and Bahruddin himself and was a kind of informal motto community during my fieldwork.

<sup>215</sup> I will still use “students” to refer to members of KBQT for the purpose of clarity. Among members of KBQT, “kids” is often used to refer to students (i.e. “anak QT”), perpetuating the idea that their education is familial and intergenerational without implying a hierarchy of knowledge.

history of violence against farmers in the region, paired with the fact that Bahruddin and the community in Kalibening has a strong sense of Muslim identity, this community rests at an important and controversial intersection of some of the biggest points of ideological conflict in Indonesia, namely between Muslim and Communist affiliations, schisms largely solidified by the New Order government, but which have a long history in the region.

In this chapter I explore the transformative leadership role of Bahruddin in Kalibening. His story is a story of men, of his grandfather and father who established the pesantren and of his own role within the transformative movement of activists. In the example of Bahruddin, however, the patriarchal associations of male leadership are subverted interesting ways. I argue that Bahruddin enables various strategies of his predetermined role as a leader in the community in Kalibening, namely his as “sebetulnya kyai” (actually a kyai), as a that grants him greater space and flexibility for developing organizational strategies and implementing change in the community. For Bahruddin, his family genealogy plays a significant role in how he is seen to be part of a kyai lineage. Like a kyai, Bahruddin respects tradition, his family background, and local history. Combined with his involvement activist networks in the nineties and training in transformative methodologies, Bahruddin as a figure also works to transform hierarchical and patriarchal notions of traditional leadership in Java, and provides a key example of the kind of leadership that is today embedded in transformative notions of village empowerment.

### ***“Sebetulnya Kyai”: Ethos of a Kyai as Activist***

In May 2015, Rolling Stone Magazine Indonesia selected Bahruddin to receive an Editor’s Choice Award for his community organizing work among rural farmers in Central Java. The other recipients selected include contemporary musicians, actors, and other noteworthy pop cultural figures commemorated in the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of the magazine. Kalibening has received a great deal of regional and national media attention since the establishment of SPPQT in 1999 and KBQT in 2003, and very often Bahruddin is at the center of that attention. In the Rolling Stone article, Bahruddin is pictured with a stern look, his arms are crossed as he stares directly and defiantly into the photographer’s camera. His long hair is tied in a bun at the base of his head and he’s wearing a short-sleeved button-down *batik* (wax resist dye) shirt. It is a somewhat intimidating stance one could imagine on a professional fighter posed for competition. The author lingers on the details of his physical appearance in the opening lines of the article.

“A man who is proficient in martial arts and loyal to his long hair that is always tied back when he meets such names as President Joko Widodo, Governor of Central Java Ganjar Pranowo, KPK Chairman Abraham Sama, as well as a number of ministers like the Minister of Manpower Hanif Dhakiri. They came specially to visit the residence of Ahmad Bahruddin, to meet with the person directly at the Qaryah Thayyibah headquarters, Jl Raden Mas Said No. 12, Kalibening, Salatiga, Jawa Tengah. [...] He is the founder of the Farmers Association for Village Empowerment [SPPQT] whose members comprise thousands of farmers from Salatiga, Magelang, and the district of Semarang. He trains the farmers to manage the land and produce agricultural products that can improve the lives of the farmers” (Hidayat 69).<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> “Pria yang mahir bela diri ini setia dengan rambut panjang yang kerap terikat saat bertemu dengan nama-nama seperti Presiden Joko Widodo, Gubernur Jawa Tengah Ganjar Pranowo, Ketua KPK Abraham Samad, sampai deretan menteri seperti Menteri Ketenagakerjaan Hanif Dhakiri. Mereka khusus datang ke kediaman Ahman Bahruddin, bertemu langsung dengan yang bersangkutan di markas Qoryah Toyiybah, Jl. Raden Mas Said No. 12, Kalibening, Salatiga, Jawa Tengah. [...] Ia adalah pendiri Serikat Paguyuban Petani Qaryah Thayyibah yang anggotanya terdiri dari ribuan petani Salatiga, Magelang, dan Kabupaten Semarang. Dia melatih petani

This portrayal of Bahrudin as a defender of rural farmers and unlikely friend of the political elite is indeed a distinctive set of character qualities. The notion that he carries a set of identities that cross stereotypical boundaries are at the forefront of this description of Bahrudin in popular media. Rural traditions and urban modernities, farmers interests and the interests of the political elite, even his long hair is a signal to audiences that there is something about Bahrudin that doesn't quite fit the mold, so to speak. Bahrudin occupies somewhat of a deviant position when it comes to common stereotypes of leadership in Java, and his long hair is the ultimate stereotype of this. The authors exploit the assumption that longhaired men are either thugs or criminals. While the authors are perhaps merely appealing to the rock-inspired readership of Rolling Stone Magazine, Bahrudin is not exactly the "tough guy" persona depicted above, though he has been active in competitive martial arts throughout his life. He is a fun-loving person, always laughing and making jokes while scheming new projects to develop with the community in Kalibening. On one of my research visits to Kalibening, Bahrudin had been experimenting with growing stevia. He had hundreds of stevia pots planted on his upstairs terrace and wanted to chat with everyone about the benefits of stevia as an alternative to sugar, its dietary benefits, and the low impact agricultural methods that would be involved in growing stevia in greater quantity. His excitement over innovation and finding new ways to empower the local community is palpable to most visitors to Kalibening. The fact that this longhaired man does in fact associate with prestigious people like the president, governor and ministers, is meant to shock popular audiences. Add to this the fact that he actively works to assist and emancipate farming communities, taps into a latent discomfort of bringing peasants into politics. As we've witnessed in the previous chapters, a history of violent suppression of peasant movements in contemporary Indonesian history, namely the events of 1965-66, remains a salient trauma embedded in popular memory.<sup>217</sup>

This is not the first instance of mainstream media recognition for Bahrudin. He's been a guest on the popular television talk-show *Kick Andy* to discuss the independent publishing of student writing from the community school (KBQT). In 2012, he received the Ma'arif Award in recognition of his community organizing efforts promoting inter-faith dialogue. He is also regularly invited by various non-profits, governmental as well as private organizations to speak about his community organizing experiences in his hometown of Kalibening. In 2007, the national newspaper Kompas published a series of articles featuring KBQT.<sup>218</sup> Since that time, this small town on the outskirts of Salatiga has seen a steady stream of visitors to their community, all looking to learn more about the educational and agrarian systems that operate in Kalibening. Bahrudin is at the center of all this activity. In fact, on my first visit to Kalibening, I was simply instructed to "ask around for Bahrudin", and since everyone there knows him, they can always point you to his home, which is a center of community activity in Kalibening and has been for many generations.

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*mengelola lahan dan menghasilkan produk pertanian yang bisa meningkatkan taraf hidup para petani*" (Hidayat 69).

<sup>217</sup> It's worth noting here that SPPQT unites farmers from regions of Central Java that were formerly sites of some of the most brutal violence of 1965-66 and later were dislocated by the construction of the Kedung Ombo discussed previously in Chapter 1, most notably farmers from Boyolali. The irony of their continued marginalization, physically and here resonating symbolically under the surface of popular stereotypes, is a salient side effect of the New Order and precisely the point of conflict which Bahrudin centers his organizing efforts.

<sup>218</sup> Bahrudin. *Pendidikan Alternatif Qaryah Thayyibah*. PT LKiS Pelangi Aksara, 2007.

In Kalibening, Ahmad Bahrudin is called by the more familiar names, Pak Din or Kang Din. Born in 1965, he is the fourth of five siblings born into a large land-owning family in Kalibening, Tingkir, Salatiga, Central Java. When community members describe him, they commonly refer to him as “sebetulnya kyai,” “actually a kyai.” He comes from a family of kyai who established the pesantren in Kalibening and have been important leaders in their community for many generations. As the descriptions in Rolling Stone emphasize, he does not look like someone who would be acquainted with the political elite, nor does he look like a stereotypically puritanical Muslim man. Bahrudin’s association with being “actually a Kyai,” is however an important (albeit somewhat ironic) basis for understanding his contemporary leadership role in Kalibening. Being part of a *keluarga kyai* (kyai family), as he is, comes with a great deal of expectation surrounding notions of inherited leadership in Java. Kyai are the leaders of pesantren and therefore also the central arbiters of moral and practical guidance for rural communities across Java. Bahrudin does not hold any official position of leadership in Kalibening—he dons blue jeans, wears a long ponytail, and does not serve in any capacity as kyai of his father’s pesantren in Kalibening—yet the popular connotation of his “kyai-ness” remains an important basis for understanding his efficacy as a community leader in Kalibening. Some of his authority is inherited, and some of it he has acquired through his work empowering communities of farmers and students in Kalibening.

### ***Traditions: Charisma and Politics of Kyai Leadership***

In scholarship and Islamic practice in Indonesia, *The Pesantren Tradition: The Role of the Kyai in the Maintenance of Traditional Islam in Java* by Zamkhsyari Dhofier is considered an authoritative work on the cultural role and social responsibility of kyai in Java. There are multiple points of authority that lay the foundations for kyai leadership, what I am referring to as an ethos of kyai leadership that serve as a basis for community expectations surrounding leadership in Java more broadly.

“Traditionally, the term *kyai* refers to three different titles: (1) a title of veneration for sacred things—‘*Kyai Garuda Kencana*,’ for example, refers to the Golden Coach of the Yogyakarta Court.; (2) a title of veneration for old people in general; and (3) a title given by the community to a Muslim scholar who has his own pesantren and who teaches classical Islamic texts to his students” (Dhofier 34).

As discussed in Chapter 1, the distinction of kyai is enabled also by the performance arts group Kyai Kanjeng. In that case enabled more in the musical sense since gamelan are often given the title of kyai because they are considered sacred objects, but with their work bridging popular musical forms with Islamic pengajian, they also enable the slippery plesetan nature of the term for strategic aims. It is a versatile category that is deeply entrenched in Javanese culture and practice.

Bahrudin as “sebetulnya kyai” similarly bridges multiple categories of traditional and contemporary notions of leadership in Java. The most common association of the term kyai in Java today aligns with Dhofier’s latter definition, kyai are religious scholars and the founders of pesantren Islamic boarding schools. Mecca is the ultimate source of authority in this context, a form of internationalism embedded in the traditional landscape of rural leadership in Java which is also an ever-shifting relationship between religious authority and cultural practice. For kyai leaders in Java in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, landownership was of central importance to the established authority of kyai leadership. Owning land was in many ways a prerequisite for being

able to establish a pesantren during the late Dutch colonial era. The history of landownership in Java is of course intricately tied to colonial and post-colonial histories of land use, and many contemporary landowners, like Bahruddin, inherited their lands. In the early twentieth century, Bahruddin's grandfather Ismail was a landowner—"tuan tanah yang kaya desa" / "the master of the land who was rich in the village," as Bahruddin describes (*Oral History* 21 Sept. 2015). Kalibening became a small center of Islamic learning, and as part of a Muslim family who have owned the land in Kalibening for over a century, Bahruddin inherits authority that is tied to histories of religious, political and agrarian change in Java, offset by the small-scale village context and personal family commitment to education in Kalibening.

The close connection between landownership and the ability to establish pesantren, however, is not the only factor which determines the continued authority of a kyai in any given place. Authority derived from the immediate context and which includes a range of factors determined by the people and the locale out of which a kyai established prominence are some of the more contemporary determinants of their authority. Family and community values, village politics, proximity to nearby city centers, role in the management of agrarian production, and the specific social and cultural histories of the place and the people all contribute to the ways in which a kyai is seen by the community to be a leader. The colonial history of landownership and village authority is in many ways overshadowed by local community histories. Community members in Kalibening, for example, remember Ismail not for being a landlord but for promoting education in their rural community. Bahruddin expressed pride in the fact that in 1926 Ismail purchased an expensive set of *kitab kuning* (Islamic religious texts) for the community. He also instilled a reverence for the search for knowledge in all of his children and sent them to school in various pesantren across Northern Central Java, as well as funded their pilgrimages to Mecca. Bahruddin's father, Zamhuri, was educated in a number of pesantren across Central Java, most notably *Pesantren Tegalsari*, a minor pesantren addressed in Dhofier's work. It is considered minor because it was "established in a remote area far from urban centers and other pesantren" (Dhofier 72). Bahruddin frequently made reference to Dhofier's work as constituting much of what he knows about his family history as kyai, and in my reading of that history, the importance of the "off center", "minor" and rural agrarian origins of their contemporary movement in Kalibening.

After completing the hajj, Zamhuri became known as KH Abdul Halim) and with the land he inherited from Ismail, continued their family commitment to education by using the land to establish Pondok Pesantren Hidayatul Muftadi-ien.<sup>219</sup> This pesantren still operates in Kalibening today under the leadership of Bahruddin's eldest brother, KH Abda' Abdul Malik, and is located only about 200 meters distance from the KBQT learning community. Zamhuri also served as village lurah for over 25 years, and so carried both political and religious authority in the community. As a mediator between state and village level politics, successful village leadership during the New Order necessitated strategic responses to state limitations on political organization. By the seventies, the diversity of political parties had been reduced to a handful of officially sanctioned parties, and the *Partai Golongan Karya* (Golkar, the Party of Functional Groups) became increasingly dominated by Suharto and the *Angkatan Bersenjata Republik*

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<sup>219</sup> The history remembered by Bahruddin differs slightly from what is remembered at the pesantren. There, Ismail is credited for establishing the pesantren in 1926. This is likely the date he purchased the kitab kuning, but both versions pinpoint Zamhuri/KH Abdul Halim as a "great ustad" responsible for the growth of the pesantren from roughly 1940-1970.

*Indonesia* (ABRI, Indonesian Armed Forces). Bahruddin recounts the political strategies his father employed to become lurah of Kalibening in 1971.

“Pak Jamri would say that he instructed my father to select Golkar in the 1971 election. He worried that if there was no Golkar representation, he wouldn’t have a chance. In the end there were a few Golkar candidates. My father didn’t want to select Golkar, but he did after Pak Jamri instructed him, ‘*Kowe nyobloos Golkar, Zam, ben ono*. It will be serious if there are none [who represent Golkar]” (Bahruddin, *Oral History* 21 Sept. 2015).<sup>220</sup>

For this reason, Zamhuri, like many other local leaders whose political allegiances were not aligned with Golkar, feigned support for the national party. His allegiances were tied more closely the traditionalist Sunni Islamic movement in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama. Bahruddin remembers his father hanging a Golkar flag in front of their home as a strategy to continue to represent NU politics in Kalibening while safely operating under the guise of Golkar in the face of New Order tightening of official political channels.

“In the 1971 elections, of course all the village heads across Indonesia had to support Golkar [Golongan Karya], but my father supported NU. At home I remember seeing the board, the sign for Golkar, because the district and sub-districts required it. [...] My elder brother Afdak worked on an NU campaign. I saw him going from door to door using a stamp or paper with the symbol hollowed out [i.e. a stencil], this was before we had easy access to printing, then he would spray it with paint. I was only 6 years old at that time” (Bahruddin, *Oral History*, September 21, 2015).<sup>221</sup>

Zamhuri is today remembered for having established Kalibening as a local center of organizing for the community.<sup>222</sup>

“After the election in which he became Lurah, my father rallied the strength of the village community in many ways. He became their leader who believed strongly in the ideologies of Sunni Islam, almost fanatically so. He even named my younger brother, Rifquoh is his name, Rifquoh Suniah Wal Jamaah” (Bahruddin, *Oral History*, 21 Sept. 2015).<sup>223</sup>

“Suniah Wal Jamah” references “Ahl-us-Sunah Wal Jamaah” or “Adherents to the Sunnah.” The Sunni Islamic sect is representative of the majority of practicing Muslims in Indonesia, though they are largely divided between two mass Islamic organizations, the traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama and modernist Muhammadiyah.<sup>224</sup> Zamhuri’s affiliation with the Nahdlatul

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<sup>220</sup> “Pak Jamri cerita-cerita ketika pemilu 1971, disuruh bapak saya nusuk Golkar. Karena khawatir, kalau Golkar nol, sudah habis ini. Jadi biar adalah. Akhirnya ada beberapa. Jadi Golkar dapat berapa, tiga, berapa gitu. Sedikit sekali. Hanya Pak Jamri, terus siapa lagi. Bapak sendiri tidak mau nusuk Golkar, biar ada sampai suruh Pak Samri. ‘Kowe nyobloso Golkar, Zar, ben ono. Nanta kalau ga ada, bisa serius kalau nol’” (Bahruddin, *Oral History*, 21 Sept. 2015).

<sup>221</sup> “Ketika pemilu 1971, mestinya seorang kepala desa di seluruh Indonesia harus memperjuangkan Golkar. Tapi bapak saya memperjuangkan NU. Di rumah, saya ingat, saya lihat ada papan itu, plang, papan Golkar. Darena dari kecamatan dari Kabupaten harus begitu. [...] Kakak saya Afdak, itu kampanye NU itu saya lihat sampai rumah-rumah, dipake cap, pake kertas, dibolong-bolong gambar simbol, kan belum ada cetak. Disemprot pakai cat itu. Saya usia 6 tahun” (Bahruddin, *Oral History* 21 Sept. 2015).

<sup>222</sup> KH Abdul Halim is the name he was called after having completed the hajj and establishing the pesantren.

<sup>223</sup> “Setelah pemilihan jadi Lurah, Bapak saya betul-betul bisa menggalang kekuatan masyarakat desa, dengan NUnya, macam-macam. Jadi dia pimpinannya. Dia punya ideologi, sampai fanatik, Sampai adik saya, Rifquoh, namanya, Rifquoh Suniah Wal Jamaah” (Bahruddin, *Oral History* 21 Sept. 2015).

<sup>224</sup> Traditionalist have an extensive network of pesantren, are tolerant of local cultural syncretism as long as not in conflict with Islamic teaching, and have had a strong political orientation since national independence. Modernists

Ulama represents an important node for understanding the strong Muslim basis of leadership and authority in Kalibening. The trajectory of their family history—from landowners to kyai leaders—shows how notions of efficacious leadership is inflected most meaningfully by local level negotiations. Community memories of a kyai family who proved a longstanding commitment to the needs of the local village work to ensure their family’s continued role as religious and political leaders in Kalibening. When Bahruddin is referred to as “sebetulnya kyai,” it is this history that is remembered, even as it poses tension with his contemporary leadership role in the community which was largely inspired by the application of transformative methodologies, a topic that I will return to below. Bahruddin is no longer a leader of a pesantren, his elder brother has continued that family tradition, yet Bahruddin remains “sebetulnya kyai” in the community. His being both inside and outside the kyai tradition points towards an important shifts in notions of kyai leadership and another instance of underlying and continuous processes of change that are in some ways intrinsic to the agrarian landscape of Java.

Scholarship regarding traditional constructions of kyai leadership often focus on the charismatic qualities of an individual kyai. Dhofier articulates how in the early formation of pesantren, “[s]tudents who went to the Muslim teachers were attracted to them for their learning and magical prowess.”<sup>225</sup> Charisma is tied first and foremost to a kind of spiritual largesse, but Dhofier extends this “magical” kind of charismatic power to include the efficacy of a kyai in working with the community at large. Dhofier defines the role of kyai as one that is tied both to traditional Islamic spiritual ideals, as well as to their ability to adapt to the changing everyday experiences of the community.

“The *Kyai* have, throughout the history of Java, played a conspicuous role [...] In contemporary Indonesia, too, the *Kyai* have evinced the vitality of their faith. Amidst increasing material development, the *Kyai* have been regarded as the safeguards of the basic moral needs of the Indonesian community. [...] the *Kyai*’s faith, although strongly bound up with traditional Islamic ideals, has room for future development. The *Kyai* do not emotionalize their traditional outlook so as to transform it into a closed system by which they retreat from modernity into a fanaticism of crippling isolationist violence. Indeed, they have been successful in adapting their traditional interpretation of Islam for life in a new dimension” (Dhofier, 177-178).

This is an important point for understanding the changes in leadership authority in Kalibening because of how Dhofier locates notions of change and adaptation embedded within the traditional notion of Islamic leadership. From its inception in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the kyai tradition has always been incorporative of a degree flexibility of interpretation and practice. The kyai tradition also emerged against the backdrop of late colonial plantation politics. The scholarship of Sartono Kartodirdjo similarly situates the role of kyai leadership as tied to the needs of their constituents, but which ties their charisma to a more explicitly political

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have reformist mix of religious and secular education, strongly oppose syncretism, take a more literal interpretation of the Qur’an and Sunnah, and advocate for individual interpretation of the Qur’an (ijtihad) alongside traditional interpretations by the ulama.

<sup>225</sup> I keep the quotes around charisma intentionally to draw the idea from Anderson’s “Idea of Power in Java” that notions of “charisma” are tied to Western Weberian definitions and a judgment about the exceptionalism of these leaders, but within those notions there lies an indigenous notion of leadership tied to “magical prowess,” a concept foreign to many Western scholars but that is nonetheless very real within the cultural imagination of Java.



role among farm laborers working on plantations in the late Dutch colonial era in West Java.<sup>226</sup> In Kartodirdjo's work, *kyai* were integral in mobilizing populist movements of revolt against Dutch sugar plantation owners.

Education, however, is an important element that *kyai* play in establishing educational institutions for the families of laboring communities who migrated to these plantations as a mode of survival in the modernizing economy of Dutch colonial Java. An early form of educational praxis, perhaps, in the face of rapid economic expansion and increasing exploitation of peasant labor by the Dutch government. Educational access is an important dynamic within the politics of *kyai* leadership that is not purely tied to their individual charisma, in a religious sense, but also in terms of a politics of representation under exploitative economic circumstances. Charisma is in some ways merely a reductive euphemism for speaking about leadership that does not adhere to Western rational notions of authority tied to neoliberal ideals. The “short and disconnected” nature of peasant uprisings as seen from Dutch archival sources is in fact a deeper religious affiliation of communities whose resilience was in part due to the educational frameworks *pesantren* institutions provided for disenfranchised agrarian laborers on Dutch plantations.

The notion that *kyai* charisma is determined by the ways in which they reflect the religious values of a community, combined with their responsiveness of local needs—educational, economic and political—are sustained features of the *kyai* tradition. In the 1980s, the term *kyai kampung* emerged as a means by which to explicitly articulate this distinction and broaden definitions of *kyai* leadership beyond purely *pesantren* institutional affiliations. The everyday role of *kyai* as local leaders became an important distinction that circulated within a growing discourse of reform within NU, lead most notably by Abdurrahman Wahid. *Kampung* is a term that can refer to both urban and rural spaces in Indonesia and is closely connected with notions of home throughout Indonesia. Wahid articulates the important political role *kyai kampung* held as intermediaries between state or religious institutions and the everyday experience of communities living in urban and village *kampung* across Java.

“The existence of village *Kyai* is very important to the political life being built by this nation. The term ‘*kyai kampung*’ is a word used to denote two kinds of *Kyai* in our society, apart from the older *kyai* who mainly care for large Islamic boarding schools [...], village *Kyai* more often listen to the opinions outside of that circle of power. Of course, there is a pattern of healthy reciprocity between the *kyai* and the people they lead. [...] The pattern of communication between the two can be reversed, namely there is enormous influence from the people in the village upon the village *kyai*. Because of this, we can assume that village *Kyai* better understand the situation and feelings of the people [lit. “*rakyat kecil*” / “little people”]” (Wahid, “Introduction v-vi).<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> See for example Kartodirdjo, Sartono. *Protest Movements in Rural Java; a Study of Agrarian Unrest in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*. Oxford University Press, 1973. And Kartodirdjo, Sartono, et al. *Dinamika perubahan sosial ekonomi pedesaan*. Cet. 1., Aditya Media, 1996.

<sup>227</sup> “Keberadaan *kyai kampung* merupakan sesuatu yang sangat penting dalam kehidupan politik yang sedang dibangun bangsa ini. Istilah ‘*kyai kampung*’ adalah kata yang digunakan untuk menunjuk salah satu dari dua macam *kyai* yang ada dalam masyarakat kita, selain ada *kyai* sepuh dan sebangsanya, yaitu mereka yang menjadi pengasuh *pesantren-pesantren besar* seperti *Lirboyo, Langitan, Tebuireng, dan sebagainya* [...]. *Kyai kampung* lebih sering mendengar pendapat mereka yang berada di luar lingkaran kekuasaan itu. Sudah tentu ini merupakan pola hubungan timbal balik yang sehat antara para *kyai kampung* dan rakyat yang mereka pimpin. [...] Pola komunikasi antara kedua belah pihak itu tentu saja dapat dibalik, yaitu sangat besarnya pengaruh dari orang-orang masyarakat itu dan *kyai kampung*. Karena itu, dapatlah dipertanggungjawabkan anggapan bahwa *kyai kampung* lebih mengerti keadaan dan perasaan rakyat kecil” (Wahid, “Introduction v-vi).

Enabling the term *kampung* in relation to the role of *kyai* draws attention to the important notion of home embedded within considerations of efficacious leadership in Java, as discussed previously in relation to the mass “*mudik*” movements that take place each year and bring millions of people to “*pulang kampung*” or “return home” during the Lebaran holiday. The *kampung* is a site of origin, home and family, that carries important resonance for expressions of self and community in Java. *Kyai kampung* are similarly embedded in the notion of home and family for Muslim communities in Java. Wahid’s definition highlights the important dialogical relationship between leaders and their constituencies beyond strictly official capacities. *Kyai kampung* serve a more capacious role in society in how they cultivate close connections to the everyday needs of the people (he uses the term *rakyat kecil*), in rural and urban contexts alike, and in so doing Wahid highlights the important political role of *kyai kampung* precisely because of their location outside of official national and political arenas. The small-scale, direct connection they have within their respective communities is important in mediating popular involvement in national politics. *Kyai kampung* are responsible for the more informal spiritual upbringing of their community: encouraging young children to study Qu’ran and kitab kuning as well as them to attend *pesantren* when they are of age, as well as incorporating spiritual practice into the everyday village environment, from overseeing legal and cultural affairs to assisting in local disputes. Since *kyai kampung* do not have an official institutional affiliation, as Hanif articulates:

“...the figure of a *kyai kampung* from a socio-cultural perspective must be more egalitarian and not assert themselves. The style of leadership can be said to be more interactive, dialogical, and participatory. They exist to maintain a spirit of togetherness so that the cohesion and dynamics of rural communities remain within the framework of religious and moral values of the communities concerned” (Dhakiri 13-14).<sup>228</sup>

Still tied to the long tradition of *pesantren* leadership in Java but whose work were not explicitly restricted to official forms of institutional leadership in the large *pesantren* across Java, *kyai kampung* came to encompass leaders in less formal contexts within small towns and villages. According to Dhakiri, *kyai kampung* are imagined in a more praxis-oriented capacity, combining traditional and transformative Islamic ideologies. Written in 2007, Hanif Dhakri was himself part of the community of scholars who engaged with transformative methodologies in the late nineties. The transformative paradigm, as Fakhri defines it, was one of many “practical efforts to help solve community-based economic problems, as well as practical efforts associated with advocacy to state policies that marginalize the poor and [those living on the edges of society].”<sup>229</sup> The long history of *kyai* involvement in peasant politics from the late colonial period through the New Order made *kyai* leadership a central area of development for activists working with transformative methodologies.

As “*sebetulnya kyai*,” Bahruddin is recognized within traditionalist Islamic notions of an inherited leadership role that is deeply embedded in the politics of NU in the region, but which

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<sup>228</sup> “...*sosok kyai kampung secara sosio-kultural dituntut untuk lebih egaliter dan tidak menonjolkan diri. Gaya kepemimpinannya bisa dikatakan bersifat interaktif, dialogis dan partisipatoris. Keberadaannya adalah merawat semangat kebersamaan agar kohesi dan dinamika masyarakat pedesaan tetap berada dalam bingkai nilai-nilai agama dan moral masyarakat bersangkutan*” (Dhakiri, *Kyai Kampung dan Demokrasi Lokal* 13-14)

<sup>229</sup> “*usaha praktis untuk membantu memecahkan persoalan ekonomi yang berbasis masyarakat, juga usaha praktis tersebut dikaitkan dengan melakukan advokasi untuk mempengaruhi segenap kebijakan negara yang memarginalkan kaum miskin dan pinggiran*” (Fakhri, *Jalan Lain* 259).

also intersects with the paradigms of transformative Islam through which he became involved with participation in agrarian and educational activism in the late eighties and nineties.

"... Pak Bahruddin is an example of a figure who has dared to choose a massive change within the nation's educational [system] which is still in decline. Inevitably, we have to admit that what Pak Bahruddin is doing is a shortcut, in order to alleviate marginalized people and the poor. Likewise with Gus Dur, we are sure that the way to choose to respect differences will prosper the people" (Rosyida, *Asyik* 88).

In the next section I discuss in greater detail the ways in which Bahruddin became involved in the transformative movement through a critique of pesantren institutional formations and the larger discourse of reform within NU which Abdurrahman Wahid was a central leader.

### ***Transformations: Pesantren Critique & Alternative Methodologies***

In Kalibening, the traditionalist paradigms of the Nadhaltul Ulama provide an important basis for the inherited leadership role of Bahruddin. The emergence of the term *kyai kampung* in the eighties additionally offers a productive lens for understanding the intersections of progressive Islamic movements of reform within NU and transformative social movements in the work of Badruddin and by extension the organizational formation of SPPQT and KBQT. As I draw the connection between NU traditions and the community based agrarian activism of Bahruddin, especially in the formation of the farmers union SPPQT, it would be naïve to overlook the historical tensions that exist within NU as an organization, as well as between NU and the Indonesian communist party (PKI).<sup>230</sup> As discussed previously in the introduction to this work, the role which NU played in the communist killings complicate a clear connection between NU and the transformative movements at play in Kalibening today. Reconciling those histories on the national level and within the organization of NU itself remains a hotly debated subject today, but the process that began in the eighties among progressive Islamic leaders and transformative activists has, however, contributed significantly to the shape of community organizing in Kalibening. Central to the discourse of reform within NU is Abdurrahman Wahid, popularly known as Gus Dur.<sup>231</sup> He was the first elected president of Indonesia following the fall of Suharto, and in 2000, was famously (and contentiously) known as being the first leader to publicly apologize for the mass slaughter of communists in 1965-66, as well as to acknowledge the role of NU in the killings. Wahid served part of the central leadership of NU for over a decade where he served an integral role in reforming the organization as he advocated for expanding their social mission to tackle the social and economic inequalities that had intensified most rapidly as an effect of New Order developmentalism. It was at that same time in the eighties that transformative methodologies began to circulate among activist communities in Indonesia. In this section I will discuss in greater detail the politics which immediately

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<sup>230</sup> On antagonisms between NU and PKI see Fealy, Greg, and Katharine McGregor. "Nahdlatul Ulama and the Killings of 1965-66: Religion, Politics, and Remembrance." *Indonesia*, no. 89, Southeast Asia Program Publications at Cornell University, 2010, pp. 37-60. On Islamic paramilitary groups see Fealy, Greg. "Islamic Radicalism in Indonesia: The Faltering Revival?" *Southeast Asian Affairs*, ISEAS - Yusuf Ishak Institute, 2004, pp. 104-21. On the growth of extremist groups as a response to New Order repression of Islamic political space, see Jones, Sidney. "New Order Repression and the Birth of Jemaah Islamiyah." *Soeharto's New Order and Its Legacy*, edited by Edward Aspinall and Greg Fealy, vol. 2, ANU Press, 2010, pp. 39-48.

<sup>231</sup> "Gus" is a common honorific designation for the son of a *kyai*, or a short form of "bagus" meaning "good" but carrying the connotation of "handsome."

foreground the activist work of Bahruddin by linking the discourse of reform within NU led most notably by Wahid, with the incorporation of transformative methodologies among many NU youth activists in the eighties and nineties.

Maia Rosyida is a young author from the KBQT learning community. In 2007, she published a collection of essays through The Wahid Institute entitled *Gus Dur...Asyik Gitu Loh! (Gus Dur...He's cool, you know!)*.<sup>232</sup> Written for popular teen audiences, Rosyida reflects on the writings and life's work of Abdurrahman. From her perspective as a young woman who grew up in the post-reformasi era, she discusses Wahid's influence on her thinking and social impact of his work through the eighties and nineties by identifying the leader as an important arbiter of change both within NU as well as for the Indonesian nation as a whole during a time of tumultuous political and religious transition. In the preface to the work, Rosyida quotes a favorite Javanese *tembang* of Wahid to illustrate how his progressive Islamist approach to reform the organization created serious schisms with many more conservative traditionalist Indonesian Ulama in their varying approaches to tackling large scale social problems of the late New Order:

Sigro milir sang nggethek si nonggo bajul  
Kawandoso kang ngageni  
Ing ngarso miwah  
Ing pungkur tanapi ing kanan kiri  
Sang nggethek lampahnyo alon<sup>233</sup>

Quickly flowing the raft is pushed by crocodiles  
Forty guards  
In front and  
In back, on the right and left  
The raft slows its pace<sup>234</sup>

She likens Wahid's interactions with Indonesian political and religious leaders to the crocodiles from a Javanese folk story to reflect on his position as "a figure who would continue to uphold goodness even though he must live in an environment full of antagonistic figures."<sup>235</sup> This reference to crocodiles is particularly interesting considering the myth of *lubang buaya* or the "crocodile's pit" which was so instrumental to the symbolic establishment of the New Order administration. *Lubang buaya* is a site which the New Order government claimed 7 military generals were brutally dismembered and their bodies fed to crocodiles during the alleged communist uprising of the 30 September movement in 1965 [G30S]. This myth has been largely refuted yet remains monumentalized in Jakarta to this day at Pacasila Sakti or the "Sacred Pancasila" Monument. The shifting identity of these crocodiles—be they alleged communists or ulama debating the political role of Islam in Indonesia—serve as an allusion to the complex and shifting nature of political and religious alliances in Indonesia. As Robinson notes in *The Killing Season* (2018), the significant role of language, symbols, and leadership in manipulating political

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<sup>232</sup> This book is part of a series of collaborative projects sponsored by the Wahid Institute which brought Rosyida and a group of other teenlit authors together for a conference in Jakarta. See Wahid Institute. *Temu Penulis Teenlit Pesantren Terinspirasi Gus Dur*. 2 Mar. 2004.

<sup>233</sup> Rosyida, *Gus Dur...Asyik Gitu Loh!* (2007: 1).

<sup>234</sup> My rough translation

<sup>235</sup> "Seorang tokoh yang tetap akan menegakkan kebaikan meskipun harus hidup dalam lingkaran tokoh-tokoh antagonis" (Rosyida, 2007: 1).

representation is an overarching tendency that was most voraciously felt during the New Order. An author like Rosyida is emboldened in this text to confront those histories and speak beyond hegemonic notions of power and influence, to interrogate the submerged political realities of Indonesia's past. I bring her work in here to establish a link between KBQT and the long history of progressive Islamic discourse which her generation inherit through the style of participatory learning and critical pedagogies of their learning community. She is part of a new generation of Muslim authors who have no direct experience of the New Order, and yet are intimately aware of past political and religious discord, largely through their educational experiences at KBQT which provides an openness to learn about any subject of student interest. Very often this involves critical reflection on the surrounding environment, including the history of local and national politics. As Rosyida reflects on the work of Wahid, she interrogates some of the most hotly debated Islamic discourse in Indonesia today in a manner that reflects this kind of emancipatory learning practice, a dynamic that is not common in educational institutions more broadly. Rosyida attended both state and pesantren educational institutions before joining KBQT in 2005 largely because of her desire to explore her interests in film, music, wayang performance and creative writing. Her writing, and the writing of many members of KBQT, reflect the intersections of progressive Islam and transformative methodologies which grew out of a great deal of confrontation during the late New Order. In name and in practice, KBQT is a Learning Community that serves to incorporate legacies of participatory learning from the transformative movement, alongside a strong sense of Muslim identification with community empowerment through Village Empowerment. The work Wahid did to broaden the discourse of progressive Islam combined with Bahruddin's application of transformative methodologies are two integral aspects to the contemporary configuration of KBQT and SPPQT in Kalibening.

From its inception, Indonesian national politics have had a strong Muslim basis, and while the violence of 1965-66 may have enabled a momentary alignment between the military and NU, the New Order also created significant antagonisms between the military and Islamic political organizations. In the lead up to the 1971 elections, for example, the New Order government significantly suppressed Islamic parties in national politics.<sup>236</sup> As mentioned previously, this was the same election in which Zamhuri was first elected as *lurah* of Kalibening. It was quite radical then to support NU, hence his strategy to officially run as a Golkar candidate, but unofficially represent NU politics for the people of Kalibening. Due to the suppression of Islamic political parties, these organizations set aside prior discord to consolidate Islamic efforts in the political arena. In 1973 the PPP—United Development party—merged several Islamic-based parties as an umbrella party for Muslims.<sup>237</sup> In the nineties, Suharto turns more squarely to Islam, visits Mecca and centers his political alignment more aggressively towards Islam. The multiplicity and complexity of these waves fluctuating between alignment and antagonism of state and Muslim organizations throughout contemporary political history was especially exaggerated during the New Order, and many of those legacies underpin much of the recent rise of Islamic extremism in Indonesia today.

In the 1980s, many NU youth organizers began advocating for greater religious pluralism and tolerance within the organization. This is where Abdurrahman Wahid, more affectionately known as Gus Dur, became a dominant voice in the discourse of NU reforms. He was one of the most vocal leaders in expressing discontent at the direction NU had taken at the time while also

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<sup>236</sup> See Harold Crouch "Indonesia" in *The Politics of Islamic Reassertion* (1981).

<sup>237</sup> See Ricklefs, M. C. *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200*. 4th ed., Stanford University Press, 2008. And Schwarz, Adam. *A Nation in Waiting: Indonesia's Search for Stability*. Westview Press, 2000.

working towards social reform within the organization. He opposed the sectarian “aliran” streams of religious alignment in politics that dominated Muslim organizations in the seventies, and in 1983 withdraws NU from the PPP to return the organization to its “original socio-religious status” (Barton and Fealy xx-xxi). He worked alongside Kyai Achmad Siddiq to expand the social mission of NU by advocating for a more socially conscious Islamic worldview (*weltanschauung*) that addressed growing rates of poverty in Indonesia.

“*Weltanschauung* Islam sudah jelas, yaitu bahwa Islam mengakomodasikan kenyataan-kenyataan yang ada sepanjang membantu atau mendukung kemasalahan rakyat” (“Pribumisasi Islam” in *Islam Menatap Masa Depan*, 92)... “Tiga nilai dasar, keadilan, persamaan, dan demokrasi (*weltanschauung*) itu diejawantahkan ke dalam sikap hidup yang mengutamakan Islam, kebangsaan dan kemanusiaan” (“Pribumisasi Islam” in *Islam Menatap Masa Depan*, 93)

This was not without some disagreement, however, as Bruinessen writes:

“A small but growing group of young people were interested in pesantren-based community development. The ideas of Paolo Friere and Ivan Illich were not unknown in this circle, and in collaboration with the Jakarta-based research institute LP3ES (which in turn had European sponsors) a few pilot projects were set up. Abdurrahman Wahid, Kyai Sahal Mahfudz and Jusuf Hasjim were the three top people involved in these efforts. The majority of NU, however, stuck to a more limited definition of ‘social concerns.’ [...] Thanks to generous foreign support, the number of small community development projects carried out in and by pesantren increased. The NU had meanwhile in 1983 established its own non-government organization, called P3M, to coordinate these projects” (Bruinessen 156-157).

As Wahid and his colleagues worked to reform the organization itself, NU youth organizers began working on a variety of grassroots pesantren-based activities across Java that extended the social mission of their work. With the establishment of P3M as an umbrella organization designed to oversee and centralize these grassroots activities, youth allegiances to the progressive and socially conscious work of NU waned.

“After an initial period of high hopes and confidence in the ‘emancipatory’ potential of pesantren, there followed one of disappointment and skepticism among many of the younger activists who participated in these projects and felt hindered by the hierarchical relations in the pesantren world. Serious doubts were raised about the chances of success of such projects through the pesantren” (Bruinessen 157).

Through P3M, many activists felt that NU had imposed institutional constraints on their ability to organizing grassroots projects and in turn enact transformative change that could most benefit local communities. The hierarchy of the organization itself as well as the dissemination of knowledge in pesantren education became a central critique of the pesantren system by many Muslim activists and scholars.<sup>238</sup> In many ways, the work of Gus Dur set an important precedent of social engagement among NU members from which Bahruddin became increasingly involved in the late eighties.

Bahruddin was educated in pesantren. He attended grade school at his father’s pesantren in Kalibening and college at the Salatiga campus of Institute Agama Islam Negeri Walisongo (the State Islamic University of Walisongo – IAIN Walisongo). He graduated from their Fakultas Tarbiyah (Faculty of Teaching) and studied Pendidikan Guru Agama Negeri (State Religious Teachers Education – PGAN). While at university, he became involved with Ansor (the youth

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<sup>238</sup> For a deeper account of NU politics during this time see Barton, Greg, and Greg Fealy, editors. *Nahdlatul Ulama, Traditional Islam and Modernity in Indonesia*. Clayton, Australia, 1996.

section of NU), Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia (Indonesian Islamic Student Movement – PMII), as well as local farmers groups in Kalibening. Living near the city of Salatiga, a major center of student activism in the eighties and nineties, Bahruddin also became immersed in a community of social movement organizers and intellectuals looking beyond religious or social barriers to tackle problems posed by New Order developmentalism. He worked alongside activists such as the well-known Arief Budiman, a professor of Sociology at Satya Wacana Christian University [UKSW] located in the center of the city of Salatiga, just 6 kilometers from Kalibening. Here, Bahruddin became increasingly involved in promoting interfaith dialogue while advocating for the rights of farmers. It was also through the work of such Muslim intellectuals as Moeslim Abdurrahman that intra-religious discussions and collaborations served to expand campus-based activism. His work, *Islam Transformatif* (1995) is a direct engagement with humanitarian notions of liberation theology, which were of great importance to, Romo Mangun Wijaya discussed in the previous chapters. Though much of what led to the formation of KBQT is rooted in a critique of the pesantren tradition situated within a larger trajectory of progressive Islam in Central Java, the activist discourse surrounding transformational methodologies expanded and blurred the boundaries between student activists, scholars, and religious leaders that had previously been a constraint to social movement organizing in the seventies and early eighties. Intra-religious collaborations looking beyond campus-based activism to examples from other social movements within Indonesia and internationally among the global south facilitated much of the praxis-oriented approach Bahruddin and the community in Kalibening would come to develop, and another important link between KBQT and SALAM.

In Kalibening, as internal politics surrounding the social mission of the Nahdlatul Ulama began to create schisms between the more established ulama and their youth members, Bahruddin, like many Muslim activists and NU youth organizers, shared this skepticism of pesantren hierarchies and began searching for new methods that would work with existing traditions to emancipate and empower local communities. In the late eighties, Bahruddin joined a community of Islamic leaders and scholars working to cultivate greater connections between pesantren education and the larger struggle of marginalized communities in rural and urban contexts across Indonesia. In 1989, he attended a seminar organized by KH Muntaha Azhari (from the village of Ketapang, 20km east of Salatiga) at IAIN Wonosongo entitled, “Santri, Kitab Kuning dan Kepedulian Sosial” (“Pesantren students, Islamic teachings and Social Awareness”). Bahruddin organized regular community discussion groups to continue these conversations among santri students and grassroots activists at the nearby *Pondok Pesantren Edi Mancoro*, a progressive pesantren located in Gedangan Village to the West of Salatiga, less than 10 kilometers from Kalibening.

“Following that momentum, I made a seminar discussion on the theme of students of Islamic teaching [santri kitab kuning] and social awareness. I was restless [to find a way for] pesantren students studying the kitab kuning, books that are very abstract, to also care about social problems faced by farmers” (Bahruddin, *Oral History* September 21, 2015).<sup>239</sup>

In 1989, at the height of activism at Kedung Ombo, Bahruddin was invited by LPIST to join a “kader” (cadre) of individuals selected to participate in a seminar entitled, “Pelatihan Metodologi

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<sup>239</sup> “Ketika momentum itu saya bikin seminar, bikin diskusilah, temanya santri kitab kuning dan kepedulian sosial. Jadi saya ada keresahan, bagaimana santri yang belajar kitab-kitab kuning, yang lebih abstrak macam-macam kayak gitu, bisa peduli dengan persoalan-persoalan sosial, yang dihadapi petani,” (Bahruddin, *Oral History* September 21, 2015).

Penelitian Transformatif” / “Training in Transformative Research Methodologies.” As a student at IAIN Wonosobo, Bahrudin was already involved in local level community organizing around agrarian issues in Central Java. Since Bahrudin was part of a kyai family, his inherited position of religious and political authority in Kalibening, combined with his interest in agrarian activism, was viewed by the organizers as the perfect combination for the application of transformative methods. Over the course of the two-day seminar in Jakarta, Bahrudin was introduced to a wider network of social movement activists, including Moeslim Abdurrahman, best known for his work exploring the intersections of Islamic and transformative ideologies.<sup>240</sup> In a publication from P3M in which many of these leaders published essays about their work at that time, Moeslim Abdurrahman interestingly writes about the ways in which transformative methodologies were already intrinsic to the work of Gus Dur.

“Abdurrahman Wahid sees that the problems of poverty like we have in Indonesia can only be broken through transformative efforts of “macro” scope to uphold pure democracy, develop fair social institutions in all fields, and reject injustices in all of its forms. The religion of Islam cannot be separated from these “macro” struggles and neglecting this is a digression from Islamic teachings and a betrayal of the aspirations of Islam in its fullest sense” (Abdurrahman, “Bagaimana Indonesia Dibaca Pemikir Islam” 223).

These kinds of intellectual meeting points were becoming increasingly more common at that time, especially as the link between New Order developmentalism and increasing rates of poverty and social inequality became more transparent.

It was at this time, in 1989, that KH Muntaha Ashari invited Bahrudin to attend the “Training in Transformative Research Methodologies” workshop in Jakarta mentioned previously, to become part of a new generation of social movement leaders working towards transformative goals at the intersection of pesantren education and broader social concerns. Alumni from the conference who were based in Salatiga then formed *Jaringan Studi Transformasi Sosial* (JSTS, the Network of Transformative Social Studies), and continued working with activist organizations such as *Yayasan LKiS* (Institute for Islamic and Social Studies) and INSIST (The Indonesian Society for Social Transformation), both of which formed significant publishing presses to disseminate knowledge surrounding social transformation in Indonesia.

Bahrudin was strongly influenced by the work of Ivan Illich. Formulating an alternative to state or religious institutions became a key modality to incorporate the emancipatory goals of transformative ideologies. *Deschooling Society* by Illich provided a theoretical framework for his critique of institutionalized education that aligned with the existing critique of pesantren education. The school, in the work of Illich, is the central means for the reproduction of neoliberal values that lead to poverty and powerlessness of peasant communities. The work of Ivan Illich has remained an important theoretical reference point for Bahrudin’s search for more sustainable solutions for future community-based development projects.<sup>241</sup> Rather than reform

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<sup>240</sup> Moeslim Abdurrahman was working specifically in the field of education as an important medium to incorporate transformative methodologies. He comes from a mixed NU (mother) and Muhammadiyah (father) family, he was officially a member of Muhammadiyah, but whose work bridged multiple Islamic ormas and LSM. He was also heavily involved in LSM as Director of the Ma’arif Institute for Culture and Humanity as well as the Director of Lembaga Pengembangan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial (LPIIS). *Islam Transformatif* was published in 1995, and so was developing these ideas around this same time.

<sup>241</sup> In his home, in fact, he keeps an image of Ivan Illich on the mantle of the front living room where guest and community members frequently gather. It sits alongside a wall of local, national, and international accolades that he, SPPQT and KBQT have received for their community development projects in Kalibening.



the pesantren educational process in Kalibening, Bahrudin and the surrounding community have together created alternatives that would further democratize the dissemination of knowledge, technologies, and resources in their community. There are many methods through which SPPQT and KBQT do this, but one of the earliest methods for the learning community was through internet technology. Bahrudin received a grant from the Dutch philanthropic organization Hivos to install open access internet service for the village of Kalibening. Today, no matter where you are in the village, there is always reliable internet access, an uncommon occurrence elsewhere in Indonesia. Outside of big cities, internet access is typically restricted to cell phone connections and internet cafes which are relatively costly and therefore inaccessible to many agrarian communities.

The critique of pesantren education in the formation of educational alternatives in Kalibening represents an important meeting point of the discourse of reform within NU alongside the circulation of transformative methodologies in Java. KBQT and his father's pesantren are in very close proximity to one another in Kalibening, and many students today serve as a bridge between the two communities. Their coexistence is reflective of a form of resistance to the adverse and continued effects of neoliberal developmentalism of the New Order. On a local level, however, rather than being cast in sharp resistance to pesantren institutions, KBQT is a movement from within and alongside tradition. There remains a tension between traditional leadership expectations and notions of change. The centrality of a charismatic figure, for example, complicates the notion of leadership as it intersects with the transformative movement. Despite the centrality of his family in Kalibening and his own personal involvement in community organizing in Kalibening, Pak Din rarely takes individual credit for the success of SPPQT and KBQT in cultivating more sustainable agricultural projects, education, and local community development practices in Kalibening. He is often cited in popular media as having founded these organizations in Kalibening (SPPQT and KBQT), but when he speaks about these projects, he consistently highlights the collective efforts that went into the founding of these grassroots organizations. In many of my personal conversations with Pak Din as well as in many public forums where Pak Din is invited to speak about his work in Kalibening, he consistently points to a larger community of activists and organizers involved in developing QT. Whether being written about in Rolling Stone or receiving the Ma'arif award for community organizing, Bahrudin regularly shifts attention away from his individual efforts and towards the collective efforts of members of KBQT and SPPQT. For example, in the way Bahrudin tells the story of the establishment of KBQT, he always makes a point to say that it was his eldest son, Hilmiy, who started it all. Highlighting collective efforts, not individual achievement, is part of a larger project of de-centering authority and the hierarchies that tend to dominate the discourse on development, namely "official" authority in its manifest forms. The decentralization of economic, cultural, and religious authority is integral to the transformative goals of new social movements in Central Java. This tendency is seen also in the way Kyai Kanjeng de-centers the idea of individual authorship of creative works as well as the similar manner in which Wahya assumes an embodied leadership role for SALAM.

Many community members in Kalibening still map their expectations of the inherited role of leadership onto Hilmiy, assuming he will inherit a kyai-like role as leader of KBQT in Kalibening. Hilmiy expressed his frustrations to me regarding these community expectations and general disinterest in becoming a community leader like his father. Notions of leadership within the transformative movement are still complicated by traditional cultural expectations regarding the centrality of charismatic leaders in Java, but Bahrudin and Hilmiy are examples of the

shifting nature of village leadership, the terms of which are still changing. Rather than replacing one cultural system with another, emphasis is on the continued dialogical process of change. This is part of the difficulty of articulating the transformative movement on a larger scale because of these subtle tensions, notions of change that are gradual and not overtly resistant. By enabling his role as “sebetulnya kyai” alongside his work as an agrarian and educational activist, Bahrudin is shaping new expectations for leadership in Kalibening. Advocating for pluralism and interfaith dialogue alongside Islamic teaching, while also stressing the importance of local knowledge production whereby the people (peasants, farmers, rakyat kecil, or wong cilik) are the central subjects of local development. Youth participation is central to this process in Kalibening, and the genre of ChickLit novels set in pesantren contexts offer a complimentary site through which the terms of change are being shaped by the next generation.

### ***Interrogating Kyai Leadership in Novel Pop Pesantren***

Literature produced by members of KBQT contribute to broadening both scholarly and popular understandings of the contemporary and expanding role of kyai in Javanese society. There is, of course, a huge range of very progressive to very conservative kyai in Java that complicate monolithic notions of kyai tradition and their contemporary role in society. *Tarian Cinta* (*The Dance of Love*, 2007), by Maia Rosyida is an example of a novel which engages themes of kyai leadership in Java within the genre of *Novel Pop Pesantren*, or Popular Pesantren Novels. This is a popular Indonesian sub-genre of “ChickLit” literature, a global literary genre which owes its label to the fact that these works are overwhelmingly authored and read by women, especially young adult readers. The stories are best described as coming-of-age stories that typically follow a first-person narration of their central female protagonists who come to define a deeper sense of identity and self-subjectivity while maneuvering romantic, educational, and social dynamics. ChickLit narratives are highly realistic, and the interiority of characters is given a great deal of attention. In Indonesia, the genre is a contemporary derivation of the more well-established genre of Sastra Wangi or “Perfumed Literature” which came to prominence in the early 2000s (Arimbi 80). Arimbi writes of the genre:

“Contemporary Indonesian writing has also seen the emergence of the so-called ‘chick lit’ (chick literature), a genre in popular writing different, although often assumed to be similar, to the more serious *sastra wangi*. *Sastra wangi* writings have philosophically deep narratives, but still lack moral pretension. ‘Chick-lit’ writings on the other hand, have hilarious narratives dealing with women facing modern problems in their work and social life. ‘Chick lit’ narratives are always set in urban environments and have stories of young cosmopolitan working women aged in their twenties or thirties concerned with issues such as fashion, shopping, sex, and the search for ‘Prince Charming.’ Unlike the highly romanticized fiction of the 1970s/80s, ‘chick lit’ is humorous and very light reading; the book covers are always in pastel colors with illustration a la Barbie” (Arimbi 83).

*Tarian Cinta* is a novel that fits within the ChickLit genre as “humorous light reading,” published with a bright pink and yellow cover “a la Barbie,” as Arimbi indicates, but deviates in important ways from the otherwise urban thematic conventions of the above description. The novel is set within a complex of pesantren institutions of the outskirts of Yogyakarta. Romantic themes do indeed feature prominently in the narrative, but they take place within a more suburban/rural environment for primarily teen readers. The issues of “fashion, shopping, and sex” are replaced by education, hobbies, and more subdued sexual flirtations that are nonetheless titillating for their younger teen audiences as the author explores sexuality in ways that are not

officially discussed in national schools and are often expressly prohibited as a topic of conversation within pesantren institutions. Educational themes and romantic intrigue feature prominently alongside the authors exploration of social dynamics within the pesantren community. Rosyida also deviates from the first-person narration that is common in Chick narratives, she instead enables an omniscient narrative voice that follows several key characters throughout the novel. This opens possibilities of a multiplicity of narrative perspectives that also works to expand her readership to both young men and women.

The novel opens by setting up expectations for the personal development of key characters within the Chick narrative. Rosyida works to broaden the possibilities of experience reflected in the Chick genre redirecting expectations of the urban context towards the pesantren context as an important site of character development.

“Usually those who live on campuses are known as college students, it is an experience that cannot be separated from adulthood, independence, perseverance, individuality, and sky-high ideals. At least that’s what happened to Aiman.

When it came to adulthood, he had always been calm and impressed adults. Speaking of independence, this cute light skinned boy sometimes liked to be alone, though he never missed band practice with his two close friends. If he is independent on a personal level, I don’t really know. The problem is that his parents are well known. As the Kyai and Nyai of the pesantren, they spoil him. Of course, I mean they spoil him in a positive way. Like how it is alright for Aiman to go from one cafe to the next playing music with his band. See, that’s positive. Moreover, they come home with their pockets full of coins even though they’re not as good as as PeterPan or Ungu. Ok ok, that’s enough! Don’t start dreaming already! So, if we’re talking about dreams, about plans for the future, it’s true that he only focuses on his band. He says he wants to be a musician like Kyai Kanjeng, at least. Well! At least? At most who would you be like, man?” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 1).<sup>242</sup>

First, she draws a parallel between campus life of typically urban college campuses with the pesantren campus. Pesantren complexes like the one in the novel can have many different pesantren operated under direction of different kyai and provide education for a wide range of students, from elementary through college aged santri students. By drawing a likeness between pesantren education and college education, Rosyida maps the rural village pesantren context that is the central locale of the novel onto the audiences’ expectations of the cosmopolitanism of ChickLit narratives, while also orienting the narration to a younger audience. Second, Rosyida focuses the omniscient narration on the interiority of one of the central male protagonists of the story, Aiman, the son of a local kyai family. It is through Aiman’s perspective that the central conflict of the novel is presented. His musical interests bridge popular Islamic and secular music genres, noting especially the reference to Kyai Kanjeng discussed in previous chapters, an important example of cultural fusion in musical genres, set alongside the immensely popular boy bands, PeterPan and Ungu. In the next section I will discuss in greater detail the ways in which authors from KBQT engage in the cosmopolitanism of the ChickLit genre in Indonesia while also incorporating attention to suburban/rural environments, Islam, and the progressive educational dynamics of their learning community. Here I focus on the ways in which Rosyida employs the popular literary medium as a means by which to interrogate pesantren leadership in Java and reorient popular expectations of the role of kyai in society for young readers.

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<sup>242</sup> “Biasanya yang namanya bermukim di kampus alias jadi mahasiswa, tidak bisa dipisahkan sama yang namanya kedewasaan, kemandirian, ketekunan, individualitas, dan cita-cita setinggi langit. Seperti yang terjadi pada diri seorang Aiman ...” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 1).

Narrative attention to the son of a respected kyai offers a privileged view of the goings on of pesantren life. The narrating follows his journey through the pesantren complex as he happens upon a group of female santri students practicing a dance choreographed to the Britney Spears song “Toxic,” which they plan to perform at an upcoming community talent show hosted by one of the local pesantren.<sup>243</sup> It is here that we are first introduced to the female protagonist of the story. Dahlia is an unofficial santri student who studies at the pesantren in exchange for completing small tasks around the complex. Dahlia is introduced from Aiman’s perspective:

“Of all the six girls, the one who was at the center of his attention was Dahlia. She is indeed the sweetest, as well as very polite and careful in choosing who she associates with. Dancing is a way [for Dahlia] to eat, a way of sustaining life. She is responsible for two souls, her mother and younger brother who is still in class II of SMP [junior high]. Her father passed away a long time ago, which made her grow up quickly and be forced to struggle to survive more than friends her age.

In addition to dancing, Lia, which is how she is usually called, also works to gain additional royalties from the pengajian teacher by the name of Umar Muhammad. Almost every afternoon she joins in reciting the Qu’ran and kitab kuning with the female santri of Kyai Umar. After that, she spends her time [helping around the pesantren... ngabdi?]. In fact, this pesantren could be called a small-scale or beginner pesantren in the village, but it is enough to make Dahlia’s life more meaningful,” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta*, 4-5).<sup>244</sup>

The title of the novel is derived from this “toxic dancing” that Aiman witnesses, and a romantic triangle which develops between Aiman, Dahlia and Bilal, the son of yet another kyai in the novel. There are three separate kyai types depicted in the novel, determined by their reactions to the central conflict of the novel which revolves around Dahlia. She becomes the subject of public scandal as the community learns that she dances for money to support her single mother and young brother. Despite her diligence and desire to continue her pesantren education, even though she cannot afford it, she comes to be seen by the community as a negative influence on the pious Muslim youth of the pesantren. In response to Dahlia’s situation, each of the three kyai leaders assert their positions as arbiters of moral and ethical values for the pesantren youth and greater village community in very different ways. Rosyida enables realistic depictions of the three contrasting kyai figures and their varying responses to the sexual taboo of dancing for money as a means by which to explore notions of kyai leadership. Their treatment of Dahlia in this circumstance becomes a kind of novelistic litmus test for the author to evaluate kyai authority.

Mbah Jalal, the father of Aiman, is the first kyai to respond to the rumors by speaking and directly to Dahlia about her dancing. He is tempered and understanding of the difficulty of her situation, at the same time instructive as he attempts to direct the young girl to make a more concerted choice about how she plans to support her family in the future.

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<sup>243</sup> Gatherings like this are common among santri students and Javanese villagers alike, much like the monthly *Gelar Karya* performances that take place at KBQT mentioned previously.

<sup>244</sup> “Dan, yang paling menjadi pusat perhatian dari keenam gadis itu adalah Dahlia. Ia memang paling manis, selain sopan dan sangat hati-hati dalam memilih pergaulan. Menari adalah jalannya untuk makan dan salah satu cara untuk mempertahankan hidup. Seorang ibu dan satu adik laki-laki yang masih kelas II SMP adalah dua nyawa yang kini menjadi tanggung jawabnya seorang diri. Ayahnya yang telah lama meninggal, membuatnya umbuh menjadi gadis yang dewasa dan lebih survive dibanding teman-teman seusianya.

“Selain menari, Lia, begitu ia biasa dipanggil, juga berusaha mendapatkan royalti tambahan dari guru ngajinya yang bernama Umar Muhammad. Hampir setiap sore ia ikut mengaji Al-Qur’an dan kitab kuning bersama santri-santri puteri Kyai Umar. Setelah itu, pasti Lia menlonggarkan waktu untuk ngabdi. Kebetulan, pesantren yang mungkin bisa dibilang kecil-kecilan dan beginner di sebuah desa ini sudah membuat hidup Dahlia menjadi lebih berarti” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta*, 4-5).

“I’ve heard about your profession as a dancer, and it seems as though you do this to support your family. That’s not a problem because that’s all that you can do. But now your profession has become a topic of great discussion everywhere. I also don’t really know why men prefer to see women only as sexual objects. I personally don’t agree with that. [...] Of course, people will say all kinds of things if we are not good at socializing, but we really cannot live without society. The most important thing in this matter is morality, it has to be developed. Improving oneself begins from within. Isn’t that so Dahlia? [...] Later you will come to know about freedom of expression once you form your own sense of morality. And of course, improving our morality cannot be separated from religious doctrine. That is absolute. Since Allah spoke that we are all created to worship Him.”<sup>245</sup>

Mbah Jalal encourages Dahlia to reflect on her relationship with the community and choice of profession while remaining supportive of her spiritual development. Rosyida stylistically mimics pengajian practices of reading and interpreting the Qur’an within the dialogue. Mbah Jalal quotes passages from the Qur’an to help guide Dahlia and shape a meaningful lesson from which she can reflect and derive her own sense of morality from the situation. Dahlia is somewhat stunned by his direct approach and initially does not know how to respond. Mbah Jalal provides additional reassurance to the young girl:

“...offer all of this up in hope of pleasing Allah. The prophet has a prayer: *Allahumma bika nushbihu wa numsi*. Yes Allah, we enter morning and evening with You. This can mean that we are always wanting to be with God, we experience everything because of Him.’ Mbah Jalal takes a slow breath. ‘That is all, Dahlia. I only want this *sillaturrahmi* to become a lake of *muhasabah* every time we meet again. You do not need to be anxious. Allah is always by your side” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta*, 61-62).<sup>246</sup>

Mbah Jalal does not judge her actions nor dictate how she should correct her behavior. Even the slow breath in this moment punctuates the sense of patience and temperance with which this kyai approaches a contentious situation.

Rosyida describes Mbah Jalal as “not wanting to be too conservative in discussing the relationship between sexes.”<sup>247</sup> Rosyida uses the word *kolot* for conservative, a term overdetermined in scholarship, such as in Geertz’s *Religion of Java* (1976), for example, he enables this term to distinguish between modern urban “kyai moderen” and conservative rural “kyai kolot.” Here Rosyida shifts the definition of the term slightly in order to differentiate between the two rural kyai, of which the kolot reaction follows shortly after.

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<sup>245</sup> “Aku sudah mendengar tentang profesimu sebagai penari, dan itu semata-mata kamu lakukan untuk menghidupi keluarga. Itu tidak masalah karena memang baru itu yang kamu bisa. Tapi, sekarang ini terpaksa profesi itu sedang menjadi perbincangan hebat dimana-mana. Aku juga kurang begitu tahu, kenapa zaman sekarang laki-laki lebih memandang perempuan itu hanya sebagai objek seksual. Aku sendiri kurang setuju dengan itu. [...] Kita memang tidak bisa hidup tanpa masyarakat. Tnetu macam-macam omongan mereka kalo kita sampe tidak baik dalam bergaul. Maka yang terpenting dalam hal ini adalah moralitas. Ini harus benar-benar dibangun. Membenahi diri adalah dari (59) dalam dulu. Bukan begitu Dahlia?’ [...] Nanti pasti kamu akan tahu tentang kebebasan berekspresi yang sebenarnya jika moral itu sudah benar-benar terbentuk. Dan untuk memperbaiki moral, tentu tidak bisa lepas dari aturan agama. Itu sudah sangat absolut. Karena Allah berfirman kalau kita semua diciptakan memang untuk menyembah-Nya.” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 59-60).

<sup>246</sup> “...persembahkanlah semua itu hanya untuk mengharap ridho Allah. Nabi punya doa seperti ini: *Allahumma bika nushbihu wa numsi*. Ya Allah, dengan Engkau kami memasuki waku pagi dan petang. Itu bisa diartikan jika kita memang ingin terus bersama Tuhan, maka sudahlah kita melakukan apa saja karenaNya. Termasuk kita harus tetap bisa menghargai orang yang sedikit tidak berkenan dengan keadaan kita.’ Mbah Jalal Kembali menarik napas pelan. ‘Itu saja Dahlia. Aku hanya ingin, *sillaturrahmi* ini menjadi telaga *muhasabah* setiap kali kita bertemu lagi. Kamu tidak perlu cemas. Allah selalu disisimu,’” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 61-62).

<sup>247</sup> “tidak mau terlalu kolot membahas tentang pergaulan antarlawan jenis” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta*, 58).

The news of Dahlia's dancing reaches Kyai Umar. Rosyida portrays his reaction as the most traditionally conservative of the three kyai represented in the novel. As a note of background, his pesantren is the most well-established institution within which he inherited his position of authority from his father and grandfather. The narrative indicates that he provides pengajian to Dahlia for free in exchange for performing small tasks around the pesantren as compensation. Upon learning about her dancing, his response is the most extreme as he threatens to discontinue their pengajian lessons due to her immoral behavior as a dancer. On Dahlia's next visit to his pesantren, Kyai Umar sits her down in a much more authoritative fashion than the previous example. He lectures her by saying, " 'For two years now, you eat [and study] as you please here, only to create an embarrassment. [...] Until you correct your behavior, don't hold any hope of being able to study here again,'" (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta*, 64-65).<sup>248</sup> After this interaction, Dahlia finishes her prayers as tears stream down her face. Rosyida repeatedly reflects on Dahlia's innocence and feelings of intense guilt now that her dancing has become so hotly debated in the community.

Later in the novel, a debate between Mbah Jalal and Kyai Umar reinforce their starkly contrasting positions: one of empathy and understanding, the other a stark rejection of her behavior as a disgrace to his own sense of authority. Kyai Umar reiterates his conservative position as he perceives her behavior as a poor reflection on the status of his pesantren. "The problem is that Dahlia is my student, I already consider her one of my children. Every day I support her, but there is no reason for her to dance because she needs more, because of this or because of that. The bottom line is that it is haram. Period!" (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 72).<sup>249</sup> Mbah Jalal responds by questioning the rigid distinction between what is considered haram and halal without considering Dahlia's family circumstance. Here Rosyida appeals to the contemporary conception that Middle Eastern forms of Islam somehow represent "purer" or more orthodox religion. The author draws a connection between the cultural dance forms of belly dancing with Muslim religious practice in Egypt, a region often looked to as a site many Indonesian Muslims look to emulate and undermine the insensitivity of Kyai Umar and the double standard he sets upon Dahlia.

"We cannot arbitrarily say what is halal or haram. It's like with the Egyptian dancers in which you can see their navel. Perhaps it is haram according to religion, but what if it is part of their custom? Does tolerance in our religion disappear just because of indulging our emotions? [...] Pak Umar you can, and it is indeed good, that you work to critique the aesthetics of young people today, but I recommend that you not do it through anger. A young girl such as Dahlia still needs more direction. Not in a violent manner. Islam is not like that. Islam comes from the word salam, meaning *peace and love* [sic]' jokes Mbah Jalal," (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 72).<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> " 'Dua tahun kamu makan enak disini hanya mau bikin malu. [...] Sebelum kamu perbaiki tingkah lakumu, jangan pernah berharap akan bisa lagi belajar disini'" (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta*, 64-65).

<sup>249</sup> "Masalahnya, Dahlia itu murid saya dan saya sudah anggap dia anak. Setiap hari nafkahnya sudah saya tanggung. Japi, tidak ada alasan dia nari karena uang, karena ini dan karena itu. Intinya yang seperti itu haram. Titik!'" (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 72).

<sup>250</sup> " 'Kita tidak boleh sembarangan bilang halal dan haram. Seperti tarian Mesir yang kelihatan pusarnya. Itu mungkin haram menurut agama. Tapi bagaimana kalo ternyata itu memang adat mereka? Apa toleransi dalam agama kita langsung lenyap hanya karena menuruti emosi kita? [...] Pak Umar boleh dan memang bagus mau berusaha mengkritisi estetika menurut anak muda jaman sekarang. Tapi saya sarankan, jangan melalui amarah. Gadis seperti Dahlia masih perlu banyak pengarahan. Bukan dengan cara kekerasan. Karena, Islam tidak seperti itu. Islam dari kata salam. Yaitu cinta damai. Peace and love,' canda Mbah Jalal..." (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 72-73).

In questioning the moral directives of this kolot kyai, Rosyida alludes to a widely debated discourse in Indonesia concerning the relationship between Muslim religious and local cultural practices. Abdurrahman Wahid did much in the way of advancing a more pluralistic sense of local cultural expressions within Islamic practices in Indonesia. As general chairman of NU from 1984-1999, as well as president of Indonesia from 1999-2004, he advocated for greater cultural indigenization of Islam in Indonesia, asserting that:

“The overlap between religion and culture occurs continuously as a process to enrich life and make it less arid. The richness of cultural variation allows for a connection between various groups on the basis of similarities, both religious and cultural similarities. The reconciliation effort between culture and religion is not because of the fear of tensions between the two, but because if humans are left to their rational nature, such tensions will subside by themselves. [...] In other words, in cultural terms we see that changes occur within the particularities [of Islam] rather than in terms of large streams [*aliran*]. Muslims continue to view the Western-style of freedom in dating as un-Islamic and try to keep their children from doing it,” (Wahid, “Pribumisasi Islam” 82, 84).<sup>251</sup>

Interestingly, Wahid draws a connection between religious change and cultural influence through the example of different dating patterns in Indonesia compared to Western nations. It is no wonder that this point is taken up by Rosyida within a Chick Lit narrative, a genre defined in part by romantic themes. The fusion of pesantren realism from a santri youth perspective within the narrative presents a significant point of tension with the romanticism of the novel. For Rosyida, the link between the Gus Durian discourse of indigenizing Islam alongside the sexual politics of the narrative that are far too taboo to discuss within the pesantren context are here made public in a manner that bears more realistic proximity to santri experience. Rosyida combines engagement with Muslim discourse and at the intersection of popular cultural phenomena as experienced by pesantren youth.

A sense of cosmopolitanism in Rosyida’s narrative is reinforced by another convention of ChickLit, the inclusion of an English phrase in the culmination of Mbah Jalal’s speech: “peace and love”, a direct translation of “salam.” Sastra Wangi and ChickLit novels that include speech sprinkled with English phrases, are told in a colloquial speech narration, and which discuss such topics as sex, drugs, homosexuality, and politics are features typically attributed to the urban context out of which the narratives are set, and an important part of the global cosmopolitanism of the genre (Arimbi). By situating the narrative within a rural pesantren context, however, Rosyida as well as many other authors from KBQT which I will discuss in the next section, push the boundaries of the cosmopolitan identifications of ChickLit. By extending the narrative into the pesantren context they are not only including rural pesantren locations within that cosmopolitanism, but they are also challenging the very idea that urban and rural spaces represent drastically different spheres of experience. In fact, authors make clear the permeability of urban and rural experience as a defining feature of pesantren experience in even the most rural settings indicated by their regular engagement with popular cultural forms.

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<sup>251</sup> *Tumpang tindih antara agama dan budaya akan terjadi terus-menerus sebagai suatu proses yang akan memperkaya kehidupan dan membuatnya tidak gersang. Kekayaan variasi budaya akan memungkinkan adanya persambungan antara berbagai kelompok atas dasar persamaan-persamaan, baik persamaan agama maupun budaya. Upaya rekonsiliasi antara budaya dan agama bukan karena kekhawatiran terjadinya ketegangan antara keduanya, sebab kalau manusia dibiarkan pada fitrah rasionalnya, ketegangan seperti itu akan reda dengan sendirinya. [...] Dengan kata lain, secara kultural kita melihat adanya perubahan pada partikel-partikel dan tidak pada aliran besarnya. Umat Islam tetap melihat berpacaran bebas model Barat sebagai tidak Islami dan berusaha agar anak-anak mereka tidak melakukannya.”* (Wahid, “Pribumisasi Islam” 82, 84).

Kyai Ryan Nirwana, the father of the “bad boy” Bilal, is the third kyai is introduced in the narrative. Rosyida begins her descriptions of Kyai Ryan by drawing a parallel to Mbah Jalal, though their differences are quickly established.

“Like Mbah Jalal, Ryan is the kyai of a pesantren established five years ago. Even though the pesantren he built is not as big as Mbah Jalal, this is a beginning step for him. In his former life he wasted his time as a preman and homeless person at the terminal, this made him more careful in cultivating his faith so as not to fade away” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 32).<sup>252</sup>

While the two kyai share the fact that they established pesantren not through inheritance, but of their own volition, Kyai Ryan’s unseemly background creates the circumstance from which his more extremist Islamic orientations emanate. Formerly a preman or thug who the audience later learns killed his wife and remarried, Kyai Ryan turns to Islam by opening a pesantren, a form of personal reform as he attempts to erase his past life and dedicate his life to religious leadership rather than preman criminal activities. Less interested in being a good leader than perhaps gaining personal recognition, Kyai Ryan does not prove to be very trustworthy kyai in the novel, in fact he helps to circulate gossip about Dahlia’s dancing. He is also not very knowledgeable in adapting religious instruction to consult the santri students. Kyai Ryan is an extreme example of a third type of kyai set in juxtaposition to Mbah Jalal and Kyai Umar. Kyai Umar and Kyai Ryan, however, share the fact that they are both quick to deny Dahlia access to pesantren instruction because of the bad image her dancing reflects on their respective institutions. The kolot and preman kyai refuse to understand Dahlia’s situation. Regardless of how they came to gain the status of kyai—traditionally through inheritance or reformed into a life devoted Islam—they each fall into extreme kyai stereotypes. They are quick to judge and condemn Dahlia’s actions without understanding the full context of her situation.

Alongside the more granular question of local leadership, Rosyida frames a larger critique of the contemporary rise of extremist mass Islamic organizations in Indonesia. The novel is set in Sleman, located on the outskirts of the city of Yogyakarta. This is also where Rosyida attended pesantren before joining the community in Kalibening. Over the past decade Sleman has come to represent a site of more kolot religious ideals, as represented in the novel by Kyai Umar, but from which there are many stories of extremist activities likened to the preman kyai, Ryan. Yogyakarta is a city with increasing antagonism between urban-centered development for tourism, art and university education, and more conservative religious communities on the periphery.<sup>253</sup> In the novel Rosyida implicates the increasing rates of Islamic extremism in her

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<sup>252</sup> “Seperti Mbah Jalal, Ryan adalah seorang kyai yang mengasuh sebuah pesantren yang ia dirikan sejak lima tahun yang lalu. Meskipun pesantren binaannya belum sebesar kepunyaan Mbah Jalal, baginya inilah tahap bagi seorang pemula. Masa lalu yang ia habiskan buat jadi preman atau bergelandang di terminal, membuatnya jadi lebih hati-hati dalam rangka memupuk keimanan agar tak kembali pudar” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 32).

<sup>253</sup> During my fieldwork in Yogyakarta in 2015, there were many instances of new fatwah enforcing bans on alcohol consumption, curfews, and public expressions of allegiance to Front Pembelaan Islam [FPI or The Islamic Defenders Front]. FPI is a hardline Islamist organization founded in 1998 that view themselves as a moral policing force in Indonesia whose supporters would often parade around the city of Yogyakarta with large flags and loud motorbikes. As of 2020 they have since been banned due largely to their involvement in the 212 Movement in 2016 which were responsible for removing Ahok from office, the governor of Jakarta who is of Christian faith and Chinese-Indonesian dissent. Nastiti and Ratri interestingly enable affect theory to analyze Islamic mobilization in politics through a case study of FPI in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial elections. The authors articulate the ways in which this organization “provide[s] little social services and has few institutional connections with political parties” (200) and yet successfully mechanize “emotive appeals [...] as a strategy to win political support” (198). They pinpoint similar rhetoric used in the 212 Movement to that of depictions of the ormas in the novel, “...throughout



depictions of the kolot and preman kyai, which are perhaps more directly a response to her experience studying in pesantren in Slemann but which also reflects the national rise of hardline extremism among Islamic mass organization in Indonesia since the publication of this work. The hardline responses of Kyai Umar and Kyai Ryan lead to a wider protest from a mass Islamic organization. They arrive one evening at the doorstep of Mbah Jalal to question his treatment of Dahlia's situation. A debate ensues between Mbah Jalal and the crowd.

“The area surrounding the Syaifiyatuddin pesantren was crowded by a group of Muslim from the community along with their mass organizations. They filled Mbah Jalal's yard. [...]

“Allah commands us to fight in the street for Him, to firmly defend Islam, Mbah, instead of taking it easy and pretending not to know anything.”

“War is mandatory only when they want to challenge or fight us...”

“Oh, I see. Does that mean that Mbah Jalal doesn't really care if ordinary people approach infidels who trample over Islam by dancing luridly on the stage like that? That means we should just keep quiet, Mbah?”

“They are not infidels, just people who don't know any better.”

“If they're not infidels, how can they flaunt their sex to those who are performing devotions”

(Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 143, 146).<sup>254</sup>

Mbah Jalal continues to defend his position that as Muslims they need to find a way to help guide the young girl rather than banish her from the community and labeling her an “orang kafir” or infidel. The crowd is depicted as blindly following Kyai Umar and Kyai Ryan, their extremist response to Dahlia's dancing is juxtaposed with Mbah Jalal's position of openness, understanding, and forgiveness. As Dahlia learns to develop a sense of critical self-reflection and self-determination through the guidance of Mbah Jalal, Rosyida sets this in contrast to expressions of blind faith in the empty authority of kyai leadership.

Through the interactions of the three kyai with one another, Rosyida incorporates several controversial Islamic debates: divergent notions regarding the terms of the spiritual struggle of jihad, interpretations of Islamic law (*fatwah*) as well as the openness and flexibility of Qur'anic interpretation (*ichtiar*). As the unquestioned extremist authority of kyai leadership is called into question through the actions and teachings of Mbah Jalal, Rosyida presents to her audience the image of an ideal kyai rooted to tradition but flexible to the needs of the community. From minor details of pesantren leadership and penganjian, to the more serious ethical dilemma of Dahlia's dancing, Rosyida places greatest emphasis on the rational and compassionate responses of Mbah Jalal. He is described as wanting “to teach the children in a modern way” rather than enforce

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the election campaign period, posters and banners carried messages, such as ‘If you love Allah, the Quran and Prophet Muhammad vote for Muslim candidates’, ‘We reject Ajok to enter our neighborhood’, ‘Kafir (unbeliever) is Haram (sinful): Reject Ahok’ and ‘This Mosque will not pray for those who support and defend blasphemers’ (Nastiti and Ratri 204).

<sup>254</sup> “Kawasan pesantren Syaifiyatuddin sudah ramai oleh sekelompok masyarakat Islam bersama ormas-ormasnya. Mereka sudah memenuhi halaman rumah Mbah Jalal. [...]

“ ‘ Allah itu memerintahkan kita untuk berperang di jalan-Nya. Membela agama Islam dengan tegas, Mbah. Bukan malah santai-santai dan pura-pura tidak tahu.’

“Perang memang wajib di saat mereka menantang atau memang ingin memerangi kita...”

“Oh, begitu? Berarti Mbah Jalal memang sudah tidak peduli jika orang-orang awam dan mendekati kafir itu dengan seenaknya menginjak-iinjak Islam dengan jogetan-jogetan seronok di atas panggung seperti itu? Itu berarti kita hanya boleh diam saja, Mbah?”

“Mereka bukan orang-orang kafir. Mereka hanya orang-orang yang belum tahu.”

“Kalo tidak kafir, bagaimana bisa mengumbar aurat di atas orang-orang yang sedang berzikir?”

(Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 143, 146).

strict rules and heavy-handed regulations as is the case with Kyai Umar and Kyai Ryan (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 124). He guides students through their own process of learning, as well as encourages the kyai, santri and other members of the surrounding community to question the full context of the situation before casting judgement. The title of “Mbah” or “grandfather” is a sign of community respect, indicating to readers a close, almost familial connection with Dahlia and the other santri. His status as kyai is gained, rather than inherited, as he becomes a close and trusted leader in the community. He is an ideal kyai who openly discusses sensitive issues and helps to find solutions without dictating or demonizing the actions of the young santri students. Rosyida reiterates Mbah Jalal’s sense of justice, humanity, humility, and compassion throughout the novel. The kolot and preman kyai, on the other hand, refuse to understand Dahlia’s situation. Regardless of how they came to gain the status of kyai—traditionally through inheritance or reformed into a life devoted Islam—they each fall into extreme kyai stereotypes. They are quick to judge and condemn Dahlia’s actions without understanding the full context of her situation. As Dahlia learns to develop a sense of critical self-reflection and self-determination, Rosyida sets this in contrast to expressions of blind faith in the empty authority of a kyai.

*Tarian Cinta* is notable for the way Rosyida casts into perspective a diversity of kyai leadership roles through realistic depictions of three contrasting kyai. Their respective responses to the “toxic dancing” of the central protagonist not only reflect and critique various stereotypes of kyai leadership in Java, but also work to shape expectations for a greater sense of social commitment among kyai leaders for teen audiences. Rosyida’s emphasis in the novel on the more tempered, compassionate, and critical thinking leadership of Mbah Jalal shapes audience expectations toward this kind of leadership in society and harkens back to the discourse of kyai kampung, and the influences of Gus Dur on her work and in the formation of KBQT. As Rosyida formulates her aspirations and expectations for transformative leadership, there is an implicit connection between Bahrudin as leader in Kalibening and Mbah Jalal in the novel that Rosyida extends from her comparisons of Gus Dur and Bahrudin mentioned previously. In “Gus Dur dan Kepala Sekolahku” (“Gus Dur and the Head of My School”), Rosyida draws a direct connection between Bahrudin and Abdurrahman Wahid, likening the two in their praxis-oriented leadership styles and approaches to educational reform in Indonesia.

“...the ways of thinking between Gus Dur and Pak Din are arguably quite similar, even the same. We don’t need to look very far for an example, I can explain through issues faced at our school (our learning community) [sic].

“Usually, people call our school an Islamic school. For us, it is far from being Islamic because Islamic schools are still oriented towards a formal method, which can be restraining and even coercive to children. Multi-story buildings, uniforms, name tags, high gates, teachers, students, these are all just symbols. In fact, almost all of what is mentioned as part of the student facilities in a school actually has no function. By function here I mean functions that are truly needed by the learners themselves” (Rosyida, *Gus Dur...Asyik Gitu Loh!* 82).<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> “...pemikiran antara Gus Dur dan Pak Din itu boleh dibilang mirip atau bahkan sering sama. Contohnya nggak usah yang jauh-jauh. Saya cukup cerita masalah sekolah saja (komunitas belajar kami).

“Jika bisanya ada yang menyebut sekolahnya adalah sekolah Islam, bagi kami justru sekolah itu masih jauh dari kesan keIslaman. Hal ini disebabkan karena sekolah tersebut masih berkiblat kepada metode formalitas, yang notabene sangat banyak pengekanan dan pemaksaan terhadap anak. Kalimat-kalimat seperti gedung bertingkat, seragam, papan nama, gerbang tinggi, guru, murid, semua hanya berbuah simbol belaka. Kenyataannya, hampir yang disebutkan sebagai fasilitas siswa justru sama sekali nggak ada fungsinya. Fungsi yang dimaksudkan di sini adalah, segala fungsi yang memang benar-benar dibutuhkan oleh para pelajar sendiri” (Rosyida, “Gus Dur dan Kepala Sekolahku” (*Gus Dur...Asyik Gitu Loh!* 82).

Rosyida's comparison draws attention to their shared critique of the institutional hierarchies of pesantren education, an important foundation from which the KBQT learning community was established. The misconception of KBQT seen as an Islamic school KBQT stands at tension with the fact that it is educational alternative that falls squarely outside of the realm of pesantren education. This can be attributed to the fact that Bahruddin is still considered a kyai in Kalibening, and that inheritance remains important to popular conceptions of traditional patterns of leadership in rural Java. As reflected in Rosyida's exploration of kyai types in *Tarian Cinta*, however, there is not a singular way of understanding kyai leadership, rather we learn through the narrative that the everyday realities of kyai leadership are diverse and multiple. It is a shifting notion largely shaped by context, whether it be strictly relegated to pesantren institutions or defined by a more syncretic ethos as in the ways Bahruddin is understood by the community in Kalibening to be "sebetulnya kyai," something like a kyai but with significant deviations from the traditional notion.

In Kalibening, family history surrounding the traditional and transformative adaptations of kyai leadership in Kalibening serve an important historical basis from which critical pedagogies are enacted at KBQT. Traditional ideologies and transformative methodologies operate in tandem to empower the village community through participatory learning, at the same time they stand in tension with one another. While expectations of inherited leadership through the male heir remain, leadership in Kalibening has, in practice, already changed. The everyday functioning of KBQT and SPPQT include many more women in positions of authority. During my fieldwork, for example, Ruth Murtiasih Subodro, served as the Director of SPPQT, and KBQT female students represent a significant majority of leaders as they organize educational projects with their peers and the surrounding community.

Emancipatory education in Kalibening is defined not merely by a departure from the sense of uniformity and restriction proliferated by institutional formations, but a methodology for local community empowerment. The legacies of Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich continue to resonate alongside contemporary national and local leaders like Gus Dur and Bahruddin. The application of critical pedagogies and participatory learning within the village context at KBQT facilitates forms of personal and community emancipation from institutional constraints reproduced through schools and government bodies. Participatory learning within the village context is critical to the ways in which members of KBQT and the greater Kalibening community self-reflexively define the terms of their own empowerment.

### ***Conclusion:***

Qaryah thayyibah as a model of village empowerment is a key site of symbolic action in Kalibening. SPPQT and KBQT are part of a set of movements set to motion most notably in the eighties and nineties. Their intergenerational and emancipatory impetus serve to sustain notions of change and adaptation in the agrarian context. Education is central to the efficacy of the transformative movement in Kalibening, while also being rooted to progressive Islamic and national movements in Indonesia. Together KBQT and SPPQT work to broaden educational access for the rural poor, strengthen food sovereignty, and become alternative mechanisms for working towards social and economic transformation in Central Java. Their localized educational and economic organizing strategies work to challenge the status quo of state authority, corporate interests, and particularly rigid notions of Islamic authority. They also work to counteract the negative effects of New Order developmentalism and centralized administrative controls in the

agrarian context. Farmers become the subject of development, not the object. This was a common idea discussed by members working to shift the subject position of farmers. This is not just an ideological goal, but one that is implemented through the educational and agrarian initiatives at KBQT and SPPQT. They operate through both symbolic and practical actions to revive a sense of direct connection to the land and autonomy over the ways in which economic and educational resources are created and distributed in Kalibening, thereby creating new foundations for community development in the process.

A reminder of the “kyai-ness” of Bahruddin is important to the ways in which the community in Kalibening establish a link between personal history and community history surrounding village empowerment in Kalibening. Kyai kampung is a productive category for understanding the leadership of Bahruddin in Kalibening because it is not an institutional designation, but rather one that is determined by community participation. While Bahruddin doesn't entirely fit the scholarly or traditional notions of kyai leadership, he nevertheless enables key elements of the ethos of kyai leadership. He embodies multiple categories of what it means to have authority and influence in Java. This is a major feature of his leadership role, and by extension, the efficacy of his community organizing work with SPPQT and KBQT in Kalibening. His adaptability to the needs and interests of the community in Kalibening is largely the reason why he is such a respected leader, but through terms that differ from his father's generation. Agrarian and educational activism by Bahruddin has brought a great deal of attention to the small village of Kalibening. For over a decade now, SPPQT and KBQT have and continue to operate as mechanisms of local empowerment. Bahruddin is widely recognized locally and nationally for this work, and as the public face of Kalibening, his leadership role in the community continues to acquire new meaning, new points of authority and resonance with popular social and cultural movements that challenge feudal, colonial, courtly, and authoritarian notions of what it means to be a rural leader in Java.

## 5 | Authorizing Empowerment at KBQT, Transformative Chick Bildung

Participatory learning and village empowerment are enacted today in the contemporary educational community of KBQT. As a new generation of cultural actors, members of KBQT inherit much from the grassroots organizing efforts of transformative social movement activists of generations prior. In their application of critical pedagogies in Kalibening, their educational practices are sites of reflection and continued action. Participatory learning is enacted in the ways in which students shape their own curriculum with the assistance of facilitators that help to organize, design and implement learning goals situated within the surrounding community. For members of KBQT, the quarryah thayyibah village empowerment model is not only enacted through learning projects within the community, but it is also expressed through popular literary forms. The Freedom Writers Forum is one of many informal learning groups at KBQT which organize educational projects around common interests. In name alone, the ideals of emancipatory and participatory learning are advanced through the practice and circulation of writing. This group and the published works of a number of key authors are the focus of this chapter. I explore how their works demonstrate shifts in the patriarchal narratives of traditional leadership in Java. As these authors reimagine literature and lived experience for popular audiences, I see their works as also expanding scholarly understandings of symbolic action in Java. Building on previous chapters, I show a long-term process of transformation which has already begun, and the ways in which women and children assume more public leadership roles through their continued symbolic actions.

In my reading of literary works produced by member of KBQT, I demonstrate how these young authors enable the act of writing as a personal emancipatory process, as well as a means by which to extend the practices of emancipatory learning to wider audiences of young adult readers. Many of the authors are women, and the stories they write are largely expressed in the popular literary forms of ChickLit and *novel pop pesantren* (pesantren pop novels) for young, primary female, audiences. This new generation of women authors assume a more public facing role as published authors outside of Kalibening. In my close reading of literary works produced by members of KBQT, I demonstrate how popular genres typically associated with urban cultural forms are resituated in the rural-urban interface of village empowerment. I show how these works reconstitute conceptions of cosmopolitanism in Java and critique traditional cultural hierarchies from within. Many of these narratives deploy the genre of ChickLit as a tool for the expression of transformative methodologies through coming-of-age stories of their young, primarily female protagonists. I show how these works constitute what I call a transformative chick bildung. By embedding examples of transformative conscientization in popular narratives for a growing audience of young readers, these works move away from the centralizing tendencies of the national imagination and instead shape spaces within which their readers can imagine alternative possibilities beyond the boundaries of the nation state. These texts in turn serve as a key example of the ways in which transformative movements continues to authorize a multiplicity of decentered subjectivities.

### *Participatory Learning and the Freedom Writers Forum*

Empowerment through self-determination is enacted at KBQT as students collaborate to decide what they want to learn, how they are going to learn it, and who they need to work with in order to facilitate their project goals. They do not follow any official state or religious curriculum, rather, there are community facilitators that help the students design and build their own curriculum. To do this, they use a variety of organizational strategies to develop projects that then become the basis of their education. Members of KBQT, for example, meet together every Monday morning to reflect on their work from the previous week, give presentations, discuss successes and failures of current and continuing projects, and define their goals for the week to come. For the rest of the week, students break out into various classes organized by age or interest group. The classes based on age meet regularly to discuss core learning objectives (math, science, reading, writing, etc.). They also organize according to various group forums based on creative interests such as writing, music, dance, painting, or internet technology. In one small example from my time conducting ethnographic fieldwork withing their community in 2015, the students were interested in learning more about cooking, so they organized a project to make, package, and sell food at the local market in downtown Salatiga. The students worked in a local family kitchen to plan a business strategy to sell muffins, cookies, traditional sweets, and small lunch boxes in Salatiga. They pooled resources to purchase ingredients, acquired ingredients from the local market, worked with a neighboring family to use their kitchen to cook and package the foods, strategized best times and sites to sell their snacks, organized a group to sell the goods, and used the profits to purchase ingredients for the next cooking project. There is a great deal of flexibility in the organization of learning groups, and as projects develop, the groups often shift and overlap as need arises. The daily and weekly format of meetings provides an outlet for discussion, development, review, and reflection on how to improve their learning goals, largely influenced by participatory models of grassroots community organizing.

In much of their learning, members of KBQT are accustomed to using the human and natural resources around them as the basis of their education. During my time in Kalibening, for example, Bahrudin requested that I share resources for English language learning as a means by which to participate in the educational projects at KBQT. One afternoon I arranged to meet with students involved in the “Freedom Writers” English Forum to discuss ideas for developing a larger English project during my time in Kalibening. We sat together on the ground of the veranda of their learning community which stands in the middle of a courtyard surrounded by Bahrudin’s family home, a mosque, student dormitories, and the homes of several other community members. Shoes off and drinking sweet tea, the students spoke with great enthusiasm about their English project ideas. Brainstorming, laughing and joking around, code switching between Javanese, Indonesian and English language as they came up with countless ideas. Members of KBQT share an excitement and eagerness to create new projects, they thrive outside of a formal classroom setting and expressed an eagerness to engage with me as an English language resource within their own creative endeavors. Recently they had been working on a number of short film project and so decided that it would be useful to produce an English language film about their community. Kalibening has many local and international visitors who come to see how the educational model of KBQT operates, so the students imagined this film could be a supplement for English audiences to learn about KBQT.

The Freedom Writers forum created a core English language script, and each of the other student forums filled in details of their respective projects. The title of the film would be “Show

Off,” a translation of “Gelar Karya,” a monthly event organized by students to “show off” their current projects at KBQT. Every month they invite members from the surrounding community and nearby pesantren to enjoy presentations and performances that reflect the variety of activities that constitute their educational practice. As a form of entertainment and community gathering, these rural art shows can be traced to the Javanese sanggar, informal sites for the study of traditional and folk arts in Java. At KBQT, they hold a monthly Gelar Karya to present works created as part of their educational process. For our film project, members of KBQT adapted the concept of “Gelar Karya” into a short film in order to feature their participatory learning style. In our discussions, the students were interested in showing not only works produced from out of their learning community, but also how the students work together to learn and create. Literatures, performance arts, visual arts, and internet technologies were among the projects featured in our film, as I learned more about how the arts are enabled as a pedagogical tool, outlet of self-expression, and site of learning at KBQT.

Participatory learning at KBQT is most enlivened through member’s engagement with a wide variety of creative expressions. Collected works of short story fiction and poetry, novels, essays, films, and group research projects are among the creative works produced through their educational system. Literature, performance and visual arts, and new technologies serve many functions in Kalibening. They are pedagogical tools, outlets of personal expression, and important sites of engagement with the surrounding village and a growing network of alternative educational communities throughout Central Java. The body of works produced by members of KBQT is vast, and some are more ephemeral than others.<sup>256</sup> The variety of forms and themes presented in their creative projects reflect an engagement with a diversity of traditional and contemporary arts and technologies. Their curriculum is entirely generated through the engagement between members of KBQT and the surrounding community as they work towards an educational system embedded in everyday life in Kalibening. As KBQT operates as an alternative to state and religious educational institutions, their collected works constitute an alternative archive of the transformative movement. The transformative goal of decentering the production of knowledge and shifting agency to local communities is achieved through student driven research and creative projects.

In 2007 the Freedom Writers created an independent publisher called “Pustaka Q-Tha” to publish works produced by and for the students and the greater Kalibening community. They are also part of a network of local independent publishers like INSIST, LKiS, and Matapena, other literary groups exploring and creating alternative archives of art for wider audiences. The body of published works by members of KBQT constitute an impressively large corpus of literature, and a productive window to explore how this next generation of empowered youth in Kalibening are working to challenge social and literary conventions in their creative projects. In 2014, the Freedom Writers Forum published an anthology of short stories entitled, *Let Go*, part of a larger research project in which members set to explore the theme of “letting go of difficult emotions” through a variety of creative projects.<sup>257</sup> The authors of this collection enable creative short story writing as an outlet to research their own personal experiences, process difficult emotions, and

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<sup>256</sup> The KBQT band which call themselves QT Perkusi, for example, regularly perform at events across central Java and have gained local celebrity status among a growing network of children’s arts festivals in the region, which I will return to later in the chapter.

<sup>257</sup> Freedom Writers. *Let Go*. Salatiga: CV. Narata Karia, 2014.

learn to “let go” through writing. The editors describe the relationship between the act of writing and the authors’ experience of relief from the emotional struggles of youth.

“For young people, bad romantic experiences are often a source of depriving oneself happiness in the present. Life feels like it cannot go on. But in the end, these shackles can be broken down. Slowly life goes on, through conscious effort or unexpected experience, we gain momentum with time. The momentum to release shackles from the past becomes an interesting story when told through fiction. The book in front of readers now is a collection of fictitious short stories that tell of individuals struggling to escape the trappings of bitter memories through their respective momentum” (Freedom Writers iv)<sup>258</sup>

The editors’ reflection on the emotional liberation of teen subjectivities serves as an important framing through which freedom is enacted within the process of writing. KBQT authors enable themes derived from everyday experience: pesantren life, coming of age in rural Java, negotiating personal faith and community expectations, and of course also the dramatic “chick” narratives of young love. A central feature in many of their narratives, whether they are set in pesantren or not, is that they typically enable learning styles that approximate participatory learning set within the village context that is a feature of their own education at KBQT.

“Undangan Merah Hati” or “The Red Hearted Letter” written by Fina Af’idatussofa explores education and community leadership in rural Java within the chick genre.<sup>259</sup> Af’idatussofa writes from the perspective of a middle-school aged girl named Alya, negotiating young love within a community learning context that bears striking resemblance to the QT learning community. The title of the work signals readers to the romantic narrative, and first personal journal-style narration interspersed within the omniscient narrative voice similarly reinforces those conventions of ChickLit by drawing readers into the inner thoughts and feelings of the central female protagonist. The story opens with the scribbled journal writings of Alya as she receives the titular “red-hearted letter”:

“I was just sitting quietly when the red hearted letter landed in my hand. Clouds brought it unburdened to me. My smile widened to perform happiness. Perform? Why did I say perform when this is such a common occurrence? I would have been wiser to take a closer look” (Af’idatussofa, “Undangan Merah Hati” 57).<sup>260</sup>

Through the self-reflexive internal experience of the central protagonist, audiences learn that the love letter is from Ashraf the “founding father” (the English phrase is used in the original) of their community of “pemerhati anak,” (lit. people who care about the well-being of children). Af’idatussofa develops tension between the narrative details of a budding romance with the growing sense of self-determination for the lead female protagonist. The letter inspires a sense of self-conscious unease for Alya as she “performs” the happiness the letter is meant to inspire.

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<sup>258</sup> “Pada kalangan anak muda, pengalaman asmara yang buruk kerap kali menjadi biang dari terampasnya kebahagiaan saat ini. Hidup pun terasa tak dapat dilanjutkan. Namun toh pada akhirnya belenggu itu terurai juga. Perlahan laku hidup dapat diteruskan setelah upaya sadar ataupun pengalaman tak terduga mengambil momentumnya dalam alur waktu. Momentum yang sanggup melepas belenggu masa lalu itu menjadi kisah menarik untuk dituturkan lewat fiksi. Buku yang ada di hadapan pembaca ini adalah kumpulan cerita pendek fiktif yang mengisahkan individu-individu yang berjuang lepas dari jebakan ingatan pahit dengan momentumnya masing-masing.” (Let Go, iv).

<sup>259</sup> Af’idatussofa, Fina. “Undangan Merah Hati,” in *Let Go*, 57–94. Salatiga: CV. Narata Karia, 2014.

<sup>260</sup> “Aku masih diam saja saat undangan merah hati itu mendarat di tanganku. Mega memberikannya tanpa beban. Menebar senyum dan pamer kebahagiaan. Pamer? Kenapa aku menyebutnya sebagai pamer, sedang itu hal yang lumrah terjadi. Semestinya aku bisa lebih bijak memandangnya.” (Af’idatussofa, “Undangan Merah Hati” 57).



Unease surrounding the romantic narrative is resolved through a solidified connection to community-based education. Af'idatussofa gives thematic attention to student driven research projects, learning by doing, and the incorporation of local economic initiatives within the educational goals of the fictitious learning community, all features which bear striking resemblance to KBQT. Alya is initially a visitor interested in the educational process of this community. While conducting a research project about the community, she gains an admiration for Ashraf, for his community work and dedication to the rights of children but struggles with whether or not this admiration translates to romantic love.

This community who care about the well-being of children became witnesses to their meeting. Alya never once thought Ashraf would get to know her better. She was just a middle school kid doing a research internship with this community, while Ashraf was the founding father of the community.

She was amazed by the enthusiasm of this one young kid, but she only placed this amazement in the space in her heart where inspirational figures usually reside. Nothing more than that.

She valued him as a teacher of life who helped others learn many things by participating in various team activities.

Not only related to children-focused communities, Ashraf also inspired his partners to remember their own productivity through a range of business development programs.

This young entrepreneur invites the entire team to work hard independently, to strengthen the movement of caring for children which in turn encourage him.

Alya decided to become part of it, for the Harmonious Garden Children's Community to become her second home" (Af'idatussofa, "Undangan Merah Hati" 58-59)<sup>261</sup>

Af'idatussofa establishes a chick narrative from the start by drawing teen audiences into the excitement of the romantic drama. The social and romantic tensions Alya negotiates in the novel parallel audience expectations for a romantic conclusion, but the "performance" Alya experiences in the opening lines of the novel is in many ways the romantic narrative itself. Romantic themes lead the protagonist on a process of self-discovery and reinvigorated sense of self-determination as she decides to set aside her romantic feelings and follow her desire to become a part of the greater community.

Choosing Kak Ashraf is not just a question of feeling. Alya felt it was her dream to be with a figure like that. If we are united, then Alya's happiness is not just with Kak Ashraf, but also the younger siblings [adik-adik] and the entire community team." [...]

Alya continued her writing...

One issue that now I must work towards is to erase Kak Ashraf from my heart. This is not easy, but since now I know that Ashraf's mother also does not agree about us, I can more easily accept this reality. I'm not saying that I accept it entirely, because I cannot deny that the feeling of disappointment is

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<sup>261</sup> "Komunitas pemerhati anak menjadi saksi pertemuan mereka. Alya tak pernah sedikitpun berpikir bahwa Ashraf akan mengenalnya lebih. Sebab ia hanya [58] anak sekolah menengah yang magang untuk melakukan riset, sementara Ashraf adalah founding father komunitas.

Jika kemudian Alya cukup kamgum dengan semangat anak muda satu itu, ia sama sekali hanya meletakkan kekegumannya di ruang hati di mana sosok-sosok inspiratif biasa dinaungkan. Tak lebih dari itu.

Ia menghargainya sebagai guru kehidupan yang membuatnya belajar banyak hal saat ia ikut serta dalam berbagai kegiatan team.

Bukan hanya soal komunitas yang terfokus pada anak-anak, Ashraf juga menggerakkan seluruh partnernya untuk meningkatkan produktifitas mereka dengan beragam proram pengembangan usaha.

Sosok pengusaha muda itu, mengajak seluruh tim bekerja keras mandiri, demi memperkuat eksistensi gerakan peduli anak yang digalakkannya.

Alya sendiri, berikutnya memutuskan untuk secara sepihak, untuk menjadikan Komunitas Anak Taman Harmoni, sebagai rumah keduanya" (Af'idatussofa, "Undangan Merah Hati" 58-59).

still here. I just don't need to care. Letting go is the best way for me now" (Af'idatussofa, "Undangan Merah Hati" 74-75).<sup>262</sup>

Af'idatussofa uses the common term "kak" to refer to Ashraf as a kind of older sibling and "adik-adik" for younger siblings to reinforce the familial nature of the educational community. The failure of the romantic narrative is a redirection towards the educational message of the story. "Undangan Merah Hati" is a story with romantic packaging that explores the process of negotiating social and personal expectations of the young female protagonist: feelings of love, learning and social responsibility. Through the protagonist's journey of negotiating the terms of her empowerment, Af'idatussofa embeds an emancipatory learning model for a young, predominantly female, readership. "Letting go" in this story means reformulating personal desire within the context of community-based participatory learning. By highlighting education as a human right for children, Af'idatussofa additionally draws from the legacies of education being utilized as an important arbiter of change within the contemporary social movements, heralded most notably through the work of Romo Mangun in the eighties, as well as the long tradition of grassroots educational projects in the agrarian context which predate the formation of the Indonesian nation. This any other works from Kalibening reflect continuities between social movement trends in the post-reformasi era and a long tradition of grassroots educational projects enabled throughout many eras of social movement organizing in Indonesia.

Many members of the Freedom Writers Forum enable the chick genre as a playful, enjoyable to read, and nevertheless intellectual bridge between literary traditions, contemporary transformative social movements in Java, and global networks engaged in emancipatory educational processes. Oriented towards popular audiences, these works invite readers from both rural and urban backgrounds to the cosmopolitanism of agrarian Java. Maia Rosyida, who is also member of the Freedom Writers Forum, draws from a wide range of cultural influences that reflect the intersections of Islam, gender, popular culture, and education, both within pesantren institutions as well as community based alternative education like at KBQT. The social tensions which emerge in *Tarian Cinta* cue readers attentions to the multiplicities of pesantren experience and shifting notions of kyai leadership. Authors like Rosyida and Af'idatussofa enable the intersections of multiple subjectivities to grapple with notions of self within divergent sets of community expectations drawn from Javanese cultural formations, village identities, pesantren experiences, and overarching national social pressures. The conflicts which emerge in these narratives often rest at the intersection of multiple identity formations, and their romantic narratives rarely conform to typical romantic resolutions. Even as the stories contain educational messages situated within state and religious institutions, the didactic impetus is generative of greater multiplicity of experience. From realistic depictions of pesantren experience to a reformulation of romantic expectation of ChickLit, authors from KBQT work to create spaces for the shaping of alternative subjectivities that reflect the alterity of their learning community in

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<sup>262</sup> "Memilih Kak Ashraf, bukan sekadar soal rasa. Alya merasa sebagian mimpi Alya berada pada sosok itu. Jika kami bersatu, maka kebahagiaan Alya bukan sekadar bersama Kak Ashraf. Melainkan juga adik-adik, dan seluruh team komunitas. [...]"

"Alya melanjutkan tulisan..."

"Satu hal yang kini harus kuusahakan. Menghapus Kak Ashraf dari hatiku. Ini tidak mudah. Tapi sejak aku tahu bahwa Ibu Kak Ashraf juga tidak menyetujui kami, aku lebih bisa menerima kenyataan itu. Aku tidak mengatakan bisa menerima sepenuhnya, sebab tak kupungkiri bahwa rasa kecewa tetap ada. Hanya saja tak perlu kupelihara. Merelalahkan adalah jalan terbaikku" (Af'idatussofa, "Undangan Merah Hati" 74-75).

Kalibening. The editors of *Let Go* frame their collection around notions of change and movement tied to the notion of letting go of difficult emotions, in the next sections I extend that idea to explore what else is being “let go” in these works. In what ways are these authors informed by literary traditions of Indonesia, global popular cultural forms, pesantren education, and the alternative trajectories of transformative social movements? How do the tensions between those influences help to shape new forms of imagination, and therefore emancipation? How does letting go of the romantic expectations of the chick narrative lead to the formation of alternative subjectivities?

In this section I engage in a close reading of a variety of works from Kalibening. The texts do not quite fit in any one genre of literature, even as they engage in the conventions of each. From stereotypical “chick” narratives, pesantren narratives, the dichotomy between rural and urban experience, as well as the novel form itself, authors from KBQT enable a broad spectrum of literary conventions, cultural traditions, and social norms as tools to explore subjectivities that are alternative to the national imagination. By both enabling and refusing certain categorical markers, the authors confront notions of difference, expand notions of tradition, and their texts in turn advance the liberatory and emancipatory goals of the transformative movement for a growing audience of young adult readers. They bring awareness of longstanding social, political, and cultural discourse into popular narratives as a means through which to negotiate processes of change and transformation that is embedded in everyday experience among the Javanese rakyat kecil.

### ***The Act of Writing: From Enlightenment to Emancipation***

Before I enter into a closer examination of works produced by members of KBQT, I first need to provide some framing of literary history and the ways in which the novel form itself first circulated in the context of Indonesia. This serves as a baseline for understanding how the act of writing enabled by members of KBQT as a medium for engagements with transformative praxis. The form of the novel itself is of course a product of the European enlightenment, wherein realism and linear temporality, combined with the democratic notions of an expanded reading public and privileging of the experience of youth are emblematic features of the modernity of the form. The novel is perhaps one of the largest global exports of European enlightenment thinking. In Europe and in the Dutch East Indies, the novel form developed alongside journalistic writing, was written predominantly by men, and circulated in mass with the onset of the printing press. In the Dutch East Indies, European style education was the primary means through which enlightenment ideals were reproduced in the colony. Indigenous communities authorized to write and publish were those individuals who attained a modern colonial education. Entrance into these institutions was determined by the politics of identity in the Dutch colony, typically only the children of mixed Dutch-Malay parentage or the descendants of the landed gentry throughout the Malay Archipelago were allowed to attend. Malay would later become the basis for the development of the Indonesian language, solidified by the link between colonial education, growth of a literate society, and shift towards print literature which largely foreground the establishment of the independent nation of Indonesia.

*Sitti Nurbaya* (1922) by Marah Rusli is considered the first Indonesian novel. It presents a kind of Malay Romeo and Juliet-type story about two teenage lovers from Padang, Samsulbahri and Sitti Nurbaya, who are separated not by a familial feud but by the modern drive towards attaining a colonial education and the traditional pull of an arranged marriage. They

discover their love only as the male protagonist departs for the colonial capital of Batavia (Jakarta) to study at a Dutch school. Nurbaya's attempts to defy her *adat* traditions inevitably lead to her tragic death by poisoning. Published in print by the colonial literary bureau, Balai Pustaka, this work represents a marked shift in the literary traditions of the Malay world. With a long oral tradition in the recitation of pantun poetry and epic *hikayat*, the novel form brought print literature in Malay to a growing readership educated in the Dutch colonial system.

Contemporary Chick literary formations may seem a far stretch from early Indonesian literary history, but the connection between youth writing, the expansion of educational access, and large-scale movements for change are well-established scholarly templates for identity formation in the Indonesian context. The *pemuda* youth movements of the 1920s provided the foundations for the formation of the Indonesian nation, as both a collective imaginary and personal identity, as well as for contemporary literary movements. The ideals of *Sumpah Pemuda* helped shape and define the contours of Indonesian linguistic and cultural identity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Now in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the youth of KBQT are renegotiating the terms of that identity. They are writing from out of their experiences, in modes of expression that are tied to the early history of Indonesian literary formation, as well as national and international trends and the rise of women's writing globally. They reflect broad intertextual connections through their engagement with and alterity to national and global literary trends.

Novels by Af'idatussofa and Rosyida, as well as many other members of KBQT, engage in forms of realism which highlight the emancipatory process. The proximity of these chick narratives to everyday experience is reminiscent of some of the earliest printed published works of Malay fiction in Java, such as was published by Balai Pustaka as well as by the Chinese-Peranakan community, whose publications closely approximated the journalistic realism from which their authors also published.<sup>263</sup> In works by KBQT authors, the personal development of central protagonists are situated within realistic community contexts that often approximate the life experiences of their authors. Their characters come to find a greater sense of self determination, personal voice, and a heightened ability to maneuver within various social and cultural domains, a reflection of the emancipatory process their authors experience in the act of writing as well as the educational dynamics of the KBQT learning community.

In so far as their works deal with the moral, psychological and spiritual growth of their central protagonists in the formative years of development, the coming-of-age stories produced by members of KBQT resemble the European literary genre of *bildungsroman*, which came to prominence in 18-19<sup>th</sup> century European literature.<sup>264</sup>

"The defining elements of the Bildungsroman, conventionally understood, are these: a young man from the provinces seeks his fortune in the city and undergoes a process of education in the ways of the world such that he eventually becomes reconciled with it. Yet even in this reductive formulation key variants exist: a young woman undergoes a process of worldly or sentimental education and becomes reconciled to her destiny, sometimes in the form of marriage; or a young man or woman undergoes a process of aesthetic or worldly or sentimental education (sometimes all three together) and achieves success as a writer or an artist" (Frow et. al 10).

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<sup>263</sup> This is a field of literature typically excluded from the "canon" of Indonesian literature, but which predate and far outnumber the collected published works of Balai Pustaka. See Salmon, *Literature in Malay by the Chinese of Indonesia: A Provisional Annotated Bibliography*. Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1981.

<sup>264</sup> See Moretti, Franco, and Albert Sbragia. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. New ed, Verso, 2000. And Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism*. Null edition, Parasitic Ventures Press, 2008.

The fact that works by members of KBQT are largely written by women in a genre that is typically oriented towards female audiences opens space for comparison with one of Indonesia's most famous female Indonesian authors, Kartini, as well as the contemporary growth of women authors in Indonesia whose literature is known by the pejorative distinction of *sastra wangi* or "perfumed literature" mentioned in the previous section.

Kartini was a daughter of the priyayi Javanese aristocracy, her father served as Regent of Jepara on the Northern Coast of Central Java and her mother was the daughter of a religious teacher in the region, presumably within pesantren circles. As a "princess" of Java she carried the title *Raden Adjeng* or *Raden Ajoe* which afforded her the opportunity to a Dutch education, though also restricted her to a life confined within the walls of the regent's palace. She attended Dutch schools in Java but was not permitted to continue beyond junior high school. Kartini's correspondence with her friend Stella Zeehandelaar in Holland from 1899-1903 were published posthumously under the title *Door Duisternis tot Licht (Out of Dark Comes Light)* in 1911, just 7 years after her death from complications during childbirth in 1904.

Kartini's letters to Stella are intimate and deeply personal, she speaks freely to a woman who she regards as a contemporary in hopes of being received by Stella as a "kindred spirit" (*On Feminism and Nationalism* 31).

"We have come together in such mutual understanding. You told me that I am nothing less than a soulmate to you. And that is how I have regarded you!" (Kartini, *On Feminism and Nationalism* 53).

Kartini writes extensively about her sense of confinement within Javanese tradition and the formalities of rank and title in the Dutch colony.

"I want nothing else than that you always call me by my name and that you use 'je' and 'jij' [informal 'you']. [...] Should you find somewhere in my letters an occasional 'gij' and 'u' ['thou' and formal 'you'], then do not regard this as a formality but merely as a mistake.

"I also am an enemy of formality.

"What do I care about forms? I am happy to be able at last to shake off that annoying Javanese formality while having this chat with you on paper. These forms, these petty laws instituted by people, are an abomination to me. You cannot imagine how that old mother 'etiquette' rules in the circles of the Javanese nobility. You cannot move a muscle or that awful woman stares grimly at you! With us these formalities are not so strictly followed. We honor the golden proverb: freedom is happiness" (Kartini, *On Feminism and Nationalism* 31).

Kartini expresses her longing for a greater sense of freedom from what she felt was a restrictive existence. In one letter from August 1900, she shares with Stella an allegorical tale of a "poor little rebellious brown girl" from Java who, when asked by one of her Dutch peers what she wants to become when she grows up, is unable to imagine her own future. As a young woman tied to the formalities of Javanese aristocracy, she mourns not being allowed to continue her education in Holland, and instead dedicates her life, however short, to the creation of schools for native girls in Java. Education, for Kartini, was the ultimate outlet for emancipation, and tradition the cage which she herself never escaped.

"A heavenly idea. Mevrouw, which would be a blessing for native society if it eventuated; and that blessing would be greater if those girls were also given the opportunity to prepare themselves for some kind of vocation that would enable them to make their own way through life when, as a result of their education, they may no longer wish to return to their traditional society. And the young girl who has been mentally developed, whose

perceptions have been broadened, will no longer be able to live in her ancestral world. She will have been taught what freedom is, and she will be placed in a prison; she will have been taught to fly, and she will be locked up in a cage” (Kartini, *On Feminism and Nationalism* 62).

Despite never having met in person, the candor Kartini expresses in her letters to Stella is indicative of the important role in which the act of writing played in Kartini’s life. The letters were for her a medium of expression and means of release from the sense of confinement she felt. Even as she was able to attend Dutch schooling as a member of the Javanese aristocracy, the fact that she was a woman also set limitations on what extent the enlightenment of her educational experience could extend into public forms of expression. Her letters not only provide a window into her personal frustrations, but also her collective aspirations for the emancipation of Javanese women and girls through wider access to education.

In the foreword to the 2005 translation of Kartini’s letters by Joost Cote, Goenawan Mohammad writes of the persona of Kartini, a figure who has been made into an icon of early Indonesian nationalism and feminism.

“Kartini is a heroic and a tragic figure. She fits into those categories in many ways: she is good looking, intelligent, perceptive, rebellious, yet at the same time she is a loyal but vulnerable daughter of a Javanese aristocrat, haunted, disappointed and restricted, and, finally, meets her death at the young age of 24 in 1904” (Mohammad, “Kartini: The Persona” v).

Kartini is indeed considered by many to be a tragic hero, and this descriptive framing highlights two opposing extremes of her popular reception that reflect commonplace conceptions of the restricted role of women. As a nationalist icon, she is “good looking,” “vulnerable,” and “loyal” to Javanese tradition, a kind of damsel saved from the vacuum of history. Her commemoration in the national holiday of Kartini Day is a day most notably marked by dressing up little girls in make-up, kebaya and sarong as the next generation of little Kartini princesses are then paraded around schools, city centers, and government buildings to remember the icon. Not unlike the contemporary depictions of Bahrudin in Rolling Stone Magazine, appearances, titles, and positions continue to carry deep resonance, even among the progressive Indonesian literati, within which Mohammad is most certainly an important figure.

As a feminist icon, Kartini is “intelligent, perceptive, [and] rebellious.” Her works are read for their revolutionary spirit, disillusionment with the patriarchal order of colonial Java, and sense of comradeship with female friends in and outside of Indonesia, as well as many international activist figures of the time. Her activism is underplayed in the national discourse and many of her translated writings have been “cleaned up” (read: censored) to remove any lingering “communist” (read: non-nationalist) sentiments. Her rebellious nature is superseded by her “goodness,” not unlike many of the female character is in works by KBQT authors—the depiction Dahlia in *Tarian Cinta*, for example, who is caught between finding a necessary means of survival for her family and the expectations of correct behavior for a young woman in the pesantren community is superseded by her aptitudes as a santri student—or in depictions of Bahrudin which underscore his kyai-like persona. As icons, Dahlia, Bahrudin and Kartini are all transgressive figures who defy commonplace expectations of correct behavior, but whose rebellious acts must also be recuperated within popular narratives of correct behavior.

The iconic persona of Kartini that has become a mainstay of Indonesian nationalism is in many ways in conflict with the person. Kartini’s call for consciousness raising of indigenous communities during the colonial period was revolutionary. For Kartini, the emancipation of the “Javanese princess” lies in her ability to determine her own subjectivity most notably through

education that is embedded in notions of family, tradition, intergenerational learning, and women's empowerment.

“Develop the hearts and minds of Javanese women and one will have a powerful collaborator in that beautiful and gigantic task: the enlightenment of a people which numbers millions! Give Java fine, intelligent mothers and the improvement, the raising of a people, will be but a matter of time.

“In the meantime, provide education, instruction for the daughters of the nobility; the civilizing influence has to flow from here to the people. Develop them into capable, wise, fine mothers and they will vigorously spread enlightenment amongst the people. They will pass on their refinement and education to their children: to their daughters, who in their turn will become mothers; to their sons who will be called on to help safeguard the welfare of the people. And as persons of intellectual and spiritual enlightenment they will, in many ways, be of assistance to their people and to their society” (Kartini “Give the Javanese Education”).

Kartini is often criticized for the elite nature of her call to educate the Javanese people, but she is of course a daughter of the Javanese elite and therefore also a product of the social structures of the time. As a Javanese princess, or member of the *priyayi* class, she was educated in a western style, breaking molds of her time, but as a woman, she remained limited. I want to highlight, however, the important intergenerational aspect of her call to broaden educational access. It is through a gendered perspective which Kartini shapes a more egalitarian notion of educational access. In what ways are works by KBQT authors also working to break the molds of their time? What constraints and what opportunities do they explore and how are they expanding notions of greater egalitarian access to contemporary educational modes?

Today, the national framing of Kartini as the “tragic hero” works to dissociate her identity from her ideals, and in some ways sets of a trajectory of national educational development which undermines the potential for egalitarian modes knowledge production. Kartini places emphasis on the important role of mothers as educators and so situates the family as a central site for the reproduction of knowledge. Even while the starting point of the educational project is still located within enlightenment standards of Dutch language education, she points towards the proliferation of a multiplicity of knowledges defined not by centralized standards of practice, but by the diverse and constantly shifting needs of the people and society. The role of families, of especially mothers, is critical in Kartini's dream of education. She writes:

“Nature herself has appointed her to this task. As mother, she is the first educator; at her knee the child first learns to feel, to think, to speak; and in most cases, this initial nurturing influences the rest of its life. It is the hand of the mother which first plants the germ of virtue or wickedness in the heart of the individual where it usually remains for the rest of the person's life. [...] The education and development of the Javanese people can never be adequately advanced if women are excluded, if they are not given a role to play in this” (Kartini “Give the Javanese Education”).

Education in Indonesia since the formation of the Indonesian nation, has of course granted access to both men and women, but in many ways the strengthening of its institutionalization has led to a great deal of disenfranchisement in practice. The cost of admission to state education is restrictive for many. *Pesantren* institutions are one alternative, but, with the growth of sectarian politics during the New Order, they too have been caught in institutional constraints of standardized practices and hierarchical modes of knowledge production. Darmaningtyas writes about the nationalizing drive of education in Indonesia.

“Education here is situated as a main door to improve the quality of our culture as a nation. [...] The atmosphere of education since the New Order until now seems more like a marketplace: crowded with many

people looking for short-cuts to generate profit, full of manipulation, corruption, collusion, student oppression” (Darmaningtyas, *Pendidikan Rusak-Rusakan* 37, 41).<sup>265</sup>

Within the impetus towards uniformity and increasing market orientation of the Indonesian state, notions of family have also been politicized and coopted by the state to such a degree that women, especially rural women, are demonized for their inability to reproduce the centralized and uniform standards of the (militarized) nation. Institutionalized education in Indonesia today, even after the reformation period, remains highly centralized and far from egalitarian. It is designed to reproduce the motives of the nation state at the exclusion of the actual diversity of the Indonesian nation.

For Kartini, the act of writing was a means to reach beyond the strictures of colonial society, both in her own time and as a legacy from which nationalist and feminist subjectivities formed around her persona in contemporary Indonesia. Freedom is a theme she returns often in her letters to Stella. It is not, however, a freedom tied exclusively to a particular cultural imagination, but rather one that is situated in the complex limbo of late colonial and early nationalist imaginations.

“I shall fight, Stella, I want to achieve my freedom. [...] In this, too, there hides a certain egotism because I could never be happy, even were I free, even if independent and emancipated, if thereby I would make Father wretched. [...] The life path of young Javanese girls is clearly marked out and formed according to only one model. We cannot have ideals—the only dream we may dream is, today or tomorrow, to become the umpteenth wife of some man or other. I defy someone to refute this” (Kartini *On Feminism* 56).

Kartini’s sense of freedom is complicated by the tension between modern progress and traditional duty. Kartini is torn between her desire for education and sense of duty to family, a sentiment which creates a sense of solidarity with fellow Javanese women.

“...born blind, but whose eyes have been opened so that they can see the beautiful, noble things in life. And now, that their eyes have grown accustomed to the light, now that they have learned to love the sun and everything that is in the brilliant world; they are about to have the blinders pressed back against their eyes, and to be plunged into the darkness from which they had come, and in which each and every one of their grandmothers back through the ages had lived” (Kartini 86).

She is conflicted in her individual aspirations for emancipation from the strictures of colonial society and desire to adhere to family tradition, as well as her aspirations to write publicly and work towards the collective emancipation of Javanese girls. Her extant writing reflects a time when the public role of women in society was strictly limited.

As a memorialized national figure, Kartini has ironically acquired a very public role in Indonesian society as one of the most well remembered figures from that period. But Kartini in the national imagination is typically confined her a role as tragic hero; domesticated as a good Javanese girl who remained true to her family traditions, and so was also a good colonial subject who absorbed the modernity enlightenment of her colonial education. There is an irony that her letters were given the title *Out of Dark Comes Light* in Holland when she had such a bleak view of her own experience. Her glowing reception in Europe reinforced the notion that Dutch education brought enlightenment thinking to the East Indies, and her suffering within the

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<sup>265</sup> “Pendidikan disini ditempatkan sebagai pintu utama untuk meningkatkan kualitas kebudayaan kita sebagai bangsa. [...] Suasana pendidikan sejak Orde Baru hingga sekarang terkesan seperti pasar: ramai oleh banyak orang yang mencari keuntungan dengan jalan pintas, penuh manipulasi, korup, kolusi, dan menindas murid” (Darmaningtyas, *Pendidikan Rusak-Rusakan* p. 37, 41).



strictures of traditional Javanese society the ultimate proof. Education was, however, both the problem and the solution to her liminality, stuck between European modernity and Javanese tradition. Kartini's example provides a point of contrast (and of continuity) with the works of KBQT authors who are by and large young women. Writing in the in the post-reformasi era, in what ways are works by KBQT authors also working to break through the strictures of their time? What constraints and what opportunities do they explore and how are they expanding notions of greater egalitarian access to contemporary educational modes? Most notably these authors work to critique educational institutions which reproduce the patriarchal legacies of authoritarianism and centralized knowledge production.

KBQT authors engage with the tension between the individuality associated with modernity and the collectivity associated with *adat* traditions that was typical of much of the literature of Kartini's era, nearly 100 years ago, now told through the negotiations of educational experiences for young women in Java. They fuse those considerations with trends in contemporary women's writing in Indonesia, but with some important revisions that speak to certain features of the transformative movement. Arimbi (2009) articulates a trajectory of literary trends from the Balai Pustaka generation to the *Angkatan 2000* or 2000 Generation—which ushered in a new phase of female dominated authorship in Indonesia known as *sastra wangi*—that serves as a useful point of comparison for how this next generation of women writers from KBQT are reworking literary conventions.

“If the Balai Pustaka generation of the 1920s is marked by the conflict between the individual and *adat*, the Pujangga Baru with the nationalist movement, the 1945 with humanism, the 1966 with soviet and political protest, and the 1970s-1980s with popular fiction, generation 2000 is identified with liberalism in every aspect of their writings. The writings are often harsh with no pretense of morality, and full of everyday slang and social references” (Arimbi 80).

She goes on to highlight some of the most notable works of this generation; *Saman* (1998) and *Larung* (2000) by Ayu Utami, the *Supernova* series (2001-2016) by Dewi Lestari and *Jangan Main-Main (dengan Kelaminmu)* (2007) by Djenar Mahesa Ayu. In the cosmopolitan world of these *sastra wangi* novels, the authors incorporate narratives that take place in urban setting, colloquial speech narration with styles sprinkled with English phrases, and regularly discuss such topics as sex, drugs, homosexuality and politics. “The audacity of these young writers is highly valued, as they construct new images of young modern Indonesian women who are unconventionally reactive in responding to the problems of modern life” (Arimbi 80). The rise in young female authors in contemporary Indonesia is not, however, limited to the representations of urban experience. The contributions of newer generations of women writers in Indonesia expands the cosmopolitanism typically associated with urban context into the rural, but nevertheless modern, *pesantren* experience. Stylistically these works are influenced by a wide variety of local and global literatures; *roman picisan* dime novels, kitab kuning, sufi poetry, and popular Muslim women authors in Indonesia such as Abidah El-Khaliqy, all resonate in works from KBQT authors. From Kartini to the Angkatan 2000 generation, the spectrum of women's writing in Indonesia are often defined by their relationship to prescribed roles of women in their respective time periods. Kartini, whose writing during the late Dutch colonial era in Java has come to assume both nationalist and feminist resonance in Indonesia is defined largely by her tragic persona. She was an enlightened Javanese princess, restricted by traditions of colonial Java and therefore a perfect model of post-colonial nationalist imagination. The urban-centered writing of Angkatan 2000, on the other hand, aggressively reject any notions of traditionalism.

Global cosmopolitanism is a medium through which these authors transgress social norms and defy contemporary restrictions on the prescribed roles of women in Indonesia today as they engage in forms of global urban cosmopolitanism in their narratives.

Arimbi's emphasis on liberal ideals embedded in writings by Angkatan 2000 authors provides an important theoretical framing for how and why KBQT authors works deviate in certain ways from both *sastra wangi* and ChickLit conventions. Their stylistic choices are linked with important features of the transformative movement that work to decouple progressive ideals from liberalism, an ideological formation which came into being in the age of enlightenment, whose permutations traveled the world through empires and the rise of the nation state, and was exacerbated to its most dramatic neoliberal form in Indonesia by the developmentalist policies of the New Order. Forms of liberalism tied to individual freedom of thought, religion and way of life are retained by KBQT authors, but they are cast in relation to traditional collectivities. Private land ownership is one of the core foundations of liberalism which, in the Indonesian context, has largely led to the capitalist exploitation of the agrarian context. The novel form, which places emphasis on the individual situated in chronological time, is tied to the global shift towards privatization. The personal narratives of KBQT authors, on the other hand, place emphasis on the individual as situated within thriving local community contexts as their narratives present a revision of the liberalism typically associated with the contemporary rise of women authors in Indonesia. The character development of the central female (and male)<sup>266</sup> protagonists are formed through authors' engagement with a multiplicity of influences that works to recuperate a sense of playfulness, joy, and growth (both personal and environmental) within the agrarian context. These authors' engagement with pesantren subjectivities are important for the reconciliation of tradition with new forms of progressive modernity that is a political legacy of post-colonial resistance movements. Their works create space for the coexistence of traditional expectations and shifting notions of modernity, without falling prey to capitalist driven neoliberalism.

### ***Love under the Azan: Literary Transformations within Chick Bildung***

Many of the short stories in the collection *Let Go*, as well as the plethora of novels produced by members of KBQT, revolve around teen romance with emphasis placed on the psychological development of the central protagonists. Following one of the central conventions of Chick Lit, the authors typically employ a first person or omniscient narrative style embedded within personal journals, diaries and letters as the characters ponder the meanings of their actions, relationships, and memories. Realism pervades these narratives as the protagonists learn to negotiate romance, religion, friendship, and a variety of other social and cultural forces that shape their subjectivities in these coming-of-age stories. The authors often enable romantic narratives as a tool for the exploration of alternative subjectivities and sites of emancipatory educational praxis. In *Gus Yahya, Bukan Cinta Biasa* [*Gus Yahya, No Ordinary Love*], Af'idatussofa combines conventions of ChickLit and Novel Pop Pesantren by foregrounding the romantic narrative situated within the pesantren / madrasa setting. On a quiet night of study as santri students anticipate of a new school year, the first glances between the male and female protagonist build audience anticipation within the chick genre. Expectations of the romantic

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<sup>266</sup> Following both male and female protagonists which still writing within the ChickLit genre is yet another feature of KBQT authors' texts resisting literary convention.

narrative are informed initially by title of the first chapter, “First Sight,” which is written in English and framed with hearts in the original publication.

♥ First Sight ♥ [sic.]

The cloudy night delivered heavy rains, it did not diminish the spirit of the santri concentrating on berta'allum.<sup>267</sup> Everyone solemnly interpreted the holy book, each class diligently occupied by their studies of nahwu, fiqh, tauhid, and other subjects.<sup>268</sup> The madrasa was peaceful and serene in the dark night. Soon the madrasa returned to being shrouded in the hustle and bustle of the students after study. The classroom doors were opened wide for students returning to the pondok.<sup>269</sup> The students of the second-grade junior high school also felt this atmosphere, but some of the male students had not yet moved from their seats. They were waiting for the rain to subside. Yahya, who usually goes straight home, joined the students from his class.”<sup>270</sup>

[...]

Amid the busyness of students chatting, the female santri from the same level passed by Yahya's class, their faces visible behind a large pane of glass in the front of the classroom. Unintentionally, Yahya's gaze fell on a female santri walking to the back row. A santri he had never seen before. She was walking next to Mbah Sanah, a santri Yahya knew well. For a moment Yahya saw the girl smiling with Mbah Sanah, a smile that was honest and full of innocence. A smile that was so beautiful and full of sincerity.<sup>271</sup>

Af'idatussofa places narrative emphasis on the internal thoughts and feelings of the central protagonist. The omniscient narrative voice which focuses on the perspective of the male protagonist, Gus Yahya, an authorial choice which from the very start signals to readers an important deviation from the ChickLit genre, a similar technique enabled by Rosyida in *Tarian Cinta*. Gus Yahya is also the son of a kyai, yet another parallel to Rosyida's work.

*Gus Yahya* was first published in 2007 by Matapena, a small publisher of pesantren teen lit out of Yogyakarta. Af'idatussofa then self-published the work in 2010 through Pustaka Q Tha, the independent publisher of the KBQT learning community. Nor Ismah, a member of Matapena and scholar out of the University of Hawaii, writes about the growth of pesantren teen lit,

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<sup>267</sup> *Berta'allum* is a general term for the study of the Qur'an, hadith and Islamic law. Students typically study in the mosque with Islamic scholars, formally and informally after communal prayer.

<sup>268</sup> *Nahwu* is Arabic grammar, *fiqh* is Islamic jurisprudence, and *tauhid* is the monotheistic concept of the oneness of God in Islam.

<sup>269</sup> *Pondok* are the dormitories for santri students.

<sup>270</sup> “Malam yang mendung disampaikan lewat derasny hujan, tak menupuskan semangat santri yang konsen berta'allum. Semuanya khusuk memaknai kitab. Pembelajaran nahwu, fiqh, tauhid, dan ilmu-ilmu lainnya ditekuni penuh di setiap kelas. Madrasah terkesan damai dan syahdu di sela peraduan malam kelam. Tak lama kemudain madrasah kemali diselimuti dengan hiruk piuk santri se usai belajar. Semua pintu kelas telah terbuka lebar untuk santri yang akan kembali ke pondok. Suasana seperti itu dirasakan juga oleh santri di kelas dua tsanawiah. Namun, sebagian santri putra di kelas itu belum juga beranjak dari tempat duduknya. Mereka masih menunggu hujan mereda. Yahya yang biasanya langsung pulang ke rumahnya, kini turut bergabung dengan para santri yang kebetulan satu kelas dengannya.” (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya*, 2010: 7.)

<sup>271</sup> “Disela kesibukan santri yang tengah berbincang-bincang, terlihat santri putri dari kelas segeloh melewati kelas Yahya. Tanpa sengaja, pandangan Yahya tertatap pada seorang santriwati yang berjalan diretan paling belakang. Seorang santri yang tak pernah dilihatnya, sebelumnya. Santri tersebut sedang berjalan beriringan dengan Mbak Sanah, satri yang cukup dikenal oleh Yahya. Sesaat Yahya melihat gadis itu tersenyum dengan Mbak Sanah. Sebuah senyum yang tulus dan penuh kepolosan. Senyum yang bergitu indah dan penuh keikhlasan” (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya*, 2010: 8).

influences from the ChickLit genre, as well as the ways in which female authors work to bring greater awareness of pesantren experience to wider audiences.

“[T]he new generation of women writers from the pesantren has become a significant group because they have acted as a bridge between those who are from pesantren and those who are outside of the tradition, and because in the past Muslim women have rarely achieved any prominence in the literary world” (Ismah 105).

Ismah goes on to cite the work of Dhofier to discuss how many young women have become authors because of a desire not only to serve as a bridge between those inside and outside the pesantren tradition, but also as a means by which to combine knowledge of both Islamic and secular themes, the former attained through pesantren education and creative writing being a central outlet in the in the romance genre for the latter. The romantic narratives of these works set up a significant tension alongside the Islamic educational context which allow their authors to engage with critical considerations of social, cultural, and personal expectations.

As Af'idatussofa writes within a genre which grew out of the larger framework of *sastra wangi*, she and many authors of *sastra pop* pesantren (pop pesantren literature) engage with the perceived margins of pesantren experience more broadly, and merge notions of attaining higher Islamic knowledge with contemporary literary styles and popular trends typically associated with more urban contexts. There are earlier instances of authors writing about pesantren experience, such as Djamil Suherman, Syu'bah Asa, and Fudoli Zaini in the sixties, Emha Ainun Nadjib in the seventies, and the poets K.H. Mustofa Bisri, Jamal D. Rahman, Acep Zamzam Noor and Ahmad Syubbanuddin Alwy in the eighties, but the first major women author to write about the tensions between sex and contemporary pesantren experience is Abidah El-Khaliqy, a kind of foremother to the pesantren *pop* genre (Ismah 107).

El-Khaliqy was born in 1965 and raised by a santri family at Pesantren Jomban in East Java. Her novels came to prominence in the late nineties, and she is considered the only author of the 2000 Generation to explicitly focus her works on Islamic themes. “[H]er works are different from the writers from the popular urban-centered *sastra wangi* generation such as Ayu Utami, Fira Basuki, and Mahesa Ayu Djenar. Their novels explore cosmopolitan lifestyles, whereas Abidah writes about lifestyles that are assumed to be marginal” (Ismah, 109). A prolific writer with more than 15 novels, her most famous novels include *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (*Woman with a Turban*, 2001) which was adapted to film in 2009, and *Geni Jora* (2003). Her engage in feminist themes, challenge patriarchal norms of Islam, and openly discuss Islamic women's sexuality in an unprecedented manner. As Tineke Hellwig argues, “Abidah's novels stand out in the way they speak openly and in great detail about sexual relations [...] They critique polygyny and male power over women, and break through taboos such as domestic and (marital) rape. Yet, they also demonstrate how women find pleasure in sexual intimacy as an intense physical expression of lovemaking. Her stories are remarkable, as they do not shy away from the topics of homosexuality and pre-marital sex, generally unmentionable within Islamic discourse. Hence her fiction contributes to debates on these issues within Indonesia's Muslim community” (Hellwig 18-19). Khaliqy and the *Angkatan 2000* literary generation greatly influence the women writers from KBQT insofar as their novels engage with women's experience in the pesantren setting and come to include stylistic features of contemporary popular literatures. Their works are oriented to younger audiences, so the sexual themes are not as explicit as the older generation of women writers, but they nonetheless deal with the realities of young love within the pesantren through the chick genre.

Romantic narratives are not new to the Malay language tradition, nor are they exclusively tied to women's writing of the Angkatan 2000 generation of writers. Oral traditions of Java and the Malay world often involved storied romantic narratives in epic poetic verse to convey didactic messages for youth in a kind of education of desire. The *Penglipur Lara* stories, for example, told of the dramatic goings on of the pleasure gardens of the Kingdoms of Java. *Andaken Penurat* is perhaps the most emblematic narrative of young romance which combines tragedy with the miraculous to convey a didactic message about the follies of young love. Romance within these epic stories largely point towards the formation of relational subjectivities, composed at the expense of the kings of Java, those subjectivities often reinforce the feudal relationships of pre-colonial Java. While these narratives are situated in a very different time to the modern ChickLit romances that are the subject of this section, similar themes are carried forth in the ways in which their narratives point towards the formation of youth subjectivities in the modern nation state, and in response to the changes that have taken place in the formation of national subjectivities. For the Freedom Writers of KBQT, romantic love is a predominant theme through which the protagonists in their novels grapple with a deeper sense of self, and the personal life lessons they attain serve to reflect the educational alternatives and the dynamics of emancipatory education at KBQT. The form of the print novel has brought many changes in the orientations of a public readership and its relation to the nation.<sup>272</sup> While these works no longer involve sung recitation, they do, however, make frequent reference to pop music, television, and film. Individuals read novels whereas collectivities hear epic stories recited—and yet the authors find ways to reflect contemporary forms of collective experience. One method enabled by Maia Rosyida is the inclusion of an Islamic soundscape as a reflection of Islamic collectivities in Java, but also is a signal to the formation of more critically minded youth subjectivities within the romantic narrative.

The romantic narrative in *Tarian Cinta*, for example, is interwoven throughout the story of Dahlia's "toxic dancing." There are two central conflicts within the novel, one of which involves our young female protagonist being torn between supporting her family through dance and being ostracized from the surrounding pesantren community, the other, a romantic drama in which she is torn between two love interests, Aiman and Bilal, the "good-" and "bad-boy" sons of Mbah Jalal and Kyai Umar respectively. In the end Dahlia finds a revived sense of self determination which supersedes the romantic narrative, but an interesting feature of the romantic action is in how the author deals with the tension between Islam and young romance, a "secular" aspect of life that is officially relegated from pesantren education, but which is part of the everyday experience of santri youth.

In *Tarian Cinta*, Rosyida explores the intersections of romance and pesantren education through an unlikely romance which takes place with strong links to family connections and develops quite literally under the sound of the azan. The familial connection and the Islamic soundscape serve as framing devices for the romantic storyline between Dahlia and Bilal. Rosyida initially constructs a juxtaposition of the two love interests that align with their father's respectively contrasting roles as kyai in the community. Notions of lightness and darkness are reflected in descriptions of the color of their skin tone, a metonymic device for their moral character. Aiman is the good son of the ideal kyai—"a sweet boy with light skin" (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 1)<sup>273</sup>—whereas Bilal is the rebellious and rude son of the former preman kyai—

<sup>272</sup> Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised Edition, Verso, 2006.

<sup>273</sup> "cowok manis berkulit putih" (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 1).

“With skin that was a little dark but which didn’t make the sweetness of his appearance disappear” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 33).<sup>274</sup> That both boys remain sweet in the eyes of the narrator signals to readers that they are both worthy of Dahlia’s affections. Dahlia is as having a strong moral character, despite accusations of the opposite from the surrounding community. The romance between she and Aiman is expected, but it is through her romantic interactions with Bilal in which Rosyida shifts audience expectations within the chick narrative to one which underscores the personal development of one of the central male protagonists. The azan is often present when Bilal and Dahlia interact with one another as a reminder of the greater Islamic community within which both are recuperated. The taboo surrounding Dahlia’s toxic dancing is foregrounded in the novel. Her good intentions, kind demeanor and diligence in attaining pesantren education help to offset the community misunderstanding of her missteps. Dahlia feels completely at home under the sound of the azan as she embraces her time at the pesantren and attempts to develop more personally fulfilling choices in how she spends her time, namely in dedication to Islamic study. She decides to don the hijab and decides to quit dancing for money. The audience is made to feel sympathy towards Dahlia throughout the work despite the community uproar against her. Bilal, on the other hand, is not depicted in such a sympathetic fashion at first. His character is defined by anger, aggression, and disenfranchisement from the community. He smokes cigarettes, associates with street thugs, and regularly lashes out at his peers in the pesantren community.

“He really has a reckless attitude. He was rarely seen at home. When he goes home, his only purpose is just to take money without permission, and sometimes steal food from the two-door refrigerator<sup>275</sup> perched in the dining room. He doesn’t bother to find a job. A childhood full of tension made him grow into a very stubborn and temperamental person who was often difficult to control” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 89).<sup>276</sup>

His rivalry with “Gus Aiman” or “Good Aiman” reinforces his bad nature. Bilal is described as having an aversion to azan, a sound which elsewhere in the novel is described as a point of inspiration and community solidarity.

“The silence of the night, interspersed only with the sound of the call to prayer echoing in all directions, had no effect on Bilal. The call to prayer is just like a buzzing bee that idly greets him” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 89).<sup>277</sup>

As Rosyida distances Bilal from his classmates, family, and the greater Muslim community, she creates distance from the sympathies of the readership. It is only through his relationship with Dahlia, her family, and the pervasive sound of the azan under which their romance takes place from which he is recuperated back into the community.

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<sup>274</sup> “Kulit yang sedikit gelap tak membuat parasnya yang manis itu hilang” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 33).

<sup>275</sup> Having a “two-door refrigerator” is a marker of affluence here.

<sup>276</sup> “Sikap yang benar-benar nekat. Jarang sekali ia terlihat ada di rumah. Kalau pulang, tujuannya paling-lain Cuma ingin ambil duit tanpa izin, sama kadang-kadang curi-curi makanan di kulkasdua pintu yang bertengger di ruang makan. Ia memang tak mau susah-susah cari kerja. Masa kecil yang penuh tekanan batin memuat dirinya tumbuh menjadi sosok yang sangat keras kepala dan temperamental sehingga sering kali sulit dikendalikan.” (Rosyida, 33).

<sup>277</sup> “Keadaan malam yang sepi dan hanya diselingi dengan suara azan yang menggema di segala penjuru, tak berefek pada pendengaran Bilal. Panggilan shalat itu hanya seperti lebah berdengung yang iseng menyapa dirinya” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 89).

Audiences only come to understand a sympathize with Bilal through Dahlia's interactions with him. She is one of the few characters to show compassion for him, this is perhaps because she too is momentarily disenfranchised from the community from the controversy surrounding her dancing. Paradoxically, however, she remains a model of santri behavior in the novel, and an important initiator of change for Bilal. Dahlia shows forgiveness and understanding to him, and the audience comes to see that there is more than meets the eye. Bilal acts out in the community because his traumatic upbringing: raised by a preman father who lost his mother at an early age.<sup>278</sup> There is a parallel motif in the way in which the community initially misunderstand what is deemed "bad" or "toxic" behavior by both Dahlia and Bilal. Rosyida leads the audience through a process by which trauma and "bad behavior" are contextualized so that the individuals find personal growth and reconciliation with the surrounding community. In the case of Dahlia's dancing, Mbah Jalal and Aiman are the character models for understanding why she was driven to dancing for money to support her family when it becomes problematic for the community, similarly Dahlia and her family are the characters models who initially try to understand why Bilal acts so aggressively. As Rosyida brings Dahlia and Bilal closer together in the novel, she also creates distance between Bilal and his father, Kyai Umar, most notably surrounding their treatment of women. Kyai Umar, as we learn, killed his first wife, Bilal's mother, and is physically abusive to his current wife, Bilal's stepmother. Despite not wanting to abuse women, like his father, there is an instance in which an argument between the santri youth leads Bilal to accidentally hit Dahlia. It is especially significant in this moment that Dahlia finds a way to forgive him for his actions. Her greater understanding for his circumstance parallels that of Mbah Jalal and is set in contrast to the "ormas" response to her toxic dancing. Within the dramatic narrative, Rosyida sculpts a larger didactic message about the difficulty but nonetheless importance of critical thinking larger contextualization of individual behavior. We, as an audience, are not meant to discount Dahlia or Bilal for their actions without first trying to understand the broad context which led to their actions. Rosyida reinforces the importance of family and collective social responsibility, not features of liberalized ideals which lead to greater individualization and community disenfranchisement, but rather of the important connection between the development of the self within traditions, community expectations, family dynamics, and religious values that are actively being negotiated through the realism of everyday experience in the novel.

Dahlia expresses her anger and frustration towards Bilal, but remains committed to showing the community that he is worthy of redemption (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 95).<sup>279</sup> She invites him to visit her mother and brother, by bringing Bilal into her home Rosyida further gestures towards the importance of family connection as a baseline to the romantic developments. This is another feature of Rosyida's revision of the conventions of more urban based *sastra wangi*, that is, to incorporate more wholesome notions of sexual relations in the novel. Dahlia discovers a hidden sweetness in Bilal's character and the audience witnesses a major shift in Bilal's character. Before meeting her family, Bilal quite uncharacteristically shows a strong intention to impress Dahlia's mother, "How should I act to be seen as good in the eyes

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<sup>278</sup> "Bilal yang telah beanjak dewasa dan keharapan untuk jadi anak yang berbakti justru semakin bersikap sebaliknya. Entah berapa kali ia merampok, berjudi dan bahkan membunuh orang. Hanya satu hal yang taka da dalam nalurinya, ia tidak suka main perempuan seperti yang sudah menjadi kesenangan Ryan di masa lalu." (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 35).

<sup>279</sup> "Dahlia menatap Bilal tajam dan berusaha untuk tegas juga. Dia ingin membuktikan, Bilal bukanlah laki-laki yang seekaknya bisa kasar terhadap dirinya." (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 95).

of your mother?” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 99).<sup>280</sup> When Dahlia’s mother first meets Bilal, she calls him “anak berandalan” or a “delinquent child” because of his previous reputation in the community, but still welcomes him warmly into their home (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 98). In a moment of motherly love between Dahlia’s mother and Bilal, she sees past his tough exterior and encourages him to get closer to her daughter. “Bring Dahlia to a beautiful place. Teach her how to have a more meaningful life” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 134).<sup>281</sup> This moment between the mother and Bilal is restorative for the young boy. Motherly expressions of kindness and love ignite the romance between Bilal and Dahlia. He spends time with Dahlia’s younger brother Jati to teach him how to collect wood for the fire in their hearth—a subtle metaphor for the warmth they share for one another as the romance develops. The love Dahlia’s family shows to this the “delinquent child” reveals his sweeter side, and Dahlia in turn feels a greater fondness for him.

“Dahlia was getting to know the real Bilal. Her mother and brother Jati also welcomed him nicely. Bilal was not like what people said about him, very wild and crazy. It was actually very miraculous because Bilal turned out to have a natural ability to become the head of a household. [...] It was as though Dahlia rediscovered her father and a friend who could make her happy when she is sad, comfort her when she cries, and protector her when she is scared” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 106-107).<sup>282</sup>

The romance which develops between Dahlia and Bilal is signaled most directly by the sound of the azan, and Rosyida returns to these familial connections repeatedly throughout the novel, but it does not always lead to the expectations of a romantic conclusion which readers still expect. The familial connections are set within the context of religious education and personal development, two themes which in the end supersede the romantic narrative.

Dahlia and Bilal go on their first date as the azan resounds throughout the community. The purple prose descriptions of the pesantren atmosphere at night reinforce audience anticipations of the romantic narrative as the two youth begin to fall in love under the azan.

“...when it was approaching sunset and the sun slowly faded and began to sink, the two of them had just come out of the dark room. Bilal immediately brought Dahlia to the top of the flyover not far from the movie theater. From such a shirt height, it was still enough for them to see the beauty of God and His various creations. The red hues gently painting the sky. The white clouds moving past to accompany the evening call to prayer. Birds in the sky flying freely above the neat rows of worshipers. Saying goodbye to the light of the sun to be replaced by the beauty of moonlight across the dark night. It all seemed to enter the naked eyes of Bilal and Dahlia. They both sat in silence, caressed by the fragrant winds fanning away their exhaustion” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 135).<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> “*Aku musti gimana biar baik di mata ibumu?*” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 99).

<sup>281</sup> “*Bawa Dahlia ke tempat yang indah. Ajari dia pada kehidupan yang lebih bermakna*” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 134).

<sup>282</sup> “*Dahlia sudah semakin mengenal diri Bilal yang sebenarnya. Ibu dan Jati juga udah bisa menerima kehadirannya dengan sangat baik. Bilal ternyata bukan seperti yang orang-orang kata. Sangat gila dan liar. Bahkan ini sesuatu yang sangat ajaib. Karena, ternyata Bilal sangat berbakat untuk menjadi kepala rumah tangga yang baik. [...] Dahlia seperti menemukan Kembali sosok ayah sekaligus teman yang dapat membahagiakannya ketika sedih, menenangkannya ketika menangis, dan melindunginya ketika merasakan ketakutan*” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 106-7).

<sup>283</sup> “*...ketika menjelang maghrib saat gelora matahari pelan-pelan luntur dan mulai tenggelam, keduanya baru saja keluar dari ruangan gelap itu. Bilal langsung mambawa Dahlia ke atas jembatan layang yang tak jauh dari lokasi bioskop. Dari ketinggian yang tak seberapa itu, sudah cukup untuk melihatkan mereka pada setiap wujud keindahan Tuhan dengan berbagai ciptaan-Nya. Rona merah pada lukisan langit yang lembut. Awan putih yang bergumul kemudian berjalan pelan-pelan seperti hendak mengiringi azan maghrib yang telah mereka nantikan. Burung-burung angkasa yang kian terbang bebas dengan barisan jamaah dan ber-shaf-shaf sangat rapi. Juga, ucapan*



Dahlia then makes an unexpected request, “Bilal...perform the call to prayer for me” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 138).<sup>284</sup> In the following moment an important change takes place for Bilal. What would be called *kesadaran* in Indonesian, or, in the context of critical pedagogies Paulo Freire would call a process of conscientization, Rosyida weaves an emancipatory learning process into the narrative and a major turning point in the romantic narrative trajectory of the novel.

“Bilal was not aware of how Dahlia’s request was presented as a proof of her holy love. He was quite surprised since the performance of his prayers was still full of holes. He never thought about or had any desire to recite the call to prayer for anyone. But, it looked like he was going to do it. Bilal would soon change” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 138).<sup>285</sup>

The change that takes will take place within Bilal is illustrative of a kind of consciousness raising Rosyida builds into the text to emulate the liberatory ideals that are central to the educational process at KBQT. Under the Islamic soundscape of the azan and at the request of a young love, Bilal comes to find his own sense of voice and personal relationship to Allah.

“A few moments later when all the worshipers had already cleaned themselves with the ablution water, including dahlia, Bilal did not hesitate to ask permission from the keeper of the mosque to become the muezzin. [...] Along Atmosukarto Street where one corner is located the mosque, silence subdued their harmony within. The poles trembled when Bilal’s voice was heard loudly praising the greatness of God. All the bark on the tree branches by the roadside shuddered, dropping their leaves. There are not enough words to describe when a beautiful voice decorates the words that are the Pearls of Allah. His greatness, His oneness, the testimony of all beautiful beings, no one can deny Him” (Af’idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 139-140).<sup>286</sup>

The shift in the narrative is also signaled by the response of natural forces surrounding them. The natural world around the young couple responds in kind by serving as a witness to Bilal’s transformation.

“The softness of the sky and the hardness of the earth seemed willing to witness Bilal’s struggle with the divine words. His heart suddenly felt blistered then collapsed by the cool air penetrating into the room. How he was ready to commit to replacing his hardened heart with prayer strings to lead his spirit gradually to heaven’s door.

“ ‘I will do it!’

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*selamat tinggal oleh cahaya matahari yang akan menggantikan semua itu dengan dengan cantiknya bulan sebagai ganti lampu penerang di kegelapan malam. Itu semua seakan menembus mata telanjang Bilal juga Dahlia. Keduanya masih sama-sama diam, terbelai angin yang semerbak mengipas kelelahan”* (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 135).

<sup>284</sup> “Bilal...azanlah untukku” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 138).

<sup>285</sup> “Bilal masih seperti tak sadarkan diri ketika permohonan itu dilontarkan Dahlia sebagai syarat atas cinta sucinya. Dia jelas kaget karena shalatnya sendiri juga masih bolong-bolong. Tak pernah sedikit pun terbesit dalam ruan keinginnannya untuk menyerukan kewajiban shalat pada manusia. Tapi, saat ini sepertinya ia akan melakukannya. Bilal segera akan berubah.” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 138).

<sup>286</sup> “Beberapa saat kemudian, saat semua jamaah sudah membersihkan dirinya dengan air wudhu, termasuk Dahlia, Bilal pun tanpa segan minta izin pada penjaga masjid untuk menjadi muazin. [...] Sepanjang jalan Atmosukarto dimana salah satu sudutnya merupakan letak masjid itu, terdiam menundukkan harmoni mereka dalam-dalam. Tiang-tiang bergetar Ketika suara Bilal dengan lantang memuja kebesaran Tuhan. Seluruh kulit pada dahan pohon di pinggir jalan merinding, menggugurkan daun-daun di atasnya. Memang tak bisa diungkapkan seperti apa pun, saat suara indah melenkung-lengkung itu menghiasikan kalimat-kalimat Mutiara Allah. Kebesaran-Nya, keesaan-Nya, kesaksian atas segala wujud-wujud yang indah, sungguh taka da yang bisa membuktikan untuk mengingkarinya.” (Rosyida *Tarian Cinta* 139-140).

“That sentence was so firm that it made the girl in front of him fall silent in disbelief” (Rosyida *Tarian Cinta* 139).<sup>287</sup>

The trope of natural forces responding to the actions of characters can be found in many precolonial literatures of the Malay world. The most direct parallel of a story of young romance is the story of *Andaken Penurat* mentioned previously. Nature responds in a similar fashion to the lovers’ feelings of intimacy throughout the tragic love story. Rosyida additionally uses the presence of natural forces to redirect the romantic themes, from the romance between male and female protagonists, to a deeper sense of self love experienced by Bilal. As he finds his voice by reciting the azan, it resounds throughout the village, and he experiences a revived sense connection to Allah and the greater community.

For Dahlia, her moment of personal revelation is not as pronounced as that of Bilal, but rather builds gradually throughout the narrative. She finds a sense of self determination that transcends her own expectations for a romantic resolution, expectations shared by the predominantly female readership. It is only later in the novel in which the narrator directly reflects on this transformation within Dahlia.

“She started daring to say that the needs of the soul were far more important than just love for the world. Matter will manifest when the mind gains knowledge. There is no comparison between this and her dancing career” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 216).

The knowledge she attains through the tension between romantic anticipation and religious education, community expectations and personal development, are central to the didactic message of *Tarian Cinta*.

Af’idatussofa enables similar techniques for framing the romantic narrative in the pesantren context by calling attention to the Islamic soundscape in *Gus Yahya, Bukan Cinta Biasa*. From the very start of the novel, the natural world and the sound of the azan draw readers directly into the physical space of the pesantren complex and the inner world of the central male protagonist, Gus Yahya.

“Dawn broke as the call to prayer sounded loudly. The sparkling stars that remained seemed to accompany Yahya and his family as they left the house to go to the mosque. Yahya’s family always gathers at the mosque. Al-Amin Mosque is located in the pesantren area, within the beautiful city of Salatiga. The walls are bright green, the floors are marble, in the courtyard of the mosque there is a fountain that is truly enchanting. The mosque sands right in front of Yahya’s house, only a few meters the distance apart. Even though it is located within the pesantren area, many residents also come to gather at the mosque. There are gates that lead in and out of the pesantren area” (Af’idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 11).<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> “Lembutnya langit dan kerasnya bumi juga seakan sudah siap menjadi saksi untuk mengawali perjuangan Bilal dengan kalimat-kalimat Ilahi. Kalbunya tiba-tiba terasa melepuh kemudian runtuh oleh hawa yang sejuk menembus ke dalam dasar ruangan itu. Dan, kini ia sudah siap bertekad akan menggantikan hati yang kian mengeras dengan untaian-untaian doa yang akan dapat mengantarkan ruhnya untuk perlahan-lahan menuju pintu surga.”

“ ‘Aku akan lakukan!’

“Kalimat itu sangat tegas sampai membuat perempuan yang ada didepannya diam dalam ketidakpercayaan” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 139).

<sup>288</sup> “Fajar menyingsing. Adzan subuh telah lantang berkumandang. Diantara gemerlap bintang yang masih tersisa, seolah menemani Yahya beserta seluruh anggota keluarganya meninggalkan rumah untuk ke masjid. Keluarga Yahya selalu rutin berjamaah di masjid. Masjid Al-Amin adalah masjid yang juga berada di kawasan pesantren. Masjid yang terletak di kota salatiga itu begitu indah. Temboknya berwarna hijau cerah, lantainya beralaskan marmar, di halaman masjid ada sebuah air mancur yang sungguh mempesona. Masjid itu berdiri tepat di depan rumah Yahya. Mungkin jarak antara masjid dengan rumah Yahya hanya terkisar beberapa meter. Meski di letaknya

The morning call to prayer in this passage signals to readers a shared Islamic sphere as it draws readers attention into the pesantren complex and the center of the community. Though Af'idatussofa was educated primarily in the KBQT learning community, she writes with a great deal of attention to the details of pesantren life in her work, the beauty of the space, the interconnectedness of pesantren students and leaders with the surrounding community, all punctuated by the call to prayer which resounds throughout the community five times per day. The soundscape of the azan is a marker of time that creates a shared sense of a greater Muslim community. It points both inward to the center of the community as well as extends beyond the immediate walls of the pesantren. She creates a privileged perspective of the inner world of the pesantren for her audience through the perspective of Gus Yahya. As the son of the kyai, he provides an insider view of the pesantren and its central position within the community. As a niece of Bahrudin, Af'idatussofa is also part of the kyai family in Kalibening and so draws from her experience growing up within a community strongly influenced by the local pesantren.

The physical centrality of the kyai's home is the setting for much of the dramatic complications in the narrative. Gus Yahya is frequently described watching the paths that lead to and from the santri dormitories. His view, his desires, his temptations emanate from that space. Writing the primary romantic narrative from a male perspective is a reorientation of typical "chick" narratives that tend to highlight the emotional life of young female protagonists. Af'idatussofa explores a socially privileged position of the male perspective, a gendered privilege magnified by his status as *anak kyai*, the son of a kyai. Much of the dramatic tension in *Gus Yahya* revolves around the boy's infatuation with Zahra, a new santri student who quickly becomes an active and beloved member of the community. There is a great deal of movement between narrative attention to the details of religious study, and Gus' infatuation with Zahra in the novel. In one scene, for example, Gus is in his home, the kyai's home, which stands as the point of intersection between the boys' and girls' dormitories. Before beginning to read kitab, he sits overlooking the path in front of his house leading to the girls' dorms, hoping to catch another glimpse of Zahra.

"Yahya returned to his busy schedule, opened the religious book to reread. He had only read a little when suddenly he looked up and saw a girl running after other students. There was no mistaking it, that was the girl he was looking for" (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 10).<sup>289</sup>

The jarring shift between Islamic study and the desire to catch sight of the girl reflects a greater tension between religious and secular knowledge, made most transparent through the romantic tensions of the novel. Yahya becomes palpably distracted from his studies when Zahra joins the community, and his infatuation is playfully described as "monkey love." The abrupt break between religious study and thinking about or catching sight of the girl, however, reflects an unarticulated discomfort with talking about romance within pesantren settings more broadly. Pesantren institutions enforce strict gender separation, most obviously in the dormitories, but in many conservative pesantren girls and boys also study in segregated classrooms. Af'idatussofa enables the kyai's home as a boundary marker between the dormitories, but also as a physical

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*di kawasan pesantren, namun banyak pula warga yang berdatang untuk berjamaah di masjid tersebut. Ada tiga pintu gerbang sebagai jalan keluar masuk kawasan pesantren"* (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 11).

<sup>289</sup> "Yahya kembali dengan kesibukannya, membuka kitab untuk dibaca ulang. Baru sedikit ia membacanya, tiba-tiba is mendongkakan dan melihat seorang gadis yang berlari menyusul santri yang lain. Tak salah lagi, itulah gadis yang sedang dicarinya" (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 10).

point of intersection, the meeting point of the two dormitories and a thematic point of interaction between male and female santri students. This is the site where the romantic narrative thrives, a site of transgression where pesantren rules are frequently crossed by the young santri.

Where the privileged male view leads the narrative to distraction and the complications of young love, the female view of pesantren experience provides a more esoteric reflection on notions of love tied to a lifelong commitment to learning that begins in the pesantren but also transcends that space. Af'idatussofa redirects narrative attention to the strong educational motivations of the female protagonist. Much like Dahlia in *Tarian Cinta*, Zahra begins the story as an outsider to the pesantren. Through her dedication to pesantren learning becomes an integral part of the community. It is through the lead female protagonists' dual role as outsider and insider which Af'idatussofa and Rosyida enable to bring audiences who are also perhaps unfamiliar with the pesantren tradition into the realities of pesantren education. Zahra repeatedly rejects the romantic advances of Gus and shows a strong dedication and appreciation for her pesantren studies. She is more interested in focusing on her studies than engaging in the dramatic twists of teen romance.

“Zahrya had also started studying the Qu'ran more intensively. She was very comfortable [studying in the pesantren], it gave her a greater thirst for knowledge.

“The pesantren tradition is still strong, but the way of thinking is global. In addition to studying classical religious texts, the pesantren also has a fairly large library with many modern and classic books. At Al-Amin, there is a culture of reading books, as well as a culture of writing” (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 147).<sup>290</sup>

Romantic desire is redirected towards educational desires as Af'idatussofa expresses what Pam Nilan (2009) calls the “spirit of education in pesantren” in Indonesia. Rather than seeing pesantren as a site which produces “negative outcomes” such as Islamic extremism, the pesantren in Nilan's view reflect spaces where students attain “a pleasurable lifelong ‘thirst’ for knowledge and study,” pesantren institutions that produce “pious, modern Muslim citizens with a passion for knowledge.”<sup>291</sup> In *Gus Yahya*, there is a strong link between the excitement for learning and the camaraderie experienced by santri students which reinforces the familial connections of a greater Islamic community.

“That's the beauty of the pesantren, there is no age limit for acquiring knowledge [...] In pesantren there is no shame in studying with friends who are not the same age. The fun is in how, after entering the classroom and studying together, everyone emerges the same. Everyone feels the same age. Every santri has their own commitments, but all of them have the same mission, to seek the pleasure of Allah. Going up a class level is just a term to continue into higher levels of learning” (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 77-78).<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> “Tradisi di pesantren masih kental, tapi cara berpikirnya sudah global. Selain mempelajari kitab-kitab klasik, di pesantren itu juga ada perpustakaan yang lumayan gede yang isinya adalah buku-buku modern dan buku-buku masa lampau. Di Al-Amin, selain dibudayakan membaca buku, juga dibudayakan menulis,” (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 147).

<sup>291</sup> Pam Nilan, “The ‘spirit of education’ in Indonesian Pesantren” 219).

<sup>292</sup> “Begitulah indahnya pesantren, dimana tidak ada batasan umur untuk menimba ilmu. [...] Di pesantren nggak ada kata malu belajar dengan teman yang bukan sebayanya. Asiknya, setelah memasuki kelas, setelah belajar bersama, semuanya akan nampak sama. Semua akan terasa seumuran. Setiap santri memiliki komitmen masing-masing. Tapi semuanya memiliki misi yang sama yaitu mencari ridho Allah. Kenaikan kelas hanyalah istilah untuk meneruskan ke jenjang pelajaran yang lebih tinggi” (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 77-78).

Many works of popular pesantren literature reflect the excitement of learning and strong sense of religious and social solidarity formed within pesantren education. Their authors combine popular literary styles typically associated with urban lifestyles, with the “knowledge and traditions associated with the pesantren system, which contains themes concerning religious expression and feelings of love for God, esoteric religious experiences, concerns about human ethics, and praise for God’s universe” (Nilan, 219). The meeting point of popular and traditional cultural forms within the pesantren context featured in these works has led to the widespread popularity of these novels.

Authors of popular pesantren novels reflect the permeability of urban and rural experience in Java. Santri students in these works are equally engaged in the traditions of rural and pesantren ways of life as they are with the cosmopolitanism of urban and global cultural forms. English language references, text messaging, pop music and television, among many other “urban” features exist alongside narrative attention to the pleasures of pesantren study. Af’idatussofa sets the pesantren world within a thriving cosmopolitan landscape in which there is not a strong distinction between urban and rural experience. It is conceived as both a globally conscious and regionally specific educational experience.

“At Al-Amin there are also many facilities for student development. There is a computer, a digital camera, handy cam, flash player, and many other things that are regularly used to record *pengajian*. Discipline in the pesantren does not make them restrained, because before the students come to stay they are given the schedule and rules, if they are suitable to the santri then they can decide to stay, but if they don’t want to stay it’s no big deal. What’s important is that if they are ready to enter the pesantren world of Al-Amin, they must be ready for what happens here. What’s interesting about the pesantren is that the teachings are global in nature, comprehensive in covering all aspects of life. There is no part of life that is not touched by the application of *pengajian* given at the pesantren” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 146-147).<sup>293</sup>

The pervasive applicability of *pengajian*, Qu’ranic recitation and interpretation, and its link with reference to digital technologies in this passage reflect the cosmopolitanism of pesantren education generally, as well as the specific technological and social dynamics of Kalibening. KBQT is located in a village which has been incorporated into the city of Salatiga. The educational dynamics of both the pesantren and KBQT learning community reinforce strong local connections to the traditions of NU in the region, as well as the globalizing forces of Islam. The incorporation of broadened internet technologies in Kalibening was important to the formation of KBQT. Some of the earliest funding for the learning community came from an international grant from Dutch philanthropical NGO, HIVOS, specifically for installing IT networks in the community. Also like Kalibening, students come to study at the pesantren in *Gus Yahya* from a variety of backgrounds as the boundaries between city and village, urban and rural spaces dissolve. In Indonesia, pesantren institutions are of course located in both urban and rural

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<sup>293</sup> “Di Al-Amin juga banyak fasilitas-fasilitas untuk pengembangan siswa. Ada komputer, camera digital, handy cam, flash player pun banyak banget dan biasanya digunakan untuk merekam *pengajian*. Kedisiplinan di pesantren nggak sampai membuat mereka terkekang. Karena sebelum ada santri yang mondok pasti diberi jadwal dan peraturan pesantren, kalau memang sesuai hati bisa masuk tapi kalau tidak ya nggak masuk nggak apa-apa. Yang penting kalau dia sudah mantap untuk memasuki dunia pesantren di Al-Amin dia harus siap dengan apa yang terjadi. Yang menarik di pesantren adalah dalam pengajarannya yang sifatnya global atau menyeluruh sehingga meliputi semua aspek kehidupan. Tidak ada bidang kehidupang yang tidak tersentuh oleh aplikasi *pengajian* yang diberikan di pesantren itu.” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 146-147)

contexts,<sup>294</sup> but Af'idatussofa places emphasis on pesantren experience which takes place on the rural margins of the city. It is an educational space which draws students in from both urban and rural contexts alike.

“Al-Ikhlas School is indeed an Islamic school in great demand by students from Islamic boarding schools in the city, but there are also many natives from their town who attend school there” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 12-13).<sup>295</sup>

What draws students to the pesantren community in this work is not, however, the traditional pull of a central charismatic kyai, but rather the ‘spirit of pesantren education.’ Situated within progressive notions of change influenced by the transformative Islamic movement, Af'idatussofa recuperates the negative views of “traditional” (read backward) rural pesantren experience by highlighting the intersection of traditional and modern forms of knowledge to shape audience understanding of more progressive Islamic educational frameworks.

“The view of life in the pesantren is always oriented towards sincerity. Al-Amin is part of the Salafi school, but the way of thinking is always being pushed forward and, God willing, has a rapid influence on the development of the nation.

The basis of past traditions is still present and is used to manage the details of change. Moreover, at Al-Amin Zahra has a kyai, KH Yusuf, with a critical, humanistic, religious, and creative role who is currently respected by many people because he has successfully developed a pesantren with religious and global thinking. Yes, that is, even though classical religious books written centuries ago are studied at Al-Amin, the thoughts of each student are not backward. Such books are needed to determine the next steps. Santri students also combine the thinking of previous and present ulama. The pesantren is very useful for maintaining and preserving traditions in Islam.

“Fiuh...the point is that Zahra really enjoys the world of the pesantren to its fullest. The twists and turns of scenarios ordained by Allah” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 146-148).<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> The pesantren context is the most notable for challenging the notion that cosmopolitanism is located exclusively in urban contexts. As Dhofier and Kartidirdjo pinpoint, their growth and development in Indonesia is largely tied to histories of agrarian transformation during the late Dutch colonial period which bridges the urban/rural dichotomy. Liberal ideals of private land ownership instituted by the Dutch lead to large scale capitalist exploitation of the agrarian context over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The pervasive association of rural contexts with “backward” thinking and restrictive traditional ways of life is inextricable from that trajectory. The rural context is features prominently within works from KBQT not only because the authors are drawing from their everyday experiences of living in the village context of Kalibening, but also because it becomes a productive site for the construction of alternative educational subjectivities that decenter the discourse of knowledge production in Indonesia.

<sup>295</sup> “Sekolah Al-ikhlas memang sekolah islam yang banyak diminati oleh pelajar santri dari pesantren-pesantren dikota itu. Tetapi banyak juga orang asli dari kota tersebut yang bersekolah di tempat itu (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 12-13).

<sup>296</sup> “Pandangan hidup pesantren selalu berorientasi pada keikhlasan. Al-Amin memang pondok Salaf, tapi pemikiran-pemikiran selalu memacu ke depan dan insyaAllah berpengaruh pesat pada perkembangan bangsa.

“Landasan tradisi masa lampau masih ada yang kemudian digunakan untuk mengelola secara mendetail berbagai perubahan-perubahan. Apalagi, di Al-Amin Zahra memiliki kyai yaitu KH Yusuf yang berperan sebagai pemimpin yang kritis, humanis, agamis dan kreatif yang saat ini sedang disegani oleh banyak orang karena telah berhasil mengembangkan pesantren dengan pemikirang secara religi dan secara global. Ya itu tadi, meski yang dipejalari di Al-Amin adalah kitab-kitab klasik yang ditulis berabad-abad lalu, tapi pemikiran tiap-tiap santri tidak terbelakang. Kitab-kitab yang demikian sangat diperlukan untuk menentukan langkah selanjutnya. Santri-santri juga banyak yang memadukan pemikiran ulama masa lalu dan ulama masa kini. Pesantren sangat berguna untuk menjaga dan memelihara tradisi dalam islam.

“Fiuh...pokoknya Zahra sangat menikmati dunia pesantren seutuhnya. Liku-liku kehidupan dijalannya sesuai skenario yang ditetapkan oleh Allah” (Rosyida, *Tarian Cinta* 146-148).

Kyai leadership, reminiscent of the “ideal kyai” in *Tarian Cinta*, is marked by their critical thinking, orientation towards humanistic and religious values, as well as creative in the adaptation of their diverse role in the community to meet local needs. The circulation of critical pedagogies, notions liberation theology, and transformative methodologies are all present in the author’s depiction. The author is also aware of the fact that even as she elaborates on the discursive connections which underscore a revive notion of pesantren experience for popular audiences, the exclamation of “fiuh” at paragraph break is also a self-conscious authorial play to pull readers back into the chick narrative.

As stories that highlight the pesantren context, to what extent are they representing pesantren selves, and what other representations do they convey? More importantly, how do these texts represent? The spirit of pesantren education is very much alive in these novels as Af’idatussof and Rosyida work to package pesantren experience for popular audiences, at the same time they work to broaden the possibilities of education praxis beyond institutional constraints. In *Gus Yahya* and *Tarian Cinta*, both works present an interesting narrative shift from the pesantren-based romantic narrative foregrounded in each work, to a greater emphasis on personal development of the central female protagonists. The tension between romantic love and pesantren education is enabled as a productive site through which the central protagonists discover a greater sense of personal emancipation. The pesantren is the central educational institution in *Gus Yahya* as well as *Tarian Cinta*, and romance is the key narrative driver, but the transformative chick *bildung* of their narratives also point towards alternative sites of learning which create greater multiplicity of representation in the works. In both novels, the soundscape of the pesantren serves as an important signal to the transformations which take place for the characters, as well as for the genre itself. Love takes place under the sound of the *azan* call to prayer, a soundscape which pervades the landscape of Indonesia and the Muslim world more broadly. It is enabled by Af’idatussofa and Rosyida as a medium of community solidarity and personal development at the same time it signals an important transformation from romantic love to a lifelong love of learning that extends beyond the pesantren walls. In conveying a variety of subjectivities, these authors from Kalibening are not as concerned with representation as they are in instilling their readers a sense of empowerment in establishing one’s own identity and subjectivity.

### ***Conflicting Sounds Beyond Java: Expanding Bildung to Critique the Nation***

Following the soundscape of the narratives by KBQT authors, as we’ve seen, opens possibilities for understanding the ways in which these texts traverse diverse boundaries, of space and of literary convention. In *Tarian Cinta* and *Gus Yahya*, the *azan* creates a shared sense of Islamic community at the same time it permeates outside that pesantren walls and sometimes serves as an unlikely cue to the romantic narrative itself. Yadi’s *seruling* is a signal to readers of the educational possibilities situated the Javanese agrarian context that lies outside of state or religious institutions. All of the narratives I’ve discussed thus far take place in Java, since that is the context that is of most immediate relevance to the lives and experiences of their authors. As authors from KBQT are still quite young, their works also evolve with time and so the setting of their narratives also expands.

In another work by Maia Rosyida, she jumps to a very different context and soundscape that further challenges the conventions of chick narratives as well as the boundaries of national imagination. *Bunga di Serambi Mekkah (Flower on the Verandah of Mecca, 2011)*, takes place

in Aceh (Nangroe Aceh Darussalam), Indonesia's Northwestern-most province, located on the Island of Sumatra. Aceh is one of the most "remote" part of Indonesia because of its geographic location, but it has a long history of interaction with the world.<sup>297</sup> Aceh is popularly considered the "Verandah of Mecca," because of the strong Islamic character of the region. Geographically it is the most Northwestern point in the archipelago and therefore closest to Mecca. It is also a historical center of trade through which it is believed that the origins of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago spread via the trade routes of Chinese and Arab traders in Aceh. It is one of only five regions in Indonesia with special status and semi-autonomy from the state and is the only region that enforces sharia as the regional law of the province. The combination of these factors has led to the popular association of Aceh as the "most Islamic" part of Indonesia, as well as a great deal of conflict between the Indonesian state and local Acehnese resistance movements. Aceh, as a historical center of international trade and Islamic practice, is a site which expands notions of what constitutes cosmopolitanism and challenges the bounded notion of Indonesian national unity.

The central protagonist, Shafiya, is a seventeen-year-old girl coping with the difficult social and political realities of Aceh immediately following the 2004 tsunami. From the very start of the novel, Rosyida interrogates imperatives of violence that have long shaped everyday experience in the region. The opening lines of the narrative immerse audiences in a soundscape of violence and conflict.

"In the midst of war, a crowd of souls floated before my eyes. The sound of bullets shot fast from AK46-type weapons and explosions from many other kinds of weapons with various numbers. Only minutes before and without time to think, a mother who gave birth only seven days ago staggered away from the explosion of bullets flying towards her as she carried her little angel. A mother whose shabby headscarf had been torn off by nails and whose face glistened with sweat" (Rosyida, *Bunga* 16).<sup>298</sup>

The sounds of terror and of families being ripped apart frame the introduction to the novel. Rosyida enables the historical conflict over regional autonomy between GAM and TNI in the novel to cast new possibilities for the genre of ChickLit, while also situating a critique of the violent assimilative force of the Indonesian military and the devastating effects national imperatives on local communities, individual subjectivities, as well as educational institutions. From the first-person narrative perspective of Shafiya, Rosyida describes a "war of hypocrisy" in which all factions of the conflict lust after positions of power at the expense of human lives. The "cunning" and "rotteness" of national Indonesian leaders are made transparent in the ongoing conflict in Aceh (Rosyida, *Bunga* 16).<sup>299</sup> The corrupting effects of a lust for power is situated

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<sup>297</sup> The Eastern islands of Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia are far more remote, but Aceh holds great symbolic value for the majority Muslim nation because of its strong Islamic character.

<sup>298</sup> "Dalam dekapaen perang. Sekerumunan nyawa melayang di depan mata. Suara peluru yang meluncur cepat dari senjata berjenis AK46 dan banyak jenis senjata dari berbagai nomor meletup-letiuip. Menumbangkan pohon-pohon besar dan banyak bangunan. Seorang ibu yang 7 hari lalu mengeluarkannya dari alam rahim, dalam hitungan menit sudah lari sempoyongan menghindari letupan peluru-peluru yang kadang tanpa etika melasat ke arahnya tanpa sempat berfikir menggendong bidadari kecilnya. Seorang ibu yang jilbab lusuhnya robek terkena paku dan wajahnya yang berkilat karena semburan keringat" (Rosyida, *Bunga* 16).

<sup>299</sup> "Perang kemunafikan semakin ngeri. Bagaimana tidak munafik. Tragedi itu mencatat berbagai hal dan pemikiran naif baru. Pemikiran busuk berupa nafsu untuk masing-masing ingin menang dan bukan menuntaskan masalah" Jika menang, maka lawan mati. Dan jika lawan mati, maka dia bebas menghabiskan kekayaan, mengingat yang dicari di sini adalah sebuah kepuasan berkuasa. Busuknya sebagian orang-orang di Negara Indonesia terekam jelas. Liciknya sebagian orang atas terlukis transparan dalam peristiwa ini." (Rosyida, *Bunga* 19-20).



into the chick narrative through the connection between love, learning, and the lack of critical and reflexive awareness by those who hold positions of power.

“To bring into conflict, without seeing first their own reflection which is no different than the original conflict.<sup>300</sup> Their consciousness, which goes by the name of love, has nearly disappeared. Not even the slightest trace remains. They may never know the Greek philosophy which explains at length the beauty and importance of the theory of Eros. The theory of affection. The theory of love” (Rosyida, *Bunga* 19-20).<sup>301</sup>

Here Rosyida discusses conflict through an untranslatable pun on the term “adu domba,” which colloquially means “to bring into conflict.” “Domba” is also the word for sheep which she repeats at the end of the sentence. I’ve translated this as “original conflict” but literally means “original sheep.” This phrase here carries the meaning that those who lust for power are merely sheep following the herd with no critical reflection on their actions or their consequences, a highly valued skill among the KBQT learning community. Romance and the “theory of eros” is thematically central to Rosyida’s critique of the military in Aceh as well as the coming-of-age story. Shafiya comes to “meet the theory of eros” by which she means Eross, the son of the director of an oil company in the region (Rosyida, *Bunga* 29). Though the traumas of conflict exacerbated by the natural disaster are at the forefront of the novel, young romance still drives much of the narrative trajectory. Rosyida plays between the slippage of meanings between Shafiya’s love interest, Eross, and learning about notions of eros through regular poetic interjections into the narrative.<sup>302</sup> The literary formulae of the chick narrative provide a framework of escapism, and even of survival, for the young protagonist. The romantic storyline is set within the educational narrative as Rosyida incorporates conventions of chicklit to explicitly explore the negotiations of young romance, and implicitly critique the constraining effects of national military presence in Aceh.

Much of the story takes place in the immediate aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, but in these opening pages as well as several flashbacks in the novel, Rosyida situates this coming-of-age story in the context of growing up amidst great political instability.

“Yeah, this is the historical record of a beautiful Acehnese girl named Shafiya. She was born in the middle of a civil war in Indonesia. History leaves scars on this land. A land that received the title Nangroe Aceh Darussaleam. If you must be born in the Indonesian archipelago, it is a gift to be born here, despite the fact that this Land of Heaven is almost never devoid of the threat of war.

“BOOOMMM!” (Rosyida, *Bunga* 29).<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Here Rosyida discusses conflict through an untranslatable pun on the term “adu domba,” which colloquially means “to bring into conflict.” “Domba” is also the word for sheep which she repeats at the end of the sentence. I’ve translated this as “original conflict” but literally means “original sheep” which carries the meaning that those who lust for power are merely sheep following the herd with no critical reflection on their actions or their consequences.

<sup>301</sup> “*Adu domba, tanpa melihat dulu mukanya sendiri yang sudah tidak berbeda dengan domba asli. Hingga nurani mereka bernama cinta nyaris lenyap. Sedikit pun tak berbekas. Mereka mungkin tak pernah tau tentang filsafat Yunani yang dengan Panjang lebar menjelaskan tentang betapa penting dan indanya teory Eros. Teori tentang kasih sayang. Teori tentang cinta.*” (Rosyida, *Bunga* 19-20)

<sup>302</sup> Poetry is enabled as a tool for learning about love as well as an intertextual connection to Sufi poetic traditions in which writing is a spiritual practice which bring one closer to the divine.

<sup>303</sup> “*Yah, ini merupakan sebuah catatan bersejarah bagi seorang gadis Aceh yang hatinya begitu rupawan bernama Shafiya. Dia lahir di tengah peperangan sesama Indonesia. Sejarah meninggalkan bekas luka di tanah ini. Tanah yang telah mendapat gelar sebagai Nangroe Aceh Darussalam. Setidaknya memang sebuah karunia, jika harus terlahir di kepulauan pucuk Indonesia itu. Meski pada faktanya Negri Surga tersebut hampir tak pernah sepi dari ancaman perang.*”

There is a great deal of irony in the tone of the narrative here as Shafiya discusses the “privilege” of being born in Aceh. This cues readers to an underlying criticism of the boundaries which define nation and the ways in which common conceptions of Aceh as the “Land of Heaven” are incongruous with the everyday realities of life in the region. The traumas of war described in the opening lines are tied to the longstanding conflict between the Indonesian Armed Forces and Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM – The Free Aceh Movement), which began in 1976. For over three decades, various phases of increase military presence in Aceh have led to continued violence between local resistance fighters and the national military. Martial law was declared in 2003, but no resolution was ever officially found. The devastation of the December 2004 tsunami truncated the civil struggle, and GAM declared a unilateral cease-fire at that time as international attentions and greater presence within the region began to grow. This is an uncommon setting for a coming-of-age novel when compared to the urban cosmopolitanism of mainstream chicklit stories. The sounds of war, as in the “BOOOMMM!” above, repeatedly jar readers attentions back to this political context throughout the narrative.

When Shafiya’s village is leveled in the 2004 tsunami, she must move to the city center of Banda Aceh to continue her education. This movement from village to city is reminiscent of the same movements that have occurred across Indonesia because of increased industrialization. In Rosyida’s narrative, village life is not a “backwards” traditional space which one must leave behind to pursue modern education in the city, rather it is emblematic of regional autonomy and resilience in the face of constantly shifting political violence.

“And the shooting continued through the time I came to be educated in an elementary school in Seramou village. A village born from the belly of the earth with all its strength. Strong because it has survived through the stampede of war. In my village, what formerly felt like a forest has now turned dry and brown. Throughout the conflict, the map of Seramoe village changed daily. The green mountains became a stopover for GAM, which withered away each time they were hit by an eruption of gunshots and bombs from TNI” (Rosyida, *Bunga* 19).<sup>304</sup>

The tsunami which eradicates her village is merely the traumatic end point of a long history of violence which has gradually eroded the vibrancy of village life. Complicating the existing political and territorial struggle with the state, Rosyida reflects a similar dissatisfaction with life in the city compared to the protagonist’s rural village upbringing. Shafiya attends a state high school, described as a place that feels like a jail to her, with limited resources compared to Java.

“Aceh is considered a province with limited facilities. Even more so in the kampung. The teachers are so scarce in every school that sometimes they must rotate between schools” (Rosyida, *Bunga* 33).<sup>305</sup>

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“DUAARRR” (Rosyida, *Bungah* 17).

<sup>304</sup> *DAN tembak-tembak terus berkelanjutan hingga tiba masanya aku mengenyam pendidikan di sebuah SD di desa Seramou. Desa yang terlahir dari perut bumi dengan segenap kekuatan. Kuat karena masih bertahan meski hidup dalam injakan peperangan. Desaku yang suasananya Nampak sekali bekas hutan menjadi kecoklatan kering. Sepanjang masa konflik, peta desa Seramoe berubah bentuk setiap harinya. Gunung-gunung hijau yang menjadi persinggahan GAM dan TNI meranggas setiap terkena letusan peluru tembak atau bom”* (Rosyida, *Bunga* 19).

<sup>305</sup> “Di Aceh ini termasuk provinsi yang fasilitasnya serba terbatas. Lebih-lebih di kampung. Gurunya sangat terbatas di setiap sekolah, malah kadang harus bergiliran dengan sekolah lain” (Rosyida, *Bunga* 33).

Rosyida speaks to the imposition of national ideals and inequity in the implementation of the national education system in Aceh, and by proxy other remote parts of Indonesia. The centrality of Java to Indonesia's national identity and therefore implementation of national institutional forms throughout the outer islands is a dominating cultural and political force. As a Javanese author, Rosyida interrogates her own positionality in relation to the marginalization of communities outside of Java. As the "verandah of Mecca" Aceh is, however, an important center for Indonesian national imaginings of its Islamic identity which underscores much of the impetus of the Indonesian national military to continue to assert dominance in the region.

### ***Under the Five Towers: Testing Pesantren Narratives***

The industry surrounding novel pop pesantren has grown exponentially in recent years. Following the lives of santri students as they negotiate the everyday experience of pesantren education, these coming-of-age stories point embed life lessons within the drama of their narratives. The emotional lives of their characters are complex and relatable as the authors inscribe lessons about growing up, learning to love, negotiating a balance between one's Islamic, faith, community involvement, and journey of self-discovery into the stories that is well received by popular audiences. Alongside the growth of pesantren pop novels is a booming industry of films based on these coming-of-age stories, which thereby increase the popularity of the novels in tandem. One of the most famous works is *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009) or *The Land of 5 Towers* by Ahmad Fuadi. This novel is considered a "mega best seller" in Indonesia, and in 2012 was adapted into a major motion picture film to bring the pesantren experience to mainstream audiences nationally and internationally. Before exploring the ways in which authors from KBQT embed alternative educational narratives within their novels, I want to turn to a comparison with Fuadi's work to underscore a few major differences in the educational messages these works. There are subtle but meaningful differences between the educational context portrayed in Fuadi's work in relation to works produced by students in Kalibening which shape divergent notions of education in Indonesia.

*Negeri 5 Menara* is a coming-of-age story that follows six young Indonesian boys from various parts of Indonesia (Maninjau and Medan on the island of Sumatra, Surabaya and Bandung on Java, Sumenep on Madura, and Gowa on Sulawesi) and their experiences studying in Pondok Madani (or PM for short in the novel). Located in the Ponorogo Regency of East Java, it is modeled after Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, one of the most well-known modern pesantren in Indonesia which Fuadi is himself a graduate. Established in 1926 and attended by a long list of famous Islamic intellectuals, political figures, artists (including Emha Ainun Nadjib), and members of many Islamic organizations (including NU and Muhammadiyah), Pesantren Gontor is considered a modern pesantren because of the breadth of educational subjects which santri students can access there. As Florian Pohl indicates, "Inspired by reforms of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Syanggit in North Africa, and the Anglo-Muslim college of Aligarh and Santiniketan University in India, Gontor sought to modernize the methods of teaching and broaden the scope of subjects taught. Over the years Gontor expanded its educational program, which now includes training from elementary grades to the university level. Arabic and English are languages of instructions, and Gontor's achievements with respect to foreign language study

have been noted even outside of Indonesia” (Pohl 400).<sup>306</sup> As an alumni of Gontor, Fuadi embeds the education narrative of *Negeri 5 Menara* within this very progressive and modernizing Islamic educational institution. Fuadi also pairs pesantren educational experience in Java with reflections on his own Mingangkabau heritage from Sumatra. Much like Fuadi, the central protagonist is a Minangkabau boy raised in the mountains of Sumatra. The story begins in his hometown, he has reached the age where, in Minang society, boys are expected to go on their *rantau*, a prescribed cultural rite of passage in which young men move away from their motherland to travel in search of knowledge and livelihood. His family wants him to study at a modern pesantren in Java. He is reluctant at first but agrees to attend and comes to value his *rantau* experience in a Javanese pesantren setting.

The Minangkabau concept of *rantau* is an important cultural frame for this coming-of-age story, and a parallel to Fuadi’s own experience traveling away from his home in Sumatra to study at Pesantren Gontor in Java. In the frontmatter of the *Negeri 5 Menara*, Fuadi includes a quote from Imam Syafii, an ulama from Gontor during his time as a santri student.

“Knowledgeable and civilized people will not stay quiet in their homelands  
Leave your land and go *rantau* to foreign lands  
Go *rantau*, you will find replacements for your relatives and friends  
Once you are tired, the sweetness of life is felt after the struggle” (Fuadi).

A young man’s departure from their home is a long tradition in Minang society, and the fusion of this cultural rite of passage with the rites of passage of pesantren education in Java creates an interesting tension in the novel. Fuadi sets up expectations for the search for knowledge to be tied to the Minang cultural concept of *rantau*, and a great deal of emphasis is placed on the importance of struggle as a necessary element in the creation of “knowledgeable and civilized people.” The central protagonist and his five companions, all in the formative years of their personal and spiritual development, are shaped most by their struggles within the disciplinary restrictions of pesantren life and through the rigors of pesantren education. This is reflected in the expression “man jadda wajada” which means “those who work hard will receive a reward” or “discipline for success.” This slogan is thematically central to the pesantren narrative and repeated often in both the novel and film. The struggle to become a disciplined subject of the pesantren is central to this coming-of-age narrative and a defining feature of the “bildung” of the novel which instills a kind of ethic of struggle in the didactic message of the novel that is reminiscent of both nationalist and global neoliberal ideals.<sup>307</sup> The struggle for independence from Dutch and Japanese colonial rule, the struggle to define the national character of such a culturally diverse archipelago, and even the struggle for Indonesia to be globally recognized as an economically powerful nation all resonate in the struggles the boys experience in the pesantren.

The Javanese pesantren is an important center of knowledge, site of new experiences, learning, discipline, and devotion for the boys in the novel. It is also a space within which the characters’ lives are intensely regulated and disciplined. The system of regulations in the

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<sup>306</sup> Pohl, Florian. “Islamic Education and Civil Society: Reflections on the Pesantren Tradition in Contemporary Indonesia.” *Comparative Education Review*, vol. 50, no. 3, Aug. 2006, 400.

<sup>307</sup> For discussions of *perjuangan* as a critical element in the formation of national identities see Siegel, James. *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*. Princeton University Press, 1997. Or Pemberton, John. *On the Subject of “Java.”* Cornell University Press, 2018.

pesantren is called *qanun*, a kind of “dynastic law, decree or directive” typically established by Muslim sovereigns, in this case the kyai of the pesantren.<sup>308</sup> As the young boys playfully transgress pesantren regulations, Faudi describes in greater detail the disciplinary system in the pesantren by drawing parallels with pop cultural references.

“*Jasus* is Arabic for spy, like Roger Moore, the 007 Agent who disguises himself and sneaks into enemy dens to gather classified information. I don’t know how, but PM cleverly managed to invent a unique method which married two very different methods: Roger Moore’s skills of espionage combined with pesantren discipline. The goal is to enforce the rules and discipline.

“In addition to being like Roger Moore, the *jasus* is also like Dracula. Imagine, to work as a *jasus* means to wander around looking for prey day and night. Victims who are bitten by Dracula will transform into Dracula as well. Offenders are recorded and reported by the *jasus*, and the next day will be tried and punished by being turned into *jasus* as well. As outlined by the *qanun*, there are many potential violations in the pondok, starting from small things like littering, eating and drinking while standing, not wearing a belt, sleeping while on night or daytime watch, wearing shorts, not wearing a head covering [*kopiah*] to the mosque, not wearing a button down shirt or wearing a sarong to class, or wearing long pants to the mosque, it ranges from trivial things to more heavy things like stealing and fighting” (Fuadi 76).<sup>309</sup>

Students who break pesantren rules are redeployed as spies among the santri youth, and the system of disciplining santri students is reproduced by the students themselves. Combining *rantau* and pesantren experiences in the process of disciplining santri subjectivities, Fuadi’s writing brings elements of Javanese and Minang culture together in a manner not unlike the Indonesian nation defines the identities of its ideal citizens. Unity in diversity, remaining rooted to [prescribed notions of] ones ethnic-cultural identity, in this case his Minang origins. It is a Minang story that fits a national framework. Fuadi writes within a Minang tradition that has become an Indonesian one, and I would argue that the text carries with it only enough Minang cultural markers to fit within the prescribed notions of diversity outlined by the Pancasila ideals of the contemporary nation-state. The goal of the text is not to challenge or critique state ideologies, pesantren education, or Minang culture, rather it is to create disciplined citizens, ones that are not terrorists.

Af’idatussofa, Rosyida and Fuadi all thematically address various *larangan* (rules and regulations) of the pesantren experience in their works. The ways in which characters transgress the rules, however, show important differences in the authors’ ideological orientations. In Fuadi’s work, there is a kind of Foucauldian power dynamic in the construction and application of pesantren regulations within the novel. Biopower dynamics emerge in the creation of santri spies, discussed above, and are valorized in the motto “discipline for success.” The *larangan* in Af’idatussofa and Rosyida’s works have much more to do with gendered divisions of space, with

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<sup>308</sup> *Qanun* is different from the general body of *sharia* laws which are typically established by Muslim jurists. See Ergene, “Qanun and Sharia” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Islamic Law* (2016) for more details.

<sup>309</sup> “*Jasus* adalah bahasa Arab yang berarti mata-mata. Spion. Seperti Roger Moore, Agent 007, yang menyaru dan diam-diam menyusup ke sarang musuh untuk mengumpulkan informasi rahasia. Entah bagaimana caranya, PM dengan cerdas menemukan sebuah metode unik yang mengawinkan dua metode yang terpisah jauh: kepiawaian spionase Roger Moore dan disiplin pondok. Tujuannya untuk menegakkan hukum dan disiplin.

“Selain mirip Roger Moore, *jasus* juga mirip drakula. Bayangkan, kerja *jasus* adalah bergentayangan mencari buruan siang malam. Korban yang digigit drakula akan menjelma menjadi drakula juga. Pelanggar yang dicatat dan dilaporkan oleh *jasus* besoknya diadili dan dihukum menjadi *jasus* juga. Seperti yang digariskan *qanun* potensi pelanggaran di pondok itu banyak. Mulai dari yang kecil-kecil seperti buang sampah sembarangan, makan dan minum sambil berdiri, tidak memakai ikat pinggang, tidur di waktu jam jaga malam atau jaga siang, pakai celana pendek, tidak pakai *kopiah* ke masjid, tidak pakai kemeja ke kelas, memakai sarung ke kelas, atau memakai celana panjang ke masjid, mulai remeh temeh sampai yang kelas berat seperti mencuri dan berkelahi” (Fuadi 76).

greatest emphasis placed on social expectations of young women's behavior in the pesantren. There is an extra level of scrutiny on female santri students, which is (unsurprisingly) more apparent in these works by female authors. The search for knowledge is also constructed very differently. They share a close respect for pesantren education as all the authors have spent a significant amount of time studying within various pesantren across Central Java. Pesantren education is promoted in all their works, but Rosyida and Af'idatussofa's departure from Fuadi's narrative style is that there remains room for criticism of the pesantren educational context, even as the narrative extolls the virtues of pesantren schools.

Testing season, or *imtihan* in the pesantren, is an important rite of passage for santri students, a theme shared between *5 Menara* and *Gus Yahya* which opens possibilities for articulating some of the key differences between the educational formations represented by these works. In Fuadi's work, *imtihan* is one of the more rigorous obstacles the santri students must face, a site through which the reproduction of pesantren hierarchies are most palpable. As students prepare for their exams, Fuadi details the disciplinary measures and tense atmosphere of "exam frenzy" in the pesantren during this time. Students have "demam ujian" or "testing fever" as the santri are "mabuk belajar" or "drunk with study" because of the long hours they must endure to prepare (Fuadi 191).

"I've never in my life seen so many people study together in one place. At PM, people learn on every corner at every time of day. We read books while walking, while cycling, while waiting in line to eat, while eating, even when we are tired. Our ammunition to study gets crazier as the exam period approaches. We push ourselves beyond normal limits to find new higher limits. I feel like PM is deliberately teaching us like some kind of opium. The opium is offered day and night, in such a way that all the students give into it. We've been hooked. We are addicted to learning, the *imtihan* exam is a party celebrating that opium" (Fuadi 200).<sup>310</sup>

Although drawing a likeness between testing season as an opiate in the pesantren bears striking resemblance to the famous quotation from Karl Marx, "Religion is the opium of the masses," but this is certainly not the message Fuadi conveys. The central characters of the story find solidarity in the shared struggle of *imtihan* and experience a great deal of excitement and joy in the relief that they have passed their exams. The "pesta ujian," a celebration which takes place after the exams, is described as a special time of year. Within the buzz of excitement there is, however, an implicit lesson about how the trauma of the exams (and of learning more broadly) is necessary for experiencing the joy of success. The "ammunition" these boys must conjure in their search for knowledge and personal betterment, reinforces a wartime ethic of suffering in the educational context. Fuadi places emphasis on the necessity of endurance, struggle, difficulty, overcoming intense pressure, and enacting an ascetic level of focus to succeed.

Rudnykyj's concept of "spiritual economies" offers a useful lens through which to interpret the impetus of pesantren discipline in the novel and the link between Islam and neoliberal ideals. His work looks at training programs within factory settings in Indonesia

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<sup>310</sup> "Belum pernah dalam hidupku melihat orang belajar bersama dalam jumlah yang banyak di satu tempat. Di PM, orang belajar di setiap sudut dan waktu. Kami sanggup membaca buku sambil berjalan, sambil bersepeda, sambil antri mandi, sambil antri makan, sambil makan bahkan sambil mengantuk. Animo belajar ini semakin menggila gebitu masa ujian datang. Kami mendesak diri melampau limit normal untuk menemukan limit baru yang jauh lebih tinggi.

"Aku merasa PM sengaja mengajarkan candu. Candu ini ditawarkan siang malam, sedemikian rupa sehingga semua murid jatuh menyerah kepadanya. Kami telah ketagihan. Kami candu belajar. Dan *imtihan* atau ujian adalah pesta merayakan candu itu." (Fuadi 200).

designed to discipline workers by enabling religious morality and Muslim ethics in service of instilling “neoliberal norms of transparency and productivity, and rationalization for purposes of profit” (Rudnyckyj, “Spiritual Economies” 105-106). In the pesantren, the purpose of discipline is not so directly tied to modes of profit as is factory work, but by disciplining santri students in institutionalized educational forms and an ethics of suffering which leads to their success, they in turn become valuable national citizens with transnational competence. “Man jadda wajada” becomes a kind of battle cry for the santri students as they face the rigors of pesantren study and are beholden to fixed hierarchies of knowledge production. By following the rules and struggling through pesantren education, the 6 boys emerge as successful men with a neoliberal work ethic that foregrounds individual advancement on a global scale. Their success is ironically marked by most of the boy’s departure from Indonesia.

“We used to paint the sky by letting our imaginations run wild. I saw a cloud that looked like the American continent, Raja insisted the same cloud was the same shape as Europe, while Atang was not sure about the two of us, and firmly believed that the cloud was in the shape of the African continent. Basu actually saw all of this in the context of Asia, while Said and Dulmajid were very nationalistic, the cloud to them formed a map of the unitary states of Indonesia. ... [T]hen the dream was just a cloud, now it is real life. The six of us live in five different countries, the five towers of our dreams” (Fuadi 405).<sup>311</sup>

Fuadi shapes a narrative in which it is worth it in the end to endure such disciplinary measures and intense (mostly rote) testing, because discipline is the greatest marker of success. The slogan “man jadda wijada” is repeated throughout the novel as the boys emerge from the personal battles of *imtihan* exams in the pesantren. The dreams of living abroad which they constructed under the towers of the pesantren are linked to the five countries the boys end up living—the United States, England, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and two who remain in Indonesia, in the city of Surabaya.

Rosyida enables an overt critique of the ethic of suffering within pesantren education in *Sajak Cinta Jean Satria* (2008) [*Jean Satria’s Love Poem*<sup>312</sup>]. The story revolves around Rendy, a young male santri student who doesn’t fit the ideal of an obedient and unquestioning santri stereotype. He is a poet who resists the uniformity of the pesantren experience throughout the narrative. He frequently questions the reasoning behind various pesantren regulation and rejects the ethic of suffering that is assumed to be necessary in pesantren schooling.

“He was a santri student, an original, but he tried to refuse the assumption that santri must be willing to get sick, grow fungus on their skin, eat unhealthy foods and so on. Instead, he wants to understand that these are the things that we must be able to master, not to surrender and become a servant. This means we do not need to learn about honest, we can ponder it for ourselves!” (Rosyida *Sajak Jean Satria* 31-32).<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> “Dulu kami melukis langit dan membebaskan imajinasi itu lepas membumbung tinggi. AKu melihat awan yang seperti benua Amerika, Raja bersikeras awan yang sama berbentuk Erupa, sementara Atang tidak yakin dengan kami berdua, dan sangat percaya bahwa awan itu berbentuk benua Afrika. Basu malah melihat semua ini dalam konteks Asia, sedangkan Said dan Dulmajid sangat nasionalis, awan itu berbentuk peta negara kesatuan Indonesia. ... [M]aka semula awan impian, kini hidup yang nyata. Kami berenam telah berada di lima negara yang berbeda. Di lima menara impian kami.” (Fuadi 405).

<sup>312</sup> “Jean Satria” is the pen name for his father, a play on “Jean Paul Sartre” because of his knowledge of literature and philosophy.

<sup>313</sup> “Dia memang santri. Orisinil sebagai santri. Tapi dia mencoba menegaskan penolakannya tentang asumsi bahwa santri harus mau sakit-sakitan, tumbuh jamur si setiap kulit, memakan makanan yang tidak sehat dan lain sebagainya. Dia justru ingin memahamkan bahwa semua itu adalah hal-hal yang harus bisa kita kuasai. Bukan

Rendy enables poetry to call into question the formalities and empty rigors of pesantren education. His refusal to become like the “assumed” santri reflects popular stereotypes of santri in Java in which the backward traditionality of the peasant is conflated with the view that pesantren represent isolationist, dogmatic and extremist Islamic communities. These are a stereotypes which Fuadi also confronts, but in a very different capacity than his strategy of aligning pesantren discipline with the creation of ideal national citizens. Here Rosyida undermines the santri stereotype through the critical thinking, creativity and self-determination. Shortly in the narrative, Rendy is expelled from class precisely because he undermines the centralized authority of the teacher because of a line in one of his poems.

“I don’t care about that kind of praise (lit. applause). Everything is just a formality. None of that has any effect on them. It is this poem that speaks to represent the hearts of the people who continue to suffer” (Rosyida, *Sajak Jean Satria* 17).<sup>314</sup>

This is of course not received well by the teachers, Rendy is scolded and dismissed from class. After being expelled, he sits ruminating on the injustice of his situation and the romantic narrative ensues outside the pesantren. Romance in this case is an escape from the rigors of pesantren schooling as it offers a space within which Rendy’s poetic imagination thrives. The romantic narrative proves only to be in his imagination. The failure of the romance narrative inspires Rendy to reflect on his existential position, as well as provide a template through which Rosyida brings several intertextual connections into the narrative.

The use of poetry as a tool of institutional critique is reminiscent of the poet activists of the New Order—W. S. Rendra, Ehma Ainun Nadjib and Wiji Thukul—but in this story Rosyida draws a more explicit connection to the work of Chairil Aiwar, solidified most by Rendy’s existential reflections of Rendy and his fierce individuality. Chairil Anwar is one of the most famous Indonesian poets. Of Sumatran descent and writing in the 1940s, his works draw from traditional verse fused with everyday Indonesian language that helped to solidify notions of nationalist sentiment in early independence. Individualism and existentialism are central themes in his poetry, and so reflect a particularly interesting influence on this novel. Rosyida incorporates his poetic influence to interrogate the relationship between community expectations and individuality, but the individuality and existentialist character of Rendy is not incorporated into any nationalist or institutional pesantren narratives. He remains a conflicted young poet who sustains a closer relationship with his books and certain icons of global philosophical and literary history—Kahlil Gibran, Aristotle, Ibnu Rusyd, Immanuel Kant, Ivan Illich, Tagore, Plato, Descartes, Al-kindī and Ibnu Taimiyah, to name a few--than any interpersonal connections with his peers. Disciplined subjectivities, be they pesantren or nationalist, are ultimately rejected in the narrative as Rendy remains alone with his literary ideals and “books remain his best friends” throughout the novel (Rosyida, *Sajak Jean Satria* 227).

Af’idatussofa returns to the context of *imtiḥan* in *Gus Yahya*, where testing season in the pesantren is described as one of the more enjoyable aspects of pesantren education. It is not a

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*malah manjadi hambah yang pasrah. Ini berarti kita tidak mau belajar tentang kejujuran. Bisa kita renungkan sendiri!”* (Rosyida, *Sajak Jean Satria* 31-32).

<sup>314</sup> “Tak peduli aku dengan tepukan-tepukan semacam itu. Semuanya hanya formalitas belaka. Semua itu tidak berpengaruh dengan mereka. Tapi sajak inilah yang berbicara untuk mewakili hati rakyat yang terus menderita” (Rosyida, *Sajak Jean Satria* 17).



battle ground like in *Lima Menara*, but rather a space of thriving intellectual and spiritual curiosity, set in contrast instead to the testing season in state schools.

“The atmosphere of imtihan is not like the testing atmosphere at public schools, it is relaxed and enjoyable. Exams conducted in pesantren are not meant to compare the abilities of one santri to the next. The exams are purely to measure their ability. [...] Ranking is just a term for encouragement in learning. Those who get a lot of good rankings are not very surprised. Everything is fun. Every santri has their own unique characteristics. Some are very proficient in nahwu [Arabic], some in fiqh [Islamic jurisprudence], or tauhid [monotheism], basically all of them study with a great deal of enthusiasm” (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya 77-78*).<sup>315</sup>

Struggle is not foregrounded in Af'idatussofa's construction of the pesantren educational experience. There are of course rigors to the educational process, but the author places emphasis on how santri students cultivate a greater sense of freedom in the learning process which gestures towards the coexistence of pesantren and state institutions alongside information educational modes in the agrarian context. Af'idatussofa dedicates greater attention to the details of each individual character's strengths and weaknesses in that context, but discipline is not a precondition for pesantren success in her work. For Rosyida as well, the “bad boy” character of Bilal in *Tarian Cinta* is a prime example of the way in which the romantic pesantren narrative works to heal family trauma, not instill greater struggle. Love under the azan leads Bilal to find his passion for reciting the call to prayer and a revived sense of spirituality in his pesantren education. For Rosyida as well, the “bad boy” character of Bilal in *Tarian Cinta* is a prime example of the way in which the romantic pesantren narrative works to heal family trauma, not instill greater struggle. Love under the azan leads Bilal to find his passion for reciting the call to prayer and a revived sense of spirituality in his pesantren education.

The critique of institutional testing standards in works by KBQT authors reflects an important discursive topic which extends into student's research projects and educational activism in Kalibening. In 2007, Naylul Izza, Fina Af'idatussofa, and Siti Qona'ah (who go by the combined pen name ZaFiKa), published their explorations of the usefulness of the national exams in a book published by LKiS, a progressive Islamic publisher out of Bantul, Yogyakarta, entitled *Lebih Asyik Tanpa UAN (It's Cooler without with National Exam)*. In this work, the authors conduct a research project on the effectiveness of standardized exams as an evaluative tool for individual students, teachers, and schools across Indonesia. The authors became interested in research on this topic largely because at KBQT, there arose a large debate among the students as to whether they should take part in the national exams. Most of the students felt that the exam was not an integral part of their education since they value more of the praxis oriented participatory learning process in Kalibening, but students' opinions diverged when faced with the choice to take the exam or not. Some felt that if they did not take the exam, this would limit their educational and professional choices later in life. Others felt that the mission of KBQT all along was to work outside of national institutional structures, and so by partaking in the national exams, this would undermine their ideals as a village-based learning community. In my interviews with KBQT members, many reflected on this debate in their community as a

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<sup>315</sup> “Seuasana tetap santai dan menyenangkan. Ujian yang dilakukan di pesantren bukanlah ujian untuk membandingkan kemampuan santri satu dengan santri lain. Ujian tersebut murni digunakan untuk mengukur kemampuan. [...] Rangkaing juga hanya sebuah istilah untuk penyemangat dalam belajar. Yang mendapat rangkaing bagus banyak juga nggak terlalu kecewa. Semua serba fun. Setiap santri memiliki ciri khas masing-masing. Ada yang mahir banget dalam nahwu, ada yang mahir banget dalam fiqh, tauhid, pokoknya semuanya belajar dengan pbenuh semangat” (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya 77-78*).

critical moment for their educational community. It was divisive and contentious, so instead of allowing the debate to divide their community, Izza, Af'idatussofa, and Qona'ah decided to turn it into a research project to be used by community members to make their own choices about whether to participate in the exams, as well as for the department of education to reevaluate the standards of testing. The authors evaluate state regulations and practices surrounding testing procedures, interview students about their experiences with testing, conduct a review of popular media surrounding testing debates, offer suggestions for alternative evaluations that reflect the greater diversity of student aptitudes, as well as recommend the decentralization of educational standards in Indonesia.

This work has received quite wide circulation since its publication in 2007. In an interview with Bahruddin on the popular television show "Kick Andy" he discusses at length the publications by KBQT members, noting especially this work for the way in which it reflects the process of educational inquiry that is not restricted by institutional constraints. Writing in the genre of popular pesantren novels, KBQT authors create space for the expression of pesantren identities as well as alternative modes self-determination that is at once rooted to local tradition and engaged with globalizing forces. Setting these works in comparison with *Negeri 5 Menara* offers a point of comparison for the ways in which pesantren experience and cultural heritage are translated to popular audiences. Works by authors from Kalibening are read quite extensively by a local network of readers in Central Java, but they have not reached the same level of national success as Fuadi's work. All of these authors bring the pesantren experience to wider audiences, but the *bildung* of their works is quite different. Part of what accounts for Fuadi's widespread national success is the way in which he reinscribes national ideals within the pesantren imagination, resituating pesantren subjectivities within a larger national framework. Cultural diversity and collectivity are incorporated into the disciplinary confines of the pesantren experience. Fuadi packages Minang rantau and pesantren experience within an easily digestible national narrative which reinforces uniformity, centralization, and discipline, by fusing the local particularities of Islamic education in Java with global civilizing forces, in turn creating in his characters who are ideal national subjects as well as competitive global citizens. Discipline in the pesantren shapes an ethic of struggle which ties the search for knowledge to neoliberal modes of success. Authors from KBQT, on the other hand, work to broaden educational choices in their works. Javanese culture is of course part of the pesantren experience, but it is also an opening through which KBQT authors experiment beyond the pesantren context to explore transformative and emancipatory educational themes in their works that are embedded in the everyday.

### ***Yadi's Flute: Returning Education to the Agrarian Context***

The authors of *Lebih Asyik Tanpa UAN*, preface their work with a list of mottos which encapsulate many of the core values of the educational process KBQT.

**Motto** [sic.]

Keep trying, balance it with prayer.

Humans must be humble enough to admit their mistakes.

Everyone is a teacher.

Sincerity sparkles with light even though most people don't see it, it is only for Him.

Always think creatively and confidently.

Have an independent attitude. You are not responsible for others.

Turn small ideas into big ideas.

Always be sensitive and open, humble, wise, and brave.  
Let them chatter, productivity is most important.  
There is no quick progress, it requires process.  
Always do something even if it's small, rather than drowning in dreams of doing more.  
With writing we will be understood.  
Look around you for what you want to learn.  
Dynamic people always want to listen, learn, gain experience and better themselves.  
Combine imagination with the ability to think.  
Read, read and keep reading" (Af'idatussofa, et al. ix-x).<sup>316</sup>

Education at KBQT is designed to be departure from the uniformity of institutionalized education that, in the discourse of transformative social movements, is seen as a tool of oppression and mechanism of control. Many of these values listed above are thematically expressed in works of fiction by KBQT authors. Rosyida and Af'idatussofa's works highlight the strength and solidarity of the pesantren community, the excitement for learning as students study the Qu'ran and hadiths, as well as the permeability of these spaces as they venture beyond the confines of the pesantren context. In all their works, educational choice is central to the didactic message. It is not relegated to the pesantren context, instead it coexists with a variety of informal alternatives. There are many educational choices available for the characters (and authors) to explore the intersectional dynamics of education, romance, Islam and pop culture. Authors from Kalibening incorporate a broad critique of centralized educational institutions that is a legacy of the circulation of critical pedagogies in Java. Af'idatussofa implicitly critiques pesantren education by establishing educational alternatives which exist in tandem with pesantren schooling, whereas Rosyida offers a more overt critique of pesantren rules, regulations, and hierarchies to construct alternative educational possibilities for her protagonists. The multiplicity of educational outlets featured in both of their writings reflect many key features of the learning process at KBQT. As characters and audiences are exposed to multiple sites of learning within and outside the pesantren institution, these novels expand the notion of schooling beyond institutional boundaries to decentralize the production of knowledge and point towards sites of educational praxis that are embedded in everyday experience.

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<sup>316</sup> "Motto

*Terus berusaha, diimbangi dengan doa.*

*Manusia harus cukup rendah hati untuk mengakui kesalahannya.*

*Semua orang itu guru.*

*Keikhlasan memiliki kilauan dan sinar, meskipun ribuan mata tidak melihatnya karena ikhlas itu hanya untuk-Nya.*

*Selalu berpikir kreatif dan percaya diri.*

*Memiliki sikap independent. Tidak bertanggung pada orang lain.*

*Sering merubah gagasan kecil menjadi gagasan besar.*

*Selalu peka dan terbuka.*

*Rendah hati, bijak dan berani.*

*Biar cerewet, yang penting produktif.*

*Kemajuan diperoleh tidak bisa langsung, tapi memerlukan proses.*

*Sering bertindak walaupun sedikit, daripada tenggelam dalam angan-angan ingin bertindak banyak.*

*Dengan menulis maka kita akan dimengerti.*

*Melihat sekeliling untuk mencari apa yang ingin diketahui.*

*Orang yang dinamis selalu ingin mendengarkan, ingin belajar, ingin bertambah pengalaman dan ingin lebih baik.*

*Menggabungkan imajinasi dengan kemauan berpikir.*

*Baca, baca dan terus membaca" (Af'idatussofa, et al. ix-x).*

In *Gus Yahya*, Af'idatussofa borrows much from her experience being raised in a community with two very different educational dynamics; two brothers with two schools operating side by side, each with two very different pedagogical orientations but which operate in harmony with one another. In the novel, pesantren education is valorized even as many santri students also study at the local state school.<sup>317</sup> Af'idatussofa's critique of pesantren schooling is not expressed as an overt form of resistance in the narrative but is rather conducive of a greater spectrum of educational sites available to characters. If there is a sense of antagonism towards an educational institution in *Gus Yahya*, it is directed more towards national schooling than pesantren education. There is an implicit critique of the centralized and hierarchical nature of pesantren education, but it is still recuperated as a space which solidifies the spiritual development of the characters and their embeddedness in the surrounding community. Her writing focuses more on expanding educational options for the unique needs of each student than it is a rejection of any institutional formation. Zahra in *Gus Yahya*, for example, finds as much joy in the search for knowledge within the pesantren as she does in the surrounding agrarian context.

“After school Zahra went to the park, to a place she usually goes to study or create new works. In that spot Zahra felt a great deal of inspiration, when her thoughts felt drained, she would go there to think clearly again. She studied while listening to music on the flash player which was a gift from Mr. Ali because she received the literary appreciation award for a poem she created. Zahra rarely poured her experiences and feelings into poetry, more often she liked to write in her diary. Zahra was not a girl who had a myriad of advantages, she was a regular girl with a strong curiosity, she also had a strong sense for sharing, she was really solid and liked to share knowledge, to the point that she became known as an intelligent girl” (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 75-76).<sup>318</sup>

The creativity and aptitudes of each santri student is reinforced by the pesantren teachers, but the pesantren context is not the only type of education portrayed. Zahra displays an eagerness and excitement for education that extends outside the classrooms.

In *Gus Yahya*, there is shift between learning within the pesantren and learning in the surrounding agrarian landscape that is signaled by the interjection of Javanese musical expressions into the Islamic soundscape. Amidst the opening flirtations between Zahra and Yahya, Af'idatussofa weaves a sub-plot into the romantic narrative. On one of her outings, Zahra wanders beyond the confines of the pesantren into the surrounding community and meets a local boy by the name of Selamed Riyadi, or Yadi for short. Yadi comes from a family of farmers, and he is responsible for herding their water-buffalo in the rice field around the pesantren complex. Zahra befriends Yadi because she is drawn to the sound of his flute playing, and frequently

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<sup>317</sup> "Seperti halnya di Pesantren, di sekolah pun Yahya begitu enjoy dan menikmati suasana. Di sekolah, dia juga memiliki begitu banyak teman dan sahabat karib. Yahya memang cerdas, tapi Yahya tidak pernah menolak ketika ada salah seorang teman yang ingin belajar sesuatu darinya. Selain cerdas, Yahya juga terkenal baik, santun, dan cakap. Nggak salah kalau dia udah banyak yang naksir. He he he... Tapi kan masih cinta monyet" (Af'idatussofa *Gus Yahya* 13).

<sup>318</sup> "Selepas sekolah, Zahra ke taman dan ke tempat biasa untuk belajar atau bikin karya. Di tempat itu Zahra merasa dapat inspirasi yang banyak banget, pikirannya yang terkuras jadi jernih lagi. Dia belajar sambil dengerin lagu lewat flash player hadiah dari Pak Ali karena dia mendapat nilai apresiasi sastra tertinggi dalam pembuatan puisi. Zahra jarang banget menuangkan kejadian atau perasaan hatinya untuk membuat puisi, dia lebih sering menggunakan imajinasinya. Kalau mau menuangkan perasaannya, dia cenderung lebih suka menulis diary. Zahra bukan termasuk gadis yang memiliki segudang kelebihan, dia gadis biasa yang rasa ingin tahunya tinggi, rasa berbaginya juga tinggi, dia solid banget dan suka berbagi pengetahuan sehingga dia terkesan sebagai gadis yang cerdas" (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya*, 75-76).

comes to sit with him in the rice fields to listen to his music. As the narration is told primarily from the perspective of Gus Yahya, his infatuation for Zahra compels him to follow her on one of her walks out of the pesantren complex. Audiences witness Zahra's interactions with Yadi through a playfully voyeuristic view from the perspective of Yahya peering through the bushes as Zahra sits in the rice field to listen to Yadi's flute playing.

"Zahra listened while sitting in the rice field. ... Who knows how long Yadi played seruling for Zahra. Yadi is used to playing the flute for hours at a time. Zahra also seemed to really enjoy listening. It was different for Yahya. Yahya, who had been watching Zahra from behind the bushes, actually fell asleep to the sound of the flute" (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 15)<sup>319</sup>

Zahra is captivated by Yadi's *seruling* and Yahya is bored to sleep. Later that evening Yahya runs into Yadi sitting on the stairs of the pesantren studying kitab. Yadi is an informal santri, not officially part of the pesantren but a community member who occasionally comes to study. Yahya asks Yadi to teach him to play *seruling*. After seeing how much Zahra loved the flute song, he now wants to impress the young girl. Yadi agrees but must first return home to feed his water buffalo. His life is repeatedly tied back to his work in the agrarian context even as he shows a strong desire to study in the pesantren and state schools. Yadi expresses educational desires by speaking to his water buffalo, Bau (a shortened form of *kerbau*, meaning water buffalo).

"Bau, do you know that from the bottom of my heart... I really want to go to middle school. You know, don't you? I'm not in school now, but I see kids going to school and I really want to go too. But how can I, Bau? There's no way I could burden mom and dad who always work so hard. I need to find another way. I guess it's ok because I'm able to meet you all the time. But, Bau! I really want to go to school; have a lot of friends and new experiences, it seems fun. You've never been to school, have you Bau? [...] You would like it if you went to school, believe me. But it's ok I don't go to school, what's important is not to stop learning. I can still borrow books from my friends who go to middle school. I have to be thankful I can stay here and be with you" (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 95-96).<sup>320</sup>

Speaking to an animal is perhaps a kind of oral parallel to journal writing. A moment of intimate personal expression inscribed in the agrarian landscape. The humorous image of a buffalo attending school is a playful expression of the harsh reality that Yadi's family cannot afford to send him to school. The relationship between pesantren schooling and rural farming life exist in close in proximity to one another in the novel but there is still a distinction made between the two in terms of one's socioeconomic class and access to education.

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<sup>319</sup> "Zahra mendengarkan baik-baik sambal duduk di pematang sawah. ... Entah udah berapa lama Yadi memainkan seruling untuk Zahra. Bagi Yadi, memainkan seruling ber-jam-jam itu udah biasa. Zahra yang mendengarkannya terlihat begitu nikmat. Lain halnya dengan Yahya. Yahya yang sedari tadi mengamati Zahra dari balik semak-semak malah ketiduan dengerin suara seruling" (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 15).

<sup>320</sup> "Bau! Tahu nggak? Sebenarnya, dari lubuk hatiku yang terdalam...aku tuh pengen banget sekolah di SMP. Kamu tahu kan? Sekarang ini aku putus sekolah Melihat anak-anak lain sekolah, rasanya aku itu pengen banget. Tapi mau bagaimana lagi ya, Bau. Aku nggak mungkin memberatkan Bapak dan Ibu di rumah yang banting tulang terus. Untuk mondok aja, aku musti cara tambahan. Tidak masalah sih, karena aku musti bisa ketemu kamu terus. Tapi, Bau! Aku tuh pengen banget sekolah. Punya temen banyak, punya pengalaman, sepertinya seru. Kamu belum pernah sekolah ya, Bau? [...] Kamu kalau sekolah pasti seneng. Percaya deh, ah tapi, nggak apa-apa aku nggak sekolah, yang penting nggak putus belajar. Aku masih bisa pinjam buku-buku temanku yang sekolah di SMP. Aku harus bersyukur karena aku masih bisa mondok dan masih bisa ketemu sama kamu" (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 95-96).

Af'idatussofa incorporates other subtle sites of decentralized knowledge production in the agrarian landscape. Learning the *seruling* with Yadi, Yahya comments on the level of skill required to play the flute compared to other western instruments.

"Yadi began teaching Yahya how to hold the bamboo flute and how to blow into it. It was not like learning the play the organ where all you do is press the keys. According to Yahya, playing *seruling* was more difficult. He was already proficient in playing organ, guitar, drums and piano, but it never crossed his mind to learn to play *seruling*" (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 21).<sup>321</sup>

There is a juxtaposition between the amount of skill necessary to learn the Javanese flute compared to other western instruments. This reinforces an implicit recuperation of Javanese cultural experience as an important site of knowledge. The *seruling* is also a very common instrument, cheap to make and therefore accessible to anyone regardless of socioeconomic status. Other Javanese instruments, such as the heavy metallophones of the gamelan, would be more difficult for Yadi to have, let alone carry with him as he herds his buffalo.

As their friendship develops, Yahya decides to dedicate his savings to Yadi's educational aspirations. Yadi thoroughly enjoys school with all his new friends and experiences as he excels in his work.

"In class they had opportunities to discuss and debate. Yadi, who already joined in many discussions at the pesantren, did not seem uncomfortable joining the class discussion. Gradually Yadi began to acquire knowledge and a global way of thinking. His words were easy to understand, coherent when speaking, and in addition to speaking properly, his knowledge of Islam was sizeable, he had a very wide range of knowledge. What was most important is that he had a strong sense of curiosity" (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 100).<sup>322</sup>

Yadi becomes a model student but remains at school for only one year. He grows bored by it and chooses to return to tending his water buffalo.

"He remembered the times when herding buffalo. So enjoyable. He can also learn while shepherding. He missed his buffalo. A whole year would pass that he never felt bored while accompanying his water buffalo to eat in the rice fields. In the fields, he could do many things he couldn't do in school. Yadi could study, play *seruling*, look for grasses for his water buffalo, tell stories to his buffalo, and in terms of friends, actually Yadi had many friends at the pesantren. ... Yadi returned to enjoy his days in the rice fields, which had already befriended him since studying at the pesantren. Yadi returned to feel the beautiful atmosphere among the grasses. Yadi returned to being 'Yadi the Shepherd' (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 101-102).<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> "... Yadi mulai mengajari Yahya cara memegang *serunding* dari bamboo juga cara meniupnya. Nggak seperti belajar organ yang hanya tinggal pencet, belajar *seruling* ternyata lebih rumit menurut Yahya. Maklum, kalau main organ, gitar, drum, dan piano sekalipun udah mahir Tapi, dulu nggak pernah terbesit dibenaknya untuk belajar main *seruling*." (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 21).

<sup>322</sup> "Di kelas tadi, sempat ada acara diskusi dan debat juga, Yadi yang sudah sering diskusi ketika musyawarah di pesantren tidak terlihat canggung ketika mulai berdiskusi di kelas. Diam-diam, Yadi memiliki pengetahuan dan cara pandang yang global. Kata-katanya mudah dimengerti, runtut kalau berbicara, menyenangkan pula. Sehingga yang mendengarnya tidak bosan. Ini dia penurus bangsa yang baik, selain tutur katanya yang sopan, ilmu agamanya lumayan, pengetahuannya luas lagi. Yang terpenting, rasa ingin tahunya tinggi" (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 100).

<sup>323</sup> "Dia teringat masa-masa saat menggembala kerbau. Nyenengin banget. Apalagi bisa menggembala sambil belajar. Dia jadi kangen sama kerbaunya. Selama setahun dia nggak pernah bosan untuk menemani kerbaunya makan di sawah. Kalau di sawah, dia bisa ngelakuin apa aja yang nggak bisa dilakukan di sekolah. Yadi bisa belajar, bisa nyeruling, bisa cari rumput untuk kerbau, bisa cerita-cerita ma kerbau, kalau teman!!! Sebenarnya Yadi juga punya banyak di pesantren. ... Yadi Kembali menikmati hari-harinya di sawah yang sudah menjadi

Through Yadi's experience, readers are introduced to the beauty and excitement of learning in the agrarian context through a subtle critique of institutional education. This is signaled by the interjection of the Javanese *seruling* into the soundscape of the novel. Just as Yadi's flute attracts Zahra's attention as she wanders around the pesantren, it also becomes a symbol for reformulating educational desires within the agrarian context. The sound of Yadi's flute is a signal through which the author works to critique institutional education, as well as re-establish the agrarian context as a thriving educational context, that is today alternative to state or religious institutions, but which is imagined by members of KBQT and the larger transformative movement to be a more original site of learning. [links back to agrarian change, new order developmentalism, industrialization,

### ***Conclusion:***

Af'idatussofa and Rosyida reflect the transformative educational goals of praxis in their experiences in participatory education in Kalibening by broadening possibilities for learning in their narratives. Their novels and short stories operate in currencies of popular culture and serve to bridge the imaginary divide between rural and urban experiences in Java. These texts capture the realistic details of a sunny afternoon walking through rice fields in Java, to the globalizing forces of SMS text messaging and pop music. Authors from KBQT engage popular audiences in cultural discourses beyond the typical confines of chick, teen, female, pesantren, or state subjectivities. Shaped by a wide range of influences both local and global, the "bildung" of these novels are instructive as their authors invite young readers to question the status quo of educational institutions to open a dialogue about education in Indonesia. A progressive discourse, rooted in local traditions, inflected by new social movements, and operating as a new mode of reorienting self-subjectivities. As coming of age stories, they are instructive for young audiences, and the authors use these educational alternatives embedded in their works in order to show alternatives that exist and are even more accessible than pesantren education. Often framed as closer to the lived experience of rural communities or to the personal experiences of santri students whose educational goals do not entirely mesh with the pesantren system (as women, dealing with poverty, or facing difficult life experiences such as family illness or even natural disasters). There is greater awareness of social problems that these authors are experimenting with in their narratives as the authors find novel ways to write beyond preconceived notions about what it means to be a santri student, or to be a young woman in rural Java.

As authors from KBQT engage in the global forms of cosmopolitanism at the same time they are deeply committed to the small, local details of their surrounding community. There is a proximity of these stories to the lives of their authors which invites readers into a sense of lived experience. The realism of these stories opens possibilities for reflection on the narrative as a means not only of representing, but also shifting the discourse on education. Works of popular pesantren literature and ChickLit often closely approximate the lives of their authors by drawing from their own experiences in pesantren, the emotional journey of their own teen subjectivities, and in some cases also by creating published authors within the narrative. Fina Af'idatussofa, for

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*temannya semenjak ia menuntut ilmu di pesantren. Yadi Kembali merasakan suasana yang indah di antara rerumputan. Yadi Kembali menjadi Yadi Si Penggembala"* (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 101-102).

example, transforms her lead female protagonist, Zarya, from a santri student into a widely published author in *Gus Yahya, Bukan Cinta Biasa* (*Gus Yahya, No Ordinary Love*).

“Graduating from junior high school, Zahra had already published her novel entitled, ‘Treatise for Rasullallah’ in which she expresses her deep love for Allah and His messenger [Muhammad]. The language is pleasing to read and the writing is beautifully arranged. It was the first novels accepted by the publisher, after the nine novels Zahra had already sent. Sometimes she would lose her enthusiasm to write because of their frequent rejection of her novels, but she would delete that lazy feeling which crept into her heart. Reject it to focus on the real purpose of writing as a process of further self-development. ... Zahra had fun spilling all her feelings into the novel. ...

“F-A-T-I-M-A-H A-Z-Z-A-H-R-A. Her name, writings and opinions frequently appeared in mass media. She became known as a critical thinking teen, a young woman would not let her enthusiasm fade as she continued to produce written works” (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 157-158).<sup>324</sup>

The act of writing is a mediating practice which leads Zahra to discover a stronger sense of self determination in the story. The expectations of a romantic conclusion which Af'idatussofa sets up in the narrative is redirected towards the personal development of the female protagonists, and the act of writing largely facilitates that redirection. Zahra becomes a kind of authorial surrogate for Af'idatussofa. The body of the novel contains the heading “Fina az-Zahra” a not-so-subtle Islamized play on “Fina as Zahra” suggestive of how the author reflects on her own experiences through characterizations of Zahra. There lies an important parallel between the character development in the novel and the authors own sense of personal emancipation through the act of writing that is integral to the formation of alternative subjectivities and reflective of the educational dynamics of the KBQT learning community. Through the growth of their central protagonists, the authors reflect the everyday experience of participatory learning in Kalibening that is both tied to community traditions and reflective of the changing shape of those traditions. Af'idatussofa and Rosyida thematically incorporate the act of writing into their texts, and in so doing, the narrative imagination of their stories extends beyond the confines of the novel and the conventions of popular pesantren literature. The act of writing and access to education provide a sense of liberation and personal empowerment for the authors and their female protagonists.

Works of literature from KBQT present an important discursive meeting point with the writings of Kartini discussed previously. Authors from KBQT, most of whom are female, enable the act of writing as an important outlet of empowerment that is in some way a continuation of Kartini's call for expanded education in the Javanese context. Journal and letter writing feature prominently in their novels, they often highlight the comradery between female characters, and

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<sup>324</sup> "Lulus SMP, Zahra sudah menerbitkan novel hasil karyanya yang berjudul 'Risalah Untuk Rasullallah' di situ dia menumpahkan kecintaanya yang mendalam terhadap Allah dan rasulnya. Bahasanya sangat enak dibaca dan tulisannya dirangkai indah. Itu adalah novel pertama yang diterima oleh penerbit setelah sembilan novel yang dikirim oleh Zahra. Kadang, saking seringnya novel yang ditolak oleh penerbit, Zahra jadi nggak semangat untuk nulis lagi. Tapi, dihapusnya dalam-dalam rasa males yang menyelinap di hatinya. Biar di tolak, tapi tujuan menulis sebenarnya adalah untuk pengembangan diri lebih lanjut. ... Zahra hanya iseng untuk menumpahkan semua perasaannya dalam novel tersebut. ...

“F-A-T-I-M-A-H A-Z-Z-A-H-R-A. Nama itu sering tampil di media masa untuk memberikan tulisan dan opini-opininya. Sehingga ia dikenal sebagai pemikir remaja yang kritis. Menjadi gadis yang sudah remaja tidak membuat semangatnya luntur, dia semakin memproduksi karya-karyanya” (Af'idatussofa, *Gus Yahya* 157-158).



the stories reinforce the cultivation of a personal passion for learning and writing which aligns with new literary conventions of ChickLit, a genre infamously known for the expression of female subjectivities, as well as with some of the earliest published women's writing in Indonesia. Kartini never lived to see her works published, and her desire to find a "public hearing" was not possible within the conventions and traditions of Dutch colonial society in Java during her time. The world she imagined for the "little brown girls" of Java, however, is in some ways achieved and expanded by authors from Kalibening. Their works also represents an important a departure from the Western enlightenment ideals of the Dutch colonial period. By combining pop, pesantren, and "chick" subjectivities in novel form, the authors shape subjectivities beyond standard expectations and stereotypes of pesantren experience.

As Pak Din plays in the discourse of identity as "sebetulnya kyai", authors from Kalibening also engage in a playful reorientation of conventional conceptions about what it means to be young Muslim youth growing up in rural Java. By revising the norms of ChickLit, authorizing rural pesantren experience for popular audiences from a transformative perspective, authors from KBQT reflect a long discourse of engagement with the boundaries of religious and creative expressions in the region through the act of writing, at the same time their works negotiate new terms for the creation of alternative subjectivities. These authors enable global literary forms situated within local realities, and their works reflect what I'm calling a transformative chick bildung. By enabling the pesantren context, romantic genre and strong emancipatory educational message within these novels, authors from Kalibening shape new forms of subjectivity for themselves and their audiences. Here in the form of both short stories as well as novels, educational themes, romance, and the individual formation of the central protagonists enact emancipatory processes that work to divorce individual and collective experience from the enlightenment standards of the Dutch colonial era and the neoliberal ideologies of the late New Order, to empower young readers to become agents in their own self-determination by shaping alternative subjectivities to state and religious institutional formations.

## Conclusion | Reflections on a Multiplicity of Imaginative Futures

The cases of Sanggar Anak Alam (SALAM) and Komunitas Belajar Qaryah Thayyibah (KBQT) form the grounds for this study on symbolic action and the intergenerational imagination in transformative social movements in Indonesia. Through my exploration of the symbolic actions of these two communities, this research demonstrates three major points about movements for social change in Indonesia. First, it demonstrates how transformative change happens in long-term, gradual steps. Social movement scholarship in Indonesia tends to focus on quick eruptions of protest (*aksi*) set in direct confrontation with forms of cultural hegemony reproduced most notably by the nation. This view also leads to the historical assumption that it is largely because of the strength of cultural hegemony that movements of resistance are not able to continue. There is some truth in that formulation, especially when considering the military strength which backed the cultural hegemony of the New Order state. But this formulation also leads scholars to stop looking for other forms of resistance that are not as overt. From the cases of SALAM and KBQT, on the other hand, we see how transformative change is effected within small steps over long periods of time. As communities work toward understanding structural forms of cultural hegemony, new directions of action are created. By reflecting on those actions, new steps are taken which then lead towards greater forms of personal and collective emancipation. This process involves increasing participation of a multiplicity of actors. Over time, mass movements are built, but they do not emerge abruptly. The processual steps of transformation are importantly constituted by intergenerational communities of actors. The gradual steps through which transformative movements are sustained contribute to their resilience. As such, cultural resistance is transformed into cultural resilience.

Secondly, this research demonstrates how decentralized forms of leadership are integral to gradual movements of transformative change. When scholars consider leadership within social movements in Indonesia, it is typically sustained through the actions of high-profile charismatic figures. In this kind of framing, there is an implicit dependence determined by the relationship between “those who lead” with “those who are led.” This relationship also reinforces the view of the short-term nature of social movements. Wahyaningsih and Bahrudin are two examples of the kind of leaders who actively work to decenter their centrality from the movements they help to initiate. For this reason, they are called *fasilitator* (facilitators) not *pemimpin* (leaders) within their respective communities. This is not to say that they are not sometime also seen as leaders, in fact they both work very hard to decenter themselves within their schools. During my fieldwork, for example, Wahyaningsih was initially reluctant to talk about her personal biography as being of any importance to the formation of the first permutation of SALAM in Lawen. This was also the case from what I saw with Bahrudin in Kalibening. On numerous occasions when visitors would refer to him as the founder (*pendiri*) of KBQT, he would immediately redirect their attention to the initiative of his son, Hilmiy, as the one who started the school. Even the term *pendiri*—which contains the root word *diri* for “self” or “ego” in Indonesian—carries an implicit assumption about the individual hubris of what constitutes leadership. Wahyaningsih and Bahrudin are indeed important to the emergence of these schools, but the continuation of these communities is not dependent on them. This is another feature of the resilience of transformative social movement action. Wahyaningsih and Bahrudin are models of new kinds of movement leaders who do not see themselves central to the continuation of the social movements they are involved.

Third, on the subject of action, this research demonstrates the importance of symbolic action for movements of transformative change in Indonesia. This is a thread which reinforces the long-term sustainability of these movements as well as the decentralized nature of leadership within them. Symbolic acts do something as well as say something.<sup>325</sup> This is where I return to the formulations of *ilmu* and *laku* which I began this presentation of research. Throughout my analysis of the art works produced by member of SALAM and KBQT, it is through the small steps of *laku* in which new forms of knowledge, *ilmu*, are created. As students are emboldened to express their creativity in a variety of forms, they are reflecting on the own experiences. Their creative products then speak to new generations of people who are emboldened to create for themselves. Egalitarian learning within these communities means that no one is positioned higher than anyone else, as either teachers or students, leaders or followers. What then do the works included as primary source materials in this research do? What do they say?

In the first chapter I explore three creative responses to the construction of a dam. In “ceritakanlah ini kepada siapapun,” Wiji Thukul uses the language of the nation to tell a story. However the poem doesn’t just tell the story of developmentalism at Kedung Ombo, it also makes an appeal to audiences to continue telling this story. In so doing, it implicitly says something more about the long-term history of people being silenced as well as silencing themselves. As the “graves rise from memory” it is the dead who speak, and the living who do not. In this way, the poem takes the language of state oppression and turns it into an agent of combatting that oppression by engaging the participation of an audience.

In the symbolic actions of Y.B. Mangunwijaya, he enables several strategies of resistance at Kedung Ombo. In a similar symbolic action to Thukul, Mangunwijaya enables a strategy that was used to construct New Order authority against it. In this case it is the tradition of wayang storytelling. Where he differs from Thukul, however, is that this strategy is largely based on his persona as a high-profile catholic priest. He becomes a cultural trickster like Semar—an intermediary between the world of the gods and the world of men—to outwit the logic of state authority. Mangunwijaya does not call attention to injustices at Kedung Ombo through direct confrontation, instead he simply calls on a higher power than the state. His spiritual calling as a *rohaniawan* man of God is enabled to justify his actions. The trick is that he cannot be called a communist, because he is religious. Having passed an initial barrier to entry by directly defying state orders to stay away from Kedung Ombo, he then goes on to focus his humanitarian efforts on the educational needs of the children of Kedung Ombo. This is a very difficult rationale for the state to counter without seeming heartless. The confluence of media attention at this moment adds to the effectiveness of Mangunwijaya’s symbolic strategies. What his work does is bring public attention to the injustices at Kedung Ombo. What it does not do, is stop it from happening.

The final example I explore from activism at Kedung Ombo is the theatrical work, *Pak Kanjeng (Mr. Kanjeng)*, by Komunitas Kecil Pak Kanjeng (the Small Community of Mr. Kanjeng, later known as Kyai Kanjeng). This group of high-profile actors attempt to represent the experiences of people displaced by the Kedung Ombo dam through a high-concept work of experimental theater. What this play says, it says three times over by the three actors that play the one character of Pak Kanjeng. What it does, is thematize a culture of silence in the figure of Begejil. Ironically, these techniques reinforce the silenced marginalization of rakyat kecil communities like Begejil. This play is similar to the work of Mangunwijaya insofar as it raises

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<sup>325</sup> This formulation I draw from an older generation of scholars, Kenneth Burke. See Burke, Kenneth. *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*. University of California Press, 1966.

public awareness, but it does not stop the construction of the dam. In fact, it only really stops the play from being performed again.

From these three examples I establish background for understanding how movements of resistance in direct action to the New Order state were temporary and easily suppressed during the New Order. It also establishes an early lexicon of symbolic actions that form an important basis for understanding how official forms of culture are reappropriated in acts of resistance against cultural hegemony. Finally, it signals a moment in which an emergent discourse of transformative social movement action—defined as such by the activists themselves—begins to be considered by high-profile activists and artists. It is in their reflections on the failures at Kedung Ombo in which activists come to formulate a specific methodology of praxis—theory, action, reflection—within transformative social movements.

The actions of chapter two take place in the physical movements of return to homeland. What they do is establish a different trajectory for understanding the shape of social movements in Java, as do all of the subsequent chapters. It is this chapter where I participate most in the creation of texts that constitute the source materials of my analysis. My participation in the stories and memories of return to Lawen cannot be extricated from the ways in which they were shared with me. It is for this reason that the *mudik* movements of return to homeland enacted by millions of Indonesians each year in some ways prefigure what I learned in Lawen. They are movements among family and within traditions that continue to reinforce the memories of the first permutation of SALAM. The woman that I follow through oral histories that were told to me by the people of Lawen is, as I mentioned above, a model of transformative leadership. For members of SALAM, her personal biography is very important to the emergence of their community. Following the movements of one woman's return to homeland has the effect of rewriting the high-profile (and largely unsuccessful) narratives of social movement action at Kedung Ombo. As she too engaged with what was going on at Kedung Ombo, she choose to do things differently. It is in her movements that the slow steps of transformation are most apparent in my research. More importantly, the symbolic actions she initiated in Lawen had the effect of bringing a larger community of actors in to discover and enact their own sense of *penyadaran*, of awareness. Community members in Lawen still hold on to the memories of SALAM as a site of reflection through which they continue to inspire actions. Lawen is today a thriving rural community, not without its own difficulties, but with a revived sense self-determination. The transformation of communities in Lawen from a “minder” sense inferiority to empowered agents of change is palpable in the community today. This chapter says something about how *rakyat kecil* communities were emboldened to determine their own futures at a time of intense oppression. What it does is prioritize people's stories and memories as an important source for determining how scholars see social movements operating at the height of New Order authoritarianism.

In chapter three, my focus shifts to the contemporary community of SALAM in Nitiprayan. Here it is the symbolic actions of a revival of rituals surrounding the goddess of rice, Dewi Sri, that inform the ways in which transformative movements are seeded again in Nitiprayan. It is through these rituals as they are performed within the school today in which the physical return to Java enacted by Wahyaningsih is transformed into a symbolic return to forgotten traditions of agrarian Java. Members of SALAM speak about the loss of these traditions, not as an active forgetting, but one which was a byproduct of a long history of agrarian change in Java. As community members of SALAM perform the *pesta panen wiwit* festival and rituals, they are doing this to counteract the very real loss of seeds in agrarian Java. They isolate

the long-term effects of the Green Revolution as a source of the loss seeds and therefore of stories and traditions surrounding the goddess of rice. They use this formulation to transform Wahyaningsih's physical return to rural Java into a symbolic return of strengthened solidarity among rakyat kecil communities in Java. Through the traditions surrounding Dewi Sri, she becomes a source of inspiration for the children of SALAM. They learn through the pesta panen festival and wiwitan rituals, but what they learn is more than the festival and rituals themselves. These revivals of tradition are symbolic strategies which initiate greater awareness surrounding notions of prosperity in Java. It is returned to rakyat kecil communities. These rituals also have the effect of appealing to bureaucrats and officials who also share in the nostalgia of these traditions. Whether or not they understand that the pesta panen wiwit is more than just a ritual revival, that it is in fact a tool for critical reflection is a side effect of the strategic efficacy of symbolic action within transformative movements at SALAM.

In chapter four, the village context becomes another site of symbolic action in the formation of KBQT. There are two symbolic actions important to understanding how KBQT and SPPQT have been so successful in Kalibening. The first is an appeal to "village" sensibilities, the second is to Muslim identity, both of which are part of the Qaryah Thayyibah brand. Kalibening is not actually a desa (village) since it was administratively incorporated into the city of Salatiga as a kelurahan. The notion of "village empowerment" is used in a similar symbolic capacity to the revival of traditions surrounding Dewi Sri at SALAM, but with a distinctively Muslim framing. Members of KBQT and SPPQT use Qaryah Thayyibah as a symbolic strategy to ensure that their movements are recognizable to the surrounding Muslim community. This is predicated on the fact that there are many latent tensions between Muslims and farmers in this region largely because of the violence of 1965. By giving KBQT and SPPQT distinctively Muslim sounding names, they are immediately recognizable as part of the identity of the people of this place. Farmers and Muslims coexist in the name without directly addressing historical antagonisms between these two communities. As a basis of symbolic action, the movements of Bahrudin are also more efficacious. For Bahrudin, it is his dual identity as "sebetulnya kyai" and as activist that his symbolic actions speak. He is "actually a kyai" but not exactly because he does not own and operate a pesantren. He is "actually an activist" but is still received by the more traditionalist members of his community as a Muslim leader. The symbolic actions of Bahrudin work to transform his dual constructed leadership role into something altogether new. He is like a leadership shapeshifter, seen as a leader in whatever capacity the viewer wants to see him. In his actions, he uses his perceived power to redirect focus to the community of students at KBQT, farmers at SPPQT, and the important role of women as leaders in both contexts.

In the final examples of symbolic action discussed in chapter five, it is within the literary works produced by members of KBQT in which a next generation of transformative movement actors speak. Students of KBQT are empowered through the act of writing. In the circulation of these works, they then empower readers to critically reflect on their own experiences. These works speak to perceived dichotomies of village tradition and of global modernity as they are experienced by their authors. The intertextual connects of these works construct a view of life in the village that is no longer limited by "what it once was perceived to be," but instead transformed into "what it could be." They open imaginative possibilities. Their authors create space within which new generations can also participate their own generative possibilities and imaginative futures through creative expression.

## *Expanding Rhizomes:*

SALAM and KBQT are only a starting point in understanding the transformative potential of symbolic actions in Indonesia today. The communities themselves contribute to expanding the emancipatory potential of symbolic actions beyond the schools themselves as they collaborate with one another and serve as a model for the growth of new educational communities throughout Central Java. During my fieldwork, members of SALAM and KBQT were regularly invited to share their methodologies with other schools working to develop independent learning models. Wahyaningsih and Rahardjo were invited to speak at two elementary schools—Lebah Putih in Salatiga and Dian Asih Montessori in Semarang—in which they discussed at length the detrimental effects of globalization on national education in Indonesia, and the ways in which educators can facilitate more creative and playful learning for their students. Maia Rosyida and Fina Af'idatussofa, among other members of KBQT, were invited to speak at a book fair in Temanggung in which they discussed how the writing process and self-publication of works of ChickLit are part of their education in Kalibening. There they met with members of *Sekolah Insan Cendikia Mandiri* (Sekolah ICM, The School of Independent Scholars) a pesantren boarding school located in Sidoarjo, East Java, who had come to this event specifically to discuss with members of KBQT how to develop their education to reflect more critical engagements and artistic productions.<sup>326</sup>

Drawing inspiration from the authors of KBQT, members of SALAM have also self-published a number of collections of student writings and art. One of which is entitled *Taman Anak Bercerita* (*The Garden of Children's Storytelling*, 2019), a collection of short stories and drawings by kindergarten students from SALAM. Since the children themselves cannot yet write, their stories were dictated and written down by facilitators to produce the book. Each story is then accompanied by an illustration from the author. Titles such as “Lautku Banyak Ikan” (“My Lake has Many Fish”), “Rumah Pelangi di Atas Bukit” (“A Rainbow House at the Top of a Hill”), and “Suatu Hari Nanti” (“One Day in the Future”), reflect the imaginative and playful nature of the collection as well as the sense of hope and unrestrained potential of these young students.

Performances by musical groups from KBQT also reflect an important element of broadening the reach of their emancipatory education in Kalibening. One example comes from an annual festival of children's arts called *Tlatah Bocah: Festival Lima Gunung* (Talkative Child: Five Mountains Festival, a combination of Javanese and Indonesian in the title).<sup>327</sup> Members of the KBQT band, *QT Perkusi* (QT Percussion) are invited every year to perform at this multi-day arts and cultural festival designed specifically to feature performance art works, both traditional and contemporary, by children around Java. It takes place in different locations around the rural mountainous regions of Central Java. The students of KBQT are regularly invited to attend. They are received like young celebrities. Their popularity has largely to do with the distinctive blend of traditional and contemporary musical forms which draw. Javanese

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<sup>326</sup> Today Sekolah ICM employs a learning model which is designed to “develop students' potential” (“membangun kapasitas siswa”) a turn of phrase which closely resembles the activist discourse of capacity building in Kalibening in both the school and the farmers' association. Sekolah Insan Cendikia Mandiri. *Visi dan Misi Sekolah ICM*. 16 Sept. 2019, [http://sekolahicm.sch.id/halaman/visi\\_misi](http://sekolahicm.sch.id/halaman/visi_misi).

<sup>327</sup> Part of the Komunitas Lima Gunung (Five Mountains Community) founded by Sutanto Mendut in 2002. The name refers to the five mountains surrounding Magelang, Central Java: Sumbing, Merbabu, Andong, Merapi and Menoreh.

children's songs, Islamic melodies, and elaborate costumes featuring rock star-like attire are combined with traditional Javanese batik.

In this research I explore how the small-scale actions of a multiplicity of actors work to shape new possibilities for understanding social movements in Indonesia. The works produced by members of SALAM and KBQT operate in modes of symbolic action which shift the discourse of cultural resistance to revived modes of cultural resilience. Students and intergenerational community members of SALAM and KBQT constitute a new community of cultural actors working through symbolic action to transform the world around them. Their stories, performances, and literatures create a sense of affect in which next generations are also emboldened to join in creating a multiplicity of imaginative futures. I end this project by including the lyrics to a song produced by member of KBQT as a gesture towards allowing their voices to resonate in relation to my readings and interpretations of their movements of transformative symbolic action.

***“Belajar Sepanjang Hayat”***

*Biar kami di lereng gunung  
Biar kami di ujung dusun  
Semangat kami tak pernah pudar  
Untuk berkreasi dan belajar*

*Biar kami di pulau seberang  
Biar kami di kaki hutan  
Semangat kami tak pernah padam  
Belajar menggapai masa depan*

*Syalala lala... lala... lala...  
Belajar bisa dimana-mana  
Syalala lala... lala... lala...  
Belajar wajib bagi semua  
Syalala lala... lala... lala...  
Tak terbatas jenis dan usia*

*Dunia sekolah kami  
Semesta laborat kami  
Kehidupan Pustaka kami  
Siapapun itu guru kami*

*Beri kami cukup kesempatan  
Motivasi dan kepercayaan  
Agar kami bisa berekspreasi  
Tuk mandiri punya jati diri*

*Belajar bisa dimana-mana  
Tak terbatas ruang dan masa  
Belajar wajib bagi semua (KBQT)<sup>328</sup>*

***“Lifelong Learning”***

Even when on the mountainside  
Even when on the edge of a village  
Our spirit never fades  
In creating and learning

Even when we go abroad  
Even when on the edge of a forest  
Our spirit is never extinguished  
Learning to reach the future

Syalala lala... lala... lala...  
Learning can happen anywhere  
Syalala lala... lala... lala...  
Learning is necessary for all  
Syalala lala... lala... lala...  
It is not limited by gender or age

The world is our school  
The universe our laboratory  
Life is our library  
Anyone can be our teacher

Give us a chance  
Motivation and belief  
So we can express  
Our independence and identity

Learning happens everywhere  
Not limited by space or time  
Learning is necessary for all

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<sup>328</sup> KBQT. *Belajar Sepanjang Hayat*. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k\\_ISCbizkbY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_ISCbizkbY). Accessed 11 Aug. 2021.

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## Appendix A | Terms and Acronyms

abangan	Javanese Muslims who practice more syncretic forms of Islam, typically of the rural peasantry
Akademi Kebudayaan Yogyakarta (AKY)	The Cultural Academy of Yogyakarta
aksi sepihak	unilateral action
aku	I (informal)
alternatif	alternative
Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia (ABRI)	Indonesian Armed Forces
ani-ani	a small hand knife used to cut the fertile panicles of rice, traditionally used by women
Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Daerah (BAPPEDA)	Regional Development Planning Agency
bangsa	citizens
Barisan Tani Indonesia (BTI)	Indonesian Farmer's Front
Barokah Nitiprayan	Prosperity of Nitiprayan (a local empowerment group in the neighborhood of Nitiprayan, Yogyakarta)
batik	wax resist died fabric in Java
batin	internal feelings
belajar bersama	to study together
berlaku	validity or to be valid, to be applicable (Javanese)
Bhineka Tunggal Ika	Unity In Diversity (Indonesian state motto)
blencong	a traditional coconut-oil lamp used in shadow play performances in Java
bodoh	stupid, dumb, ignorant
budaya bisu	culture of silence
budaya masyarakat	culture of Indonesian society
budaya rakyat	folk culture
bupati	designation for the head of district level government in Indonesia
buruh pabrik	factory laborer
buruh tani	farm laborer
caping	hats worn by farm workers in Indonesia



cara analisis normatif	normative modes of analysis
cara analisis structural	structural modes of analysis
cultuurstelsel	the Dutch cultivation system in Java (1870)
daerah hitam	lit. black area, used to refer to impoverished communities living on the banks on the Kali Code River in Yogyakarta
dalang	puppet master in the shadow plays of Java
dalang	Javanese puppet-master
Dewi Sri / Mbok Sri	the goddess of rice in Java
dharma ksatria	duty of knights
dhukun	ritual specialist / Javanese shaman
dibodohkan	to be made stupid or ignorant
dikupas	to peel back (Indonesian)
dionceki	to peel back (Javanese)
disamar	disguised
Era Reformasi	Reformation Era
ex-tapol (ET)	former political prisoner
fasilitator	facilitator (a replacement for teacher among alternative educational communities)
Five Mountains Festival	A collective of organizations which organize the Tlatah Bocah Children's arts festival
Forum Gentong	lit. Container Jug Forum, a monthly discussion hosted by Rumah Maiyah
Forum Theater	also known as Theater of the Oppressed
gamelan	traditional music of Java (and Bali)
guru	teacher
guru honor	honorary teacher
IGGI	Inter-Governmental Group on Indonesia
ilmu	knowledge
"Ilmu Iku"	lit. That Knowledge, an excerpt from Harti's singing of Serat Wedhatama
IMF	International Monetary Fund
Indonesia Merdeka	Free Indonesia
INSIST	Indonesian Society for Social Transformation
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
IRRI	International Rice Research Institute

IVAA	Indonesian Visual Art Archive, located in Yogyakarta
jaman gerak	age in motion
Jemaah Produksi	lit. Production Group, a local economic initiative in Kalibening for collectively facilitating small business growth in the community
Jemaah Produksi	lit. Production Group, a grassroots economic initiative in Kalibening which collectively facilitate small business growth
kabupaten	designation for district level government in Indonesia
Kali Code	Code River which runs through the city of Yogyakarta
kami	our, we (inclusive)
kamu	you (informal)
kanthi laku	in practice, in a complete way, valid, effective, complete (Javanese)
kaum tertindas	oppressed peoples, or "the oppressed"
ke kiri-kanak-anakan	a wordplay on the childishness of naive Marxism in Indonesia
keaneka ragaman	diversity
kebaya	a traditional top worn by Javanese women for special events
kedaulatan atas pangan	food sovereignty
kejawen	Javanese mystical tradition
kelakone	to do or to complete a task (Javanese)
kelakuan	behavior (Javanese)
kelir	the screen in which shadow play performances in Java
Kelompok Wanita Tani	Women Farmer's Group (Part of Barokah Nitiprayan)
kelurahan	urban village
Kementerian Agama	Ministry of Religion
Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan	Ministry of Education and Culture
kepala desa	head of the village
khasana pewayangan	world of wayang (shadow plays)
Kyai Kanjeng	performance arts group led by Emha Ainun Nadjib which enable Javanese, Islamic and Western musical styles
kita	our, we (exclusive)
Komunitas Belajar Qaryah Thayyibah (KBQT)	Learning Community for Village Empowerment
Komunitas Kecil Pak Kanjeng	Small Community of Pak Kanjeng (performance group that later become Kyai Kanjeng)

Komunitas Maiyah	Community of Togetherness, following of Kyai Kanjeng
Kromo	high Javanese language
Kurawa	considered the "evil" kingdom in the Mahabharata tradition in Java
kyai	title for Muslim religious leaders and gamelan ensembles in Java
lakon	a play, story, act in the Javanese wayang shadow play tradition
laku	lit. step, in my reading of transformative social movements in Java my work situates laku as a Javanese vernacular form of praxis
laku-laku	in the manner of (Indonesian)
lebaran	holiday which commemorates the end of Ramadhan
Lembaga Bantuan Hukum (LBH)	Legal Aid Institute
Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (LEKRA)	Institute of People's Culture
Lembaga PERCIK Salatiga	The Institute for Social Research, Democracy and Social Justice
Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat (LSM)	Self-Reliant Community Institutions (The Indonesian term for Non-Governmental Organization, NGO)
lesung padi	an instrument used to pound rice and separate the grains from the chaff, used also as a rhythmic musical instrument
lurah	head of village administration at the district level
lurik	a stripped pattern of woven cotton fabric that is traditionally worn by peasants and farmers
macapat	poetic meter of traditional Javanese song-poems (see tembang)
makam	grave
malaikat penyelamat	angel of salvation
malas	lazy, an aversion to something required
Manifes Kebudayaan	the Cultural Manifesto
Mankunegara IV	ruler of the Surakarta sultanate from 1853-1881
masyarakat	lit. society
melakukan	to do or complete a task (Indonesian)
mengajar	to teach
mlaku-mlaku	walking around (Javanese)
Mocopat Syafaat	monthly performance of Kyai Kanjeng in Yogyakarta

mudik	movement of people returning home for the Lebaran holiday following the fasting month of Ramadhan
murid	student
Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)	traditionalist Islamic organization in Indonesia
nasi tumpeng	a large cone of cooked rice meant to symbolize a mountain, and which is used in all kinds of celebrations in Java
ngelmu	the search for knowledge (Javanese)
Ngoko	low Javanese language
orang desa	village people (Indonesian)
Orde Baru	New Order
Orde Reformasi	Reformation Order
pahlawan kesiangan	a hero too late
Pakubuwono II	last ruler of the Kartasura court, and first ruler of the Surakarta court in present day Solo, Central Java
Pancasila	Indonesian state ideology typified by the slogan Bhineka Tunggal Ika (Unity in Diversity)
Pandawa	considered the "good" kingdom in the Mahabharata tradition in Java
Partai Kerakyatan Indonesia (PKI)	Indonesian Communist Party
Patung Kuda Arjuna Wijaya	Horse Statue of the Victorious Arjuna, located in Jakarta
pedagogi kritis	critical pedagogy, also known as popular education
pembodohan	stupidification
pembredelan	banning of news agencies that published criticism of the New Order
pendidikan penyadaran	lit. awareness education (i.e. education designed to raise critical awareness)
pendidikan penyadaran	awareness education, an Indonesian translation of the Freirean concept of conscientization
pendidikan populer	popular education, also known as critical pedagogy
pengajian	Qur'anic recitation and interpretation
penyadaran	awareness education, an Indonesian translation of the Freirean concept of conscientization
pesantren	Islamic boarding school
pesta panen wiwit	rice harvest festival in Java
PETA	Philippine Educational Theater Association
plesetan	lit. slippage, Javanese linguistic word play or pun

priyayi	Javanese aristocracy
Punaakawan	clown gods in the Javanese Ramayana tradition (Semar, Gareng, Bagong, Petruk)
Qaryah Thayyibah (QT)	Empowered Village (derived from Arabic)
QT-Perkusi	QT-Percussion, a performance arts group from Kalibening
rakyat kecil	the people, as in the mass base of working-class people
ramadhan	Islamic month of fasting celebrated
ratu adil	just king
Revousi Hijau	Green Revolution
rohaniawan	man of god
Rumah Maiyah	headquarters of Kyai Kanjeng, library and collective meeting space
sabit	sickle, large knife used to cut the fertile rice stalks, traditionally used by men
sabit padi	sickle
salak	snake fruit
samaran	linguistic disguise
sanggar	studio or workshop, traditional educational space within Javanese villages
Sanggar Anak Akar (SEKAR)	The Rooted Children's School, a sister school to SALAM located in Panggunghardjo, Yogyakarta
Sanggar Anak Alam (SALAM)	Nature Childrens' Studio
Sarasehan Budaya	Cultural Seminar
sawah	wet-rice agriculture
sekolah	school
Sekolah Alam	Nature Schools developed by Lendo Novo, the first school was established in 1998 in Cianjur, South Jakarta
sekolah alternatif	alternative schools
sekolah dasar (SD)	elementary school
sekolah menengah atas (SMA)	high school
sekolah menengah pertama (SMP)	middle school
sekolah nonformal	non-formal schools
Semar	the father of the clown-gods (See Punakawan)

Serat Wedhatama	lit. The Highest Wisdom, a late 19th Century epic song poem attributed to Mangkunegara IV
simbok	a working-class mother in Java
sindhèn	traditional Javanese singer
sinyo	young unmarried boy of European or mixed European and Native Indonesian descent
Serikat Paguyuban Petani Qaryah Thayyibah (SPPQT)	The Association of Farmers' Unions for Village Empowerment
SuperSemar, Surat Perintah Sebelas Maret	The Order of Eleven March which allegedly transferred power from Sukarno to Suharto
Surakarta	present day Solo, Central Java
Surat Perintah Sebelas Maret (SuperSemar)	Order of Eleven March, mythic document which transferred power from Sukarno to Suharto
swiden	slash and burn or subsistence agriculture
Taring Padi	lit. Fangs of Rice, a visual art collective in Yogyakarta which use woodcut style printing methods
tembang	patterned melodies of traditional Javanese song-poems (see macapat)
Tenaga Kerja Indonesia (TKI)	Indonesian Migrant Worker
Tentara Nasional Indonesia	Indonesian National Army
terasi	fermented shrimp paste
tergerus	eroded
Tlatah Bocah	an annual children's art festival in Central Java
tradisi	tradition
transformatif	transformative
tumpah darah	to spill blood
UKSW	Satya Wacana Christian University
Undang-Undang Pokok Agraria (UUPA)	Basic Agrarian Law, 1960
VOC	Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie)
wayang kulit	Javanese shadow puppets made from leather
wiwitan	rituals surrounding the pesta panen harvest festival in Java
wong cilik	lit. little people, or folk (Javanese)
Yayasan Bakti Pertiwi	a Muslim women's organization who in 1995 developed educational awareness programs for factory laborers

## Appendix B | Methods Supporting Materials

In the field, I divided my time primarily between Yogyakarta and Salatiga. In Yogyakarta I spent my time at Sanggar Anak Alam. I participated in classroom activities, spoke with parents and facilitators, I joined events such as community book discussions, monthly community markets, and the *pesta panen* rice harvest festival that is the subject of chapter three. I also participated in annual curriculum design meetings where facilitators and parents outline broad learning goals for the next year. In some of these meetings I shared my current research at SALAM and joined in discussions regarding their critical analysis of the ideologies that underscore the pedagogies implemented at SALAM.<sup>329</sup> I also frequently met with the founders of SALAM, Sri Wahyaningsih and Toto Rahardjo. With Wahyaningsih we spoke at length regarding her memories of organizing the first permutation of SALAM in Lawen in the eighties and nineties, as well as details of the everyday functioning of SALAM today. With Rahardjo, we spoke about considerations of critical theory and politics, and art. Over the Lebaran holiday in 2015, as mentioned above, I traveled with Wahyaningsih and Rahardjo to Lawen, Banjarnegara. This is where Rahardjo was born and raised, and where Wahyaningsih began the first permutation of SALAM.

Toto Rahardjo is also a founding member of the performance arts group *Kyai Kanjeng* (previously *Komunitas Kecil Pak Kanjeng*, The Small Community of Mr. Kanjeng discussed in chapter one). I also accompanied him to participate in events and meet individuals that are part of a larger network of activist-artists in Yogyakarta. Kyai Kanjeng has their headquarters in Yogyakarta, with a library and community meeting space called *Rumah Maiyah* (the Home of Togetherness) located very close to SALAM. There I attended the first of a series of community discussions called *Forum Gentong* (the Container Jug Forum) in which Simon HT discussed his involvement with theater movements and activism in the seventies through the nineties. I also met with the poet, Imam Budhi Santosa, youth organizers from some of the *Rumah Maiyah* youth organizers, and the librarian of their collection of more ephemeral materials, books produced by Emha Ainun Nadjib, and a large collection of newspaper clippings from the poetry and performance arts actions of Kyai Kanjeng, Emha Ainun Nadjib, and a wide network of artist-activists in Yogyakarta from the seventies through the nineties. Every month Emha Ainun Nadjib and Kyai Kanjeng travel a regular performance circuit of eight cities, and other performance sites which change based on who invite them to perform for special regional events. I accompanied Kyai Kanjeng on their performance circuit for about 2 weeks during my field work, and so attended their regular performances in Yogyakarta and Semarang as well as a performance in Temanggung in which they were invited by the *bupati* Irawan Prasetyadi (the head of the regional *kabupaten* district level of government) as well as a performance in the capital of Central Java, Semarang, in which they were invited by the Governor of Central Java, Ganjar Pranowo, to commemorate the anniversary of the city. At one of their regular performances in Yogyakarta, which they call *Mocopat Syafaat*, I was invited to speak with the Kyai Kanjeng group as part of a performance event about their history, formation, and the ways

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<sup>329</sup> The curriculum at SALAM is designed in terms of a specific set of methodologies to facilitate the students' learning process. It is not a fixed document. It includes a great deal of space for students to develop their own research projects that would often be part of a broad theme shared by the entire school. These themes and methodologies would be discussed among parents and facilitators through collective discussions and consensus decision making.

in which they use music to reshape popular cultural discourse surrounding *pengajian* (Qur'anic recitation and interpretation).<sup>330</sup>

In Yogyakarta, I visited the headquarters and library of the Indonesian Society for Social Transformation (INSIST), founded by Mansour Fakhri and Roem Topatimassang in 1998. I spoke with Roem Topatimassang about his work in the eighties as a scholar-activist and his translation of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* into Indonesian. I spent time in the library of the associated INSISTpress, which Toto Rahardjo is also a founding member. I spoke with Puthut EA, formerly an organizer with the cultural branch of INSIST called the Akademi Kebudayaan Yogyakarta (AKY, 2002). We met at Mojok Café, a small café he runs in association with the popular Javanese language blog *mojok.com*, where we discussed the ways in which INSIST worked to incorporate greater attention to literature and the arts in their transformative methods in the late nineties. I met with a diverse network of a new generation of artists, activists, and collectives working in Yogyakarta. I spoke with Antariksa from the KUNCI Study Forum & Collective, visited the artist collectives of Taring Padi and Survive Garage, and explored the collection of material housed at the Indonesian Visual Art Archive (IVAA).

In Salatiga, I spent the majority of my time at KBQT in Kalibening. Members of KBQT are mostly all of high-school or middle-school age, older than the elementary age students of SALAM, so I participated more directly in their everyday learning activities, such as the film discussed at the start of this writing.<sup>331</sup> In Kalibening I attended weekly meetings in which all of the members of KBQT plan their learning goals for the week and reflect on their progress from the previous week. I met with KBQT members, facilitators (which includes some of the older “graduated” students of KBQT some of whom now attend nearby universities), as well as some of the parents of members of KBQT, though they also are less involved in the everyday functioning of KBQT in comparison to SALAM. As a visitor to Kalibening, I was also invited to participate in student activities and asked to do some teaching of English language. With members of KBQT, who at the time had been working on a number of film projects, we produced a short English-language film to feature their learning style and current activities. The video was designed to be shared with other visitors to the community, international and local, as a kind of orientation material to show the creative projects and methods of learning at KBQT. I also met regularly with Ahmad Bahruddin and Rasih Mustaghis Hilmiy, the father-son founders of KBQT. With Bahruddin we discussed the ways in which he became involved in the transformative movement, his prior organizing work with *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU, one of two major Islamic organizations in Indonesia), as well as his foundation of Serikat Paguyuban Petani Qaryah Thayyibah (SPPQT – The Association of Farmers’ Unions for Village Empowerment) in 1999, which still have their regional headquarters in Kalibening. With Hilmiy, we discussed his role as a young leader in the formation of KBQT, as well as community expectations surrounding his future leadership role in Kalibening. In Kalibening I also attended regular meetings at the central headquarters of SPPQT. I met with then SPPQT President Ruth Murtiasih Subodro, the central staff of SPPQT, as well as a number of regionally elected heads of the over 55 associated farmers’ unions in Central Java. I also attended a massive planning meeting which took place over 4 days in Kalibening and brought together over 200 farmers and organizers from

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<sup>330</sup> I call this my “performance interview” since I conducted my interview of Kyai Kanjeng on the stage in front of a very large crowd. Another example of the participatory process of a larger network of transformative social movement activists.

<sup>331</sup> Facilitators from the surrounding community are often still present in their activities, but there is more autonomy as students take a stronger leadership role in designing and implementing their learning objectives.



SPPQT to envision and design the implementation of the next five-year plan for the organization. Hilmiy served as a key youth member in these meetings.

Stemming from my work with members of KBQT in Kalibening, I attended a number of performance events around Central Java with the KBQT performance arts group QT-Perkusi, including the Tlatah Bocah annual children's festival, Festival Lima Gunung (Five Mountains Festival), smaller community events in which QT-Perkusi were invited to perform, and the Temanggung Book Festival in which authors from KBQT were invited to speak about their published writings. I also sang in some of these performances with the QT band. Around Salatiga, I visited Lembaga PERCIK Salatiga (The Institute for Social Research, Democracy and Social Justice), founded in 1996. They have a small library and research center focused especially on considerations of religious pluralism in Indonesia. With Bahruddin I visited a number of pesantren in the region, Pondok Pesantren Hidayatul Mubtadi-ien in Kalibening which his brother is the current kyai, and perhaps most notably Pesantren Edi Mancoro, a pesantren which Bahruddin organized a number of community discussions surrounding the role of pesantren in facilitating transformative change in the nineties. I was also lucky to attend a community discussion event at Pesantren Edi Mancoro of Bahruddin in conversation with the late activist-scholar Arief Budiman from Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana (Satya Wacana Christian University - UKSW) in Salatiga. I also accompanied Bahruddin at a number of meetings of the Jemaah Produksi in Kalibening (lit. Production Group), a local economic initiative in Kalibening for collectively facilitating small business growth in the community, as well as meetings with the *Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Daerah* (BAPPEDA, Regional Development Planning Agency) in which the programs of the Jemaah Produksi were being considered by the regional government planning office to potentially incorporate into their programs.

## Appendix C | SALAM Supporting Materials

### *“Ilmu Iku” Narrative, Lawen, Banjarnegara, July 18, 2015*

Harti and I, along with her husband, Rahopia, and Wahya, spoke together for many hours at Harti’s family home in Lawen today. The community is preparing for the halal-bi-halal celebration tomorrow which will take place at Toto’s family home, where I am also staying. Everyone is busy cleaning and preparing food in the traditional Javanese fire-hearth kitchen, which I’m told was a site where their family also prepared food for Indonesian revolutionaries who traveled across the landscape of Java in the struggle for independence from the Dutch from 1945-1947. We sat on a set of couches built as one of the early economic initiatives to sustain SALAM educational activities in Lawen in the early nineties. Harti and Rahopia discussed the meaning of each line together in a collaborative way. Code switching between Indonesian, Javanese, Harti and Rahopia explained and explored meanings of the Javanese lyrics for me. Finishing one another’s sentences and elaborating on one another’s ideas and translations of the Javanese into Indonesian, the flexible and adaptive quality of their interpretations of the lyrics were most notable to me. I asked Harti if she would be willing to teach me to sing “Ilmu Iku.” She and Rahopia giggled as they seemed equally surprised and excited that I ask, and very quickly the dynamics of our interaction shifted from “researcher-informant” to that of “student-teacher.” An eagerness to learn inspired an eagerness to teach, and a moment of praxis emerged in our interaction. I listened as the steps of laku which began the song-poem were traced out for me. Gradual and processual, the search for knowledge unfolded in our interactions, a notion close to the Javanese mystical idea of knowing through practice was repeated in each musical phrase and poetic stanza. Harti would sing a line, and then I would repeat it. When my voice couldn’t capture the exact note or pronunciation of the old Javanese lyrics, Harti would sing along and guide me through the music. The slow steps of recitation and repetition involved in learning this traditional song-poem, echoed meanings carried within the text. After each line, Harti and Rahopia would yet again relate meaning to me, correcting one another and adding meaning as they translated the Javanese into standard Indonesian with a few words of English sprinkled in for my benefit. Harti and Rahopia don’t speak much English, but I could see they wanted to ensure that the tembang became more familiar and, well, meaningful for me. The ways they related the meaning of the song-poem to me captures something of the distinctively generative aspects of knowledge production in educational praxis. When Harti sang each phrase, line by line, and then had me repeat the melody and words again back to her, she would occasionally sing along to help me find the notes or the lyrics I’d just heard. Our voices joined in the sounds of a community gamelan and sindhen practicing in the background for a performance that would take place later that evening on the front porch of Toto’s family home. The atmosphere of Lawen on this day was filled with the resonance of traditions made new in the interactions of a community which see themselves as an extended family of empowered individuals.

### *Pesta Panen Wiwit Narrative, Nitiprayan, Yogyakarta, March 17-18, 2015*

*March 17, 2015*

On the first day of activities, a group of around fifteen women farmers gathered in the SALAM kindergarten classroom in the morning for a workshop on rice production. The seminar

was organized by the women themselves who are part of *Kelompok Wanita Tani* (Group of Women Farmers) from *Barokah Nitiprayan* (lit. Prosperity of Nitiprayan, a local empowerment organization of farmers in the Nitiprayan neighborhood). They gathered to discuss local rice cultivation, including techniques in growth, production, and sales, and discussed techniques for increasing crop yield among small-scale producers as well as methods for improving their sales within local and regional markets. As the women farmers concluded their workshop, a group of five officials from the regional government office of the *kecamatan* and local agricultural agency arrived to conduct a brief survey of the rice field that would later be harvested in the *wiwitan* ritual the following day. They laid out a one-meter square aluminum frame to count the growing rice plants and assess projected rice yields. In the afternoon, a larger group of parents and community members gathered in the kindergarten classroom for a *Sarasehan Budaya* (Cultural Seminar) entitled “*Filosofi dan Relevansi Tradisi Wiwit*,” “The Philosophy and Relevance of the *Wiwit* Tradition.” Local religious and cultural leaders spoke about the greater significance of the *wiwitan* agrarian ritual by reflecting on global agrarian shifts and their impacts on local agrarian traditions. Haryonto, a member of Komunitas Kyai Kanjeng, spoke at length on the relationship between religious and cultural practices in Java. He discussed how the tendency for people to assert sharp divisions between Islamic and indigenous cultural practices in Java today is a relatively contemporary phenomenon, that in the past, there used to be greater syncretism between Islamic and agrarian rituals. The second speaker, a Javanese *dhalang* in Yogyakarta, Parjoyo, spoke about the symbolic aspects of the *wiwitan* ritual from a Javanese cultural perspective embedded in artistic traditions. He identified the various items used in the *wiwitan* ritual and their significance within Javanese philosophy. Both speakers elaborated on the ways in which Javanese identity and cultural traditions are entwined with global agrarian shifts. The sense that Javanese traditions have been eroded (*tergerus*) by modernization, most notably the impacts of the Green Revolution in Java, was a theme repeated throughout their reflections on the cultural, philosophical and religious relevance of the rice harvest festival.

*March 18, 2015*

On the second day, members of SALAM arrived early in the morning to prepare the ritual festivities and subsequent community bazaar. Banana leaf plates were woven and arranged with locally grown snacks of boiled sweet potatoes, peanuts, and a variety of fruits. Long fronds of elaborately woven palm leaves decorated the borders of the irrigation channel. The master of ceremonies, Margareta Widhi Pratiwi, opened the event from a small stage set up in the central courtyard of the school. Behind her a large background to the stage was created for the event, constructed out of straw and pieces of stripped *lurik* fabric traditionally worn by Javanese farmers, the sign read, “Ibu Pertiwi” or “Mother Earth.” Sri Wahyaningsih then gave a short speech to invite the community to the festival and a bureaucratic official from the local *kecamatan* administrative office was invited to say a few words. After the official opening of the event, students and community members walked along the narrow irrigation channel toward Wahyaningsih and Rahardjo’s family home to witness the *wiwitan* rice-cutting ritual. Students, facilitators, parents, neighbors, agricultural officials, guests, local reporters, and other researchers were all in attendance. A one-meter area of the rice field was cleared for the performance of the *wiwitan* ritual. Three mothers of students at SALAM wore elaborate costumes to carry the *nasi tumpeng*, a nearly one-meter-tall mountain of yellow turmeric rice decorated with freshly prepared traditional foods, fruits and vegetables that is presented as an offering to Dewi Sri. The crowd gathered around a small patch of the rice field as one of the SALAM facilitators

introduced a local elder to officiate the ceremony. He spoke briefly about the meaning and significance of certain elements within the ritual. As he began the ritual, a ring of eager onlookers surrounded the small plot of land, a large gathering of people documented each step of the ritual with video cameras and photography. The elder's wife stood off to the side of the activities, quietly assisting her husband by bringing up important elements of the ritual quietly to his side. They oversee the ceremony each year at the *pesta panen* and their presence among the hundred or so children at SALAM attested to the importance of an intergenerational space for the sharing of local knowledge that is a core ideal at SALAM.

After completing the *wiwitan* ritual, students and community members are first served traditional foods now blessed by the goddess Dewi Sri, followed by a day of performances and a local pop-up market which overtake the central courtyard of SALAM. The stage is set up at one end of the courtyard, decorated dried rice fronds tied into lettering with the words "Ibu Bumi"/"Mother Earth." An offering of bananas, coconuts and fresh fruits ornament the side of the stage. The performances of traditional arts, dance, music, poetry, and theater took place throughout the day. The central courtyard is filled with chairs and encircled by a ring of booths as parents and other community members sell their local handicrafts, agricultural products and student art works. Economic circulation of capital that is not the capitalist state offers a measure of official buy-in. As they combine elements of a traditional market, or *pasar*, with the commemoration of Dewi Sri, members of SALAM incorporate local economic initiatives into the educational project that is reminiscent of Wahya's prior work with the community in Lawen and on the banks of the Code River in Yogyakarta which began with these kinds of family based, local entrepreneurial activities.

Traditional and modern performance arts are presented throughout the day, including dance, music, poetry, music and theater. Members of the *Kelompok Wanita Tani* performed a traditional *lesung padi* musical piece. The *lesung padi* is a long piece of teak wood carved out into a kind of canoe shape. It serves as kind of mortar in which 4-5 women stand around and together pound the rice with long wooden pestles to remove the chaff or husk of the rice. The pounding of the rice creates an interlocking rhythmic pattern that has been developed into its own musical style. This kind of technology is rarely used in agrarian practices today, replaced instead by industrial machines that separate off the husk of the rice for larger scale processing. The musical quality of the rhythmic pounding of the *lesung* is a symbolic gesture to their revival traditional agrarian technologies to raise awareness about these forgotten traditions. As a form of intergenerational knowledge sharing, a group of small children gathered around the older women performing on the *lesung* to eagerly watch the performance. Later in the day, a small group of young children returned to the *lesung* to play around with it, pantomiming the movements and rhythms of the women.

Another performance by a group of young girls around the age of 8 or 9 years old also show the ways in which the celebration of Dewi Sri reinforces intergenerational learning. The girls dressed in batik sarong with their hair tied back in buns. They each wore a traditional basket worn by tying a sarong around the chest to allow the basket to rest on the back, and each carried a small baby doll in a batik *slendang* cloth around their bodies. The girls dance consisted of a pantomime of picking the freshly harvested rice and placing it in their baskets while carrying their baby dolls. A group of mothers from students at SALAM who assisted in the *wiwitan* ritual performed another traditional dance. Multiple generations of women embodying Dewi Sri through dance, embedded within both long standing and ever-changing traditions of agrarian Java.

*Figures*

**Figure 1:** Photograph of SALAM as seen from the main road.



**Figure 2:** SALAM Students and community members walk along the narrow irrigation channel to gather for the upcoming wiwitan ritual.



**Figure 3:** Offerings of food for Dewi Sri are presented in rattan baskets lined with banana leaves. In the basket on the left: bananas, *salak* snake fruit, rambutan, cucumbers and mangos. In the foreground: sweet rice cakes. In the center, a roasted chicken. The basket on the right: steamed bananas, peanuts, taro root and sweet potatoes. The tall basket in the back is full of cooked rice for the community meal that follows the ritual ceremony. It is topped with the *nasi tumpeng* cone of cooked rice which represent a mountain, a block of *terasi* fermented fish paste and a chili pepper (not pictured here). In the foreground is a *sabit* sickle, a traditional instrument for cutting the rice stalks. The delicate panicles are typically cut with a smaller hand knife called an *ani-ani* (not pictured here, see Figure 5).



**Figure 4:** The wiwitan ceremony takes place, surrounded by a crowd of journalists taking photographs. A village member wearing a peasant-like mask stands facing them as the master of ceremonies begins the ritual by lighting a bundle of grass.



**Figure 5:** The first panicles of rice are cut using the *ani-ani* hand knife.



**Figure 6:** Pictured center, the panicles of rice are fashioned into a totemic doll wrapped in banana leaves and decorated with flowers to represent Dewi Sri, surrounded by flower petals and other offerings for her symbolic death and rebirth.



**Figure 7:** Dewi Sri is reborn in the totem and given a ritual bath with water poured from a *kendi* spouted clay water pot.





**Figure 8:** Local bureaucrats pose for a photograph after proudly cutting the base of the rice stalks with the sickles they are holding alongside the freshly cut rice.



**Figure 9:** *Lesung padi* performance by a group of local women, They wear batik skirts and *lurik kebaya* tops. The striped *lurik* pattern is typically worn by peasants and farmers. *Kebaya* is a traditional top worn by Javanese women for special occasions.



**Figure 10:** A group of SALAM students perform as little mothers to pantomime gathering the freshly cut rice with babies in tow.



**Figure 11:** Close-up image of Dewi Sri in a mural painted by Nano Warsono and Christopher Statton in 2015.



<sup>332</sup> Photograph courtesy of Christopher Statton.

**Figure 12:** Full mural of Dewi Sri painted by Nano Warsono and Christopher Statton in 2015. It stands in the middle of a rice paddy field in Panggunghardjo, a neighboring district adjacent to Nitiprayan, Yogyakarta. The text reads, “Air sumber kehidupan, bukan untuk kerakusan!” (“Water is the source of life, not greed!”).



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<sup>333</sup> Photograph courtesy of Christopher Statton.

## Appendix D | KBQT Supporting Materials

### *List of Works by Members of KBQT*

- Af'idatussofa, Fina. *Gus Yahya Bukan Cinta Biasa*. Matapena, 2007.
- . *Inikah Cinta*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2007.
- . *Just For You Ustadz*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2007.
- . *Kafe Bidadari*. Dwitama Asrimedia, 2013.
- . *Lebih Asyik Tanpa UAN*. LKIS, 2007.
- . *Pemuja Rahasia*. Matapena, 2007.
- . *Pinangan Buat Naura*. Matapena, 2007.
- . *Sebatas Angan Rindu*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2007.
- Bahrudin, Ahmad. *Pendidikan Alternatif Qaryah Thayyibah*. LKIS, 2007.
- Dzikri A.S., M. *Fantasy Star*. CV. Dream Litera Buana, 2017.
- Fikri. *Arti Sebuah Break Dance (e-Book)*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2007.
- Fitri, Aisyah, editor. *E-La2ng: Tangguh, Mandiri, Optimis (Buletin)*. Komunitas Belajar Alternatif Qaryah Thayyibah, 2013.
- Freedom Writers. *Let Go: Antologi Cerpen*. CV. Narata Karia, 2014.
- Fuadi, Rasih. *Dunia Dalam Semesta (e-Book)*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2007.
- Hasan, Ahmad M. Nizar Alfian. *Desaku Sekolahku*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2010.
- Hasnia, editor. *E-La2ng: Tangguh, Mandiri, Optimis (Buletin)*. Komunitas Belajar Alternatif Qaryah Thayyibah, Feb. 2017.
- Indriani, Novi. *Cinta Pertama*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2010.
- KBQT. *Tembang Dolanan (song)*.

Kinasih Gusti, Tsaqiva. *Bintang Di Langit Jakarta*. Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2017.

*Liputan Media (Metro TV, TV7, Dan Trans TV) Tentang Pendidikan Alternatif Qaryah Thayyibah*. no date.

*Lambung Ide 2: Kumpulan Ide Para Murid KBQT 26 July - 9 Augustus 2010*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2010.

*Lambung Ide 7: Kumpulan Ide Para Murid KBQT 25 Oktober 2010*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2010.

Mandanganu, M. Abdul Rohim. *Jeratan Kemiskinan*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2010.

---. *Sang Saka Di Halaman Rumah: Kumpulan Cerpen*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2010.

---. *Senandung Sunyi Di Kedung Sampur*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2010.

Nafa. *Sejarah Agama, Perang Dan Mesir (e-Book)*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2007.

Nurjannah, Ida, and Hanik Asih Izzati. *Moo-Moo*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2007.

Rosyida, Maia. *Bendera Setengah Tiang*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2007.

---. *Ekspresi*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2007.

---. *Gus Dur...Asyik Gitu Loh!* The Wahid Institute, 2007.

---. *Sabda Kelabu Seorang Santri*. no date.

---. *Sajak Cinta Jean Satria*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2008.

---. *Sekolahku Bukan Sekolah*. Matapena, 2009.

---. *Serambi Cinta*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2010.

---. *S.M.A.S.H. I Heart You*. Sheila, C.V. Andi Offset, 2014.

---. *Tarian Cinta*. Matapena, 2007.

Sa'diyah, Luluk Nur. *Luluk's Gallery*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2010.

Samba, Sujono. *Lebih Baik Tidak Sekolah*. LKIS, 2007.

Sulcha, Feni Amaliatus. *Cinta Aura*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2010.

Zahra, Theofany. *Taman Mimpi Di Gubuk Pelangi*. Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2017.

Zubaiti, Emi Masnila, et al. *Kado Untuk Remaja*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2007.

---. *San-Zie*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2010.

Zulfah, Aini. *True Love*. Pustaka Q Tha, 2007

### ***Film script, July 2012***

Title: Show Off!

#### Opening:

*Extreme shot of a percussion performance, then move on to lively guitar plucking. Continue on to shoot the picture of the moving dress. The children are practicing dance in the covered place with the accompaniment of slow music in a traditional rhythm. For a few seconds, get a shot moving around the top of the corner. The camera focuses again on the moving dress.*

*Cut to: A child writing on a board. It reads: Gelar Karya's meeting, NOW!*

*Tracking interior, the camera continues to move inside, following the children that are holding a meeting to prepare for the Gelar Karya tomorrow. They drawing up crazy ideas to make people laugh. The scene ends with a child playing guitar, starting with the intro song "Mars Qaryah Thayyibah." They begin to sing the long-lasting and enjoyable song, increasing the adrenalin of her/his friends to join the song. The song becomes energetic.*

*Tracking from above, pass by a ladder with the Credit Title raining down all along the ladder. The camera stops in front of a glass door. A man points toward a piece of paper inscribed with the name of his class.*

KID 1: "Hi, our class' name is Oriza Sativa"

*They can be heard making an agreement to put forward something different at the Gelar Karya presentation. But suddenly he avoids them because he has another activity.*

KID 2: "I can't (cannot) get involved in this Gelar Karya talent show. I must practice music because I have an approaching deadline. May I have permission?"

*Hearing this, some look stunned while others seem to be thinking.*

KID 3: "That's ok, but we cannot meet if we are not all together."

KID 4: “Aha, I have an idea! You can practice music and accompany us.”

*This makes the other children furrow their brows.*

KID 4: “We will make something musical!”

KID 5: “For example?” asked one of them.

KID 4: *snaps their finger at the friend who asked permission, then yells* “Stay behind the keyboard.”

*While the others are paying serious attention, that child sings the song “Sepanjang Hayat.” Followed by the keyboard playing and the classmates singing while standing around the instrumentalists.*

ALL TOGETHER: “Although we are on the slopes of a mountain. Although we are in the countryside. Our spirit never fades to study and to be creative. Although we are on a small island, although we are on the edge of a forest. Our spirit never dies. Learning to improve our future.”

*Cut (Blur)*

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The Next-Day:

*A few kids watch a lesson on Biogas, presented by Pak Din. There is an interactive discussion between the kids. They explain the advantages of biogas as a great contribution and solution to the problem of oil shortages.*

*Cut to: The music of tarian Bumi (lit. dance of the earth) busts forth. Successive images change between scenes, kids practicing tarian bumi and two talented kids painting a special object. Covered with paint, two kids enthusiastically finish their magnificent works of art. The music for tarian bumi continues and the camera moves through the children practicing.*

*The music of tarian bumi overflows. The picture alternates between two scenes, children practicing tarian bumi and two gifted children painting a special object. With paint soaking wet, these two children were so excited to complete their own magnificent work. The music of tarian bumi continues and the camera continues to explore their practice until the dance ends, it leaves a very deep impression.*

*Cut to: Int- ruang rapat Gelar Karya- Day*

KID 6: “Okay, we’ll make a deal?” asked one of the children, confirming the idea.

Suddenly a child, with hair like Slash GNR, stands up. While standing holding a guitar he yells in a harsh voice...

KID 3: “Yeah, it’s a deal! Rock must go on!”

KID 6: “Alright, put your hands on top of mine” said one child while putting out his/her hand. The others placed their palms on top of his/hers while forming a tall stack.

ALL TOGETHER: "SHOW OFF!"

Cut!

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*We present a scene for the epilogue, where a group of them who form a band are playing a song composed by one of their own friends – Rossy – entitled Never Can. Meanwhile, in front of the yard, several children took turns exposing themselves in front of the camera by taking medium shots.*

*SOFYAN: while bringing the result of his famous painting, with hands smeared with oil paint, he says, "I am Sofyan. Drawing is for me like shortening conversation. Because within one drawing there are a thousand words."*

*SAN: standing in front of the camera, shows her the drawing and just the "rock" sign without many words.*

*Continuing on from there, the artists show their hilarious styles. But there are also two people standing ...*

*Finally, they all pose together in front of the camera.*

*End!*

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*Credit title accompanied by the children's pop song.*

*Saat itu menginjakkan kakiku  
Ku menemukar sebuah keindahan  
Saat ku menemui kota ini  
Dingin berbagi kehangatan*

*When I stomp my feet  
I feel like I have found beauty  
The first time I came to this city  
The cold became warm*

*Bingung dan bimbang yang kita hadapi  
Telah menjadi satu pengembang jiwa  
Saling mengisi dan saling berbagi  
Lewat hari dengan canda dan tawa*

*Confusion and uncertainty we face  
Becomes one uplifted soul  
Sharing with one another  
Passing each day with jokes and laughter*

*Bertemu kawan jalan perdamaian  
Hingga jadikan semua satu  
Melangkah bersama, meraih cita-cita  
Kita jadikan semua satu*

*To meet with friends and walk in peace  
So that we can all be united  
Each step together, to reach our dreams  
We will all become one together*

*Megnjalani hidup di dunia ini  
Walaupun semau jalan tak sama  
Kita ratukan semua perbedaan  
Tuk menuju masa depan*

*To live life on this earth  
Even though we are not all the same  
We unite all differences  
To reach the future*



