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Murdering Mangir

Literature and Memories of Violence in Islamic Java

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Abstract

Contemporary Javanese Islam is often imagined as unusually peaceful, the result of an allegedly conflict-free early history populated by Sufis and saints. Yet not all of Java's Islamic history is peaceful, and neither were violent historic episodes always marginalized by historians and writers. This article discusses two literary accounts of a murder that happened in the early years of Mataram, the dynasty that facilitated widespread Islamization. Their two authors—Raden Ngabehi Suradipura and Pramoedya Ananta Toer—used the story as a familiar allegory to process their own experiences of violence and oppression in the colonial and postcolonial state. Belying normative visions of a teleology of peace, they present theo-political imaginaries in which violence is accepted in the cultivation of virtue and the creation—or aspirational creation—of a just polity. Through their literary work, these writers expressed their complex positionalities as they made sense of oppressive regimes, the political role of Islamic beliefs, and the normative content of history.

Keywords

colonial and postcolonial literature – Islam Nusantara – political theology – Pramoedya Ananta Toer – Raden Ngabehi Suradipura – violence

The Islamization of Southeast Asia was a long process that began with the formation of small, temporary settlements of Muslim traders and was furthered by the adoption of Islam by rulers with imperial ambitions. Their conversion was motivated in part by the various advantages Islam afforded, including economic privilege, cultural prestige, and military power.¹ Historical accounts have often imbued the rise of Islam with an epistemic or normative content, as providing information on what Islam in the region was like, or how it ought to be. In the case of Java, both foreign observers and local interest groups have often invoked an early history with stories populated by Sufis and saints to explain what they considered the quintessential feature of Javanese Islam, namely its religious tolerance and peacefulness.² By locating the seed for later developments or desires in a moment of inception, such narratives inscribe a teleology into the historical becoming of Islamic Java where normative self-understandings as nonviolent and moderate are projected back onto a formative period. This narrative of a teleology of peace has distinct historical origins of its own, dating back to colonial times and the beginnings of Orientalist scholarship, which sought to cast Javanese Islam as ideologically feeble and definitely unsuited for the political Islam the colonial government feared.³ In spite of its colonial origins, in recent decades traditionalist Muslims in Java have made use of these narratives to advocate for a particular kind of indigenous Islam, or Islam *pribumi*,⁴ often with the explicit

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- 1 Michael Feener, "Muslim Circulations and Islamic Conversion in Monsoon Asia," in *Monsoon Asia: A Reader on South and Southeast Asia*, ed. David Henley and Nira Wickramasinghe (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2023), 197–216; Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power, and Belief* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).
 - 2 Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Merle Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Norwalk: East Bridge, 2006); Agus Sunyoto, *Atlas Wali Sanga: Buku Pertama yang Mengungkap Wali Sanga Sebagai Fakta Sejarah* (Jakarta: Mizan Media Utama, 2016).
 - 3 These developments have been discussed in depth by Jochem van den Boogert, "The Role of Slametan in the Discourse on Javanese Islam," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 45, no. 133 (2017), 352–72; Nancy Florida, "Writing Traditions in Colonial Java: The Question of Islam," in *Cultures of Scholarship*, ed. S.C. Humphreys (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 187–217; Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 179–206. For colonial examples, see Abraham Kuenen, *National Religions and Universal Religions* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1882), 42–44; and Samuel Eliza Harthoorn, "De zending op Java en meer bepaald die van Malang," *Mededeelingen van wege het Nederlandsch Zendelingen Genootschap* 4 (1860), 105–37, 212–52.
 - 4 Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), NU leader over many years and Indonesia's fourth president, was especially instrumental in articulating this vision of Islam. Abdurrahman Wahid,

support of the government. The most recent iteration of such *pribumisasi* of Islam in public discourse has been the program of *Islam Nusantara*, the Islam of the Malay-Indonesian world, promoted by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), one of Indonesia's major Islamic mass organizations.⁵ In NU media, Islam Nusantara is presented as the Islam that was brought to the region by the so-called nine saints (J. *wali sanga*) in the sixteenth century and passed on through history by Java's kings and scholars to this day. Supposedly superior to the militant Arab Islam that has produced violent movements like ISIS, it is an Islam that is specific to Indonesia but also a model for all Muslims and, indeed, a "blessing for all creation."⁶ The notion that violence is foreign to Javanese Islam is frequently deployed in everyday discourse: After an attempted destruction of a princely grave in Yogyakarta in 2013, Indonesian media broadcast images of people protesting such acts of violence with signs that demand "Don't bring Arab Islam to the land of Mataram."⁷ Mataram, the first major Muslim polity of Java (1587–1755), marks the political beginnings of Islam Nusantara and the new religion's imperial expansion.

But the peaceful vision of Islam Nusantara has its critics and limits. Within NU, some consider Islam Nusantara a liberal invention that contradicts Islamic universalism,⁸ and even those who do endorse it may not necessarily understand its mandate to include certain religious, ethnic, or sexual minorities.⁹

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- "Pribumisasi Islam," *NU Online*, July 19, 2015 [1989] and Carool Kersten, *Islam in Indonesia: The Contest for Society, Ideas and Values* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 83–136.
- 5 Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) self-identifies as traditionalist, granting weight to the classical forms of Islamic knowledge and the traditional modes of their transmission. With tens of millions of members and occupying key positions in the government, NU is also a major political force in contemporary Indonesia. Robin Bush, *Nahdlatul Ulama and the Struggle for Power within Islam and Politics in Indonesia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), and James Hoesterey, "Public Diplomacy and the Global Dissemination of 'Moderate Islam,'" in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Indonesia*, ed. Robert Hefner (London: Routledge, 2018), 406–16.
 - 6 Leonie Schmidt, "Aesthetics of Authority: 'Islam Nusantara' and Islamic 'Radicalism' in Indonesian Film and Social Media," *Religion* 51, no. 2 (2021), 237–58; Martin Slama, "Imagining Indonesian Islam as a Center: New Mediations and Old Concepts of Power," *Archiv Orientalní* 12 (2020): 273–300.
 - 7 The grave was Ngoro Purbo's, the grandson of Sultan Hamengkubuwana VI. For more on the attack and an image of the subsequent demonstration, see Gusti Sawabi, "Makam Kyai Ageng Purbo Dibersihkan," *Tribunnews* (September 22, 2013): <https://www.tribunnews.com/regional/2013/09/22/makam-kyai-ageng-purbo-dibersihkan>, accessed January 20, 2023.
 - 8 Alexander Arifianto, "Islam Nusantara & Its Critics: The Rise of NU's Young Clerics," *RSIS Commentary* 018 (2017): 1–3.
 - 9 For more on these developments, see Robert Hefner, "Whatever Happened to Civil Islam? Islam and Democratization in Indonesia, 20 Years On," *Asian Studies Review* 43, no. 3 (2019): 375–96.

What is more, the vision of a teleology of peace becomes self-contradictory when its proponents negotiate how to deal with those who are considered outside the fold of this peaceful vision. Self-declared stewards of the legacy of the *wali sanga* often resort to rather aggressive language to talk about the alleged enemies of this legacy, like the “virus of Wahhabism, Shi’ism, and other misguided orientations.”¹⁰ Islam Nusantara’s culture of excluding its opponents, itself a form of violence, points to the ambiguities of such a teleology of peace, where violence is disavowed even as it cannot be entirely avoided.

But violence has not always been disavowed. Javanese literary sources tell us not only about the gentle mission of the nine saints, but also about their military campaigns that resulted in the final conquest of Majapahit, Java’s last Hindu-Buddhist kingdom.¹¹ And Mataram itself was hardly a harmonious place but was characterized by political rivalry and bitter contestations of normative Islam.¹² In the early years of Mataram, an angry conflict that ensued between King Senapati (d. 1601), the founder of the dynasty’s imperial expansion, and Ki Ageng Mangir Wanabaya, culminated in the former’s murder of the latter. Chronicles tell us that Mangir was the head of a neighboring independent territory (J. *pěrdikan*)¹³ located about twenty kilometers southwest of the king’s royal palace in Kotagedhe.¹⁴ Dismayed that Mangir was unwilling to accept Mataram’s sovereignty, Senapati sought a way to subdue the resilient *pěrdikan* and its head with it. But Mangir owned a magical weapon called Barukuping that made him invincible in battle, even if Mataram’s military power far exceeded Mangir’s. In many traditional tellings, Barukuping is the severed tongue of a powerful snake named Baruklinthing, the unacknowledged son of a great ascetic that turned into a spear.¹⁵ Not daring to risk military defeat,

10 See for instance the website of a group of so-called Grave Scholars (I. *Sarjana Kuburan*), “Visi-Misi,” <https://www.sarkub.com/about/>, accessed January 20, 2023.

11 Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis in South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 196–200, for other less peaceful accounts of the Islamization of Java.

12 Merle Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia Since c. 1200* (Houndsmills: Palgrave, 2001), 45–56.

13 The *pěrdikans* were autonomous Islamic communities that were given their status through royal decree and that were exempted from taxes and compulsory labor on behalf of the royal court. For more on the *pěrdikans*, and their relation to the *kraton*, see Ismail Fajrie Alatas, *What is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 37–58.

14 Today, both Kotagedhe and Mangir are a political part of Bantul, a regency of Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta.

15 Barukuping is now in the treasure chamber of royal heirlooms at the *kraton* in Solo. When the kingdom of Mataram split into Surakarta and Yogyakarta, Barukuping, one of the

Senapati and his advisor Mandaraka sought to overcome Mangir through a secret plan: They sent Senapati's daughter Pěmbayun in the disguise of a commoner, a dancer in a wandering troupe, on a secret mission to seduce Mangir. The plan was successful and resulted in their marriage at Mangir's court and by some accounts the conception of a child. After finding out about Pěmbayun's true identity, Mangir came to the royal court in Kotagede with his wife¹⁶ in hopes of reconciling with Senapati. At this meeting, Senapati killed Mangir, cracking his skull on Watu Gilang,¹⁷ a stone slab doubling as throne, with the contradictory proclamation that Mangir was both his beloved son and an enemy of his realm. This ambiguous status is reflected in Mangir's grave, which is located half in- and half outside of the royal cemetery in Kotagedhe, with the cemetery walls cutting right through its middle.

In the normative historical vision of Islam Nusantara, there is little room for stories like this. And yet, the Mangir narrative has been told countless times, indicating that it continues to haunt the historical consciousness of the Javanese. Different versions, sometimes with significant modifications,¹⁸ have been narrated in media as diverse as Javanese chronicles (J. *babad*),¹⁹ theater, both traditional Javanese (J. *kethoprak*) and modern Indonesian drama; television; comics; and orally transmitted folk narratives. When such stories are told, they are bound to raise ethical questions about the status of violence in the Islamic polity or the Indonesian nation. Historically, literary works have

most important heirlooms of the kingdom, was kept in Surakarta. Nancy Florida, personal communication, January 12, 2023.

- 16 Pěmbayun's role in these events is also contested. In some versions, she remains loyal to her father; in others she truly desires reconciliation between her father and her husband; in a few, she even sides with her husband to fight her father. Her ambiguous roles will be discussed in a separate paper.
- 17 *Watu Gilang* can still be seen today in Kotagedhe, displaying a noticeable crack, allegedly a trace of the murder.
- 18 To give a sense of the range of different accounts, some versions narrate that Mangir was never murdered, or that the murder was only metaphorical, pertaining to his negative energy. Others claim that his body was removed and buried in a different location.
- 19 The episode is, however, not narrated in the Major *Babad Tanah Jawi*, the best known—and, according to some scholars, most important—historical text written at the Javanese royal courts. For a discussion of this Major *Babad Tanah Jawi* and its status in scholarship, see Edwin Wieringa, "An Old Text Brought to Life Again: A Reconsideration of the 'Final Version' of the Babad Tanah Jawi," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 155, no. 2 (1999): 244–63. While not in the so-called Major *Babad Tanah Jawi*, however, the story features in less well-known versions of the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, including Van Dorp's edition, *Punika Sěrat Babad Tanah Jawi Ingkang Nyaosi Babonipun, Raden Panji, Jaya Subrata* (Semarang, G.C.T. van Dorp, 1923).

often played an important part in Java to undercut dominant accounts of the past that are supposed to legitimize the status quo,²⁰ although of course such processes are not unique to Indonesia. In an analysis of different literary engagements with difficult histories in France, Romania, and South Africa, Mihaela Mihai argued that artistic works can “seductively sabotage reductive narratives about what happened by prosthetically enabling audiences to see the world of systemic violence in its complexity.”²¹ This is not to say that all literature is politically subversive. Literature also often serves as a legitimizing device, and even oppositional literature is still embedded in existing power structures, competing for publishers and publicity.²²

Mihai’s identification of such an intimate entwinement between the (implicit or explicit) support of a status quo and resistance to it provides a productive framework for understanding the literary accounts at hand. The two versions of the Mangir narrative investigated here—first, the *Book of the Chronicle of Mangir* (*J. Sĕrat Babad Mangir*) written in Javanese by Raden Ngabehi Suradipura (c. 1835-?) and published in 1913, at the height of Dutch colonialism in Java; and second, an Indonesian play titled *Mangir* written by the celebrated Javanese author Pramoedya Ananta Toer (d. 2006) in the 1970s during Indonesia’s New Order (1965/66–1998)—offer fertile ground for examining the interstices of a community’s memories of systemic violence on the one hand, and political power on the other. Like the events they invoke that are permeated with ambiguities regarding Mangir’s status in relation to Mataram, these two narrativizations are neither fully inside nor outside of the normative historical understandings of their day. Through a close reading of these two literary works and their contextualization against the background of the socio-political situation into which these retellings of the past seek to intervene, I ask how violence is conceptualized and aestheticized in these texts, and how they simultaneously undercut and reinforce oppressive structures. As they exhibit an interplay between cooptation and resistance, these literary projects have a continued relevance today. They propose that virtue and violence go together in a world marked by oppression, inviting us to rethink

20 For examples of such subversive literary works, see Nancy Florida, *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future: History as Prophecy in Colonial Java* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Laurie Sears, “The Persistence of Evil and the Impossibility of Truth in Goenawan Mohamad’s *Kali*,” in *Beginning to Remember: The Past in the Indonesian Present*, ed. Mary Zurbuchen (Singapore: NUS Press, 2005); and also Els Bogaerts’ contribution to this issue.

21 Mihaela Mihai, *Political Memory and the Aesthetics of Care: The Art of Complicity and Resistance* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2022), 16.

22 Mihai, *Political Memory*, 63–65.

similar entwinements in contemporary memory culture, including those around Islam Nusantara with their unacknowledged violent aspects that cut against normative visions of a Javanese exceptionalism and teleology of peace.

A Babad for Colonial Java

The genre of the *babad*, court chronicles or dynastic histories, does not seem to promise much potential for an aesthetic of resistance. As the Orientalist scholar of Javanese literature Theodore Pigeaud lamented, the *babad* were “disappointing” and their historical content was “not always trustworthy” because the authors of these texts depended on the patronage of the royal dynasties that succeeded the kings about whom they were writing.²³ It is thus unsurprising that *babad* versions of the Mangir story cast a favorable light on Senapati and decry Mangir as a villain who threatened the integrity of the polity and the well-being of its subjects—or at least they do so on the surface level. Pigeaud, clinging to his own assumptions of what historical writing should look like, was unable to see that the court poets had their own strategies for expressing their disapproval.²⁴ Of course, some poets may well have sought to flatter the dynasties that sponsored them, but others did offer critical perspectives, albeit in a more indirect way. This was not only because they feared for their position and security, but also because the aesthetic standards of Javanese literature forbade direct expression, for “it is only the fool or the ignorant who speaks or understands directly.”²⁵

If the court poets were navigating complicated artistic and political terrain when telling the story of Mangir, in the case of Raden Ngabehi Suradipura's version the question of authorial intention in relation to power is refracted even further. Suradipura explains that his version is based on traditional *babad*, but he himself was not a court poet. He lived in colonized Java and worked in the service of the colonial government as the secretary of the Dutch official and scholar G.A.J. Hazeu (d. 1929). The book was published by a colonial press, the Dutch Commission for Public Reading Matters, for which Hazeu himself

23 Théodore Pigeaud, *Literature of Java, Volume 1: Synopsis of Javanese Literature 900–1900 A.D.* (Leiden: Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, 1967), 159.

24 As Sastrawan has argued, these dismissals were based on Orientalist failures to correctly grasp Javanese understandings of temporality and its representation in literature. Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan, “Temporalities in Southeast Asian Historiography,” *History and Theory* 59, no. 2 (2020): 210–26.

25 Florida, *Writing the Past*, 276.

was responsible at the time, and which was founded with the explicit intent to contribute to the literary socialization of the colonial subjects—which is to say to control and censor what people were reading.²⁶ Suradipura had also produced new prose versions of other traditional Javanese literary texts. Some of them appear to have been commissioned by Hazeu, but it is unknown at whose initiative he wrote the *Sérat Babad Mangir*. Neither does Suradipura say which specific original text his new version is based on, although he seems to have used a poetic version of the *Babad Mangir* written in the late nineteenth century at the royal court of Yogyakarta as his main source.²⁷ With his decision to write the text in prose rather than verse (*J. macapat*), he may have intended to set himself and his story apart from earlier poets, indicating that it was speaking to a situation very different from theirs.²⁸ But while the differences between Suradipura and his courtly predecessors were considerable, they faced a similar difficulty: like the scribes before him, Suradipura would not have voiced his criticisms of the regime directly. It is thus up to us to decide what he may have communicated in a more indirect manner, concealed from the Orientalist gaze and the colonial censor.

Like the poetic *babad* he took as a model, Suradipura clearly seems to take the side of Senapati. Before *Mangir*, we read, his father had already refused to submit to Mataram when all other regents had long accepted Senapati's sovereignty,²⁹ insisting that his spear Barukuping would make him and his *pěrdikan* invincible. His own subjects and family members tried to reason him

26 That said, this Commission, and its successor, the *Balai Pustaka*, were considered politically progressive. Lisa Kuitert, "Balai Pustaka and the Politics of Knowledge," *Lembarah Sejarah* 17, no. 1 (2021): 2–17.

27 Raden Ngabehi Sasrawinata, *Sérat Babad Bědahipun ing Mangir: Anyariyosakěn duk Kyai Wanabaya Kěpanggihnipun kaliyan Raden Ajěng Pěmbayun Ngantos Dumugi Pějahipun Wontěn ing Matawis* (Semarang: n.p., 1872). For his other work, Suradipura appears to have used both written and oral accounts. Peter Carey, *The British in Java 1811–1816: A Javanese Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 4, and Edwin Wieringa, "Babad Bangun Tapa: De Ballingschap van Pakubuwana VI op Ambon 1830–1849," PhD diss. (Leiden University, 1994), 243.

28 Suradipura's stated rationale that prose would increase ease of reading was likely not his primary motivation, since narrative poetry would not have been any more difficult to read. It is possible that Suradipura opted for prose because he considered it more modern. For more on the virtue of modernity in Javanese literature, see Edwin Wieringa in this issue.

29 Raden Ngabehi Suradipura, *Sérat Babad Mangir* (Betawi: Uitgaven door de Bemiddeling der Commissie voor de Volkslectuur, 1913), 6.

into surrendering to Mataram, but to no avail.³⁰ Mangir is delegitimized as a ruler, for he lacks the moral qualities a king should have:

To tell of the son who succeeded him in his position and carried on his name, Kyai Ageng Wanabaya, as for his habits and defiant character he was just like his father, but his arrogant attitude was even worse than that of the one who had already passed. Still young, he was quite handsome, arrogant, boastful, complacent, and too vain; already an adult, he was not yet married [...] The young Ki Wanabaya also dissented, refusing to submit to the court of Ngeksi Gonda,³¹ always boasting that he was not afraid to meet Senapati in single combat.

*Kocap putraning jalĕr ingkang anggantosi kalĕnggahanipun saha nama anunggak sĕmi ingkang rama Kyahi Agĕng Wanabaya, mĕnggah adat watak wantunipun sampun jibles ingkang rama, malah anggĕp kumalungkungipun angungkuli ingkang sampun nyuwarga. Taksih anem warnipun rahi bagus ambĕranyak ladak angkuh mawi kaduk bĕsus wanci sampun jajaka sĕpuh [...] Kyai Wanabaya nem ugi amogok botĕn purun angidhĕp dhatĕng karatoning Ngeksi Gonda, tansah susumbar botĕn ajrih atandhing prang kaliyan Senapat.*³²

According to Suradipura's *babad*, Mangir is quite alone in his opposition to Mataram. Before the unfolding of the events, we read that the rulers of all other regions have already submitted to Senapati and are awestruck by his might and splendor, signs of his rightful position as king.

All palace officials and regents paid their respects, crowded and packed [in the royal pavilion] that was filled with extraordinary decorations, flashing like lightning, with a rainbow-colored glow shining beautifully, radiant from the king's authority. The radiance of the realm, beautifully shining from above most clearly, was a sign that the king was of noble ancestry, the descendant of warriors, the seed of those ripened through ascetic practice, famous for his bravery, an expert in warfare, just like Raden Dananjaya.

30 "Para Kadang warganipun sami eram / Dene [r] botĕn mikir rĕmbag kang raharja / Amung tansah kumalungkung angandĕlaken waosipun / Manawi para sĕntana matur bobolehi lajĕng kasĕntak." See Suradipura, *Sĕrat Babad Mangir*, 7.

31 Ngeksi Gonda is the literary name of Mataram.

32 Suradipura, *Sĕrat Babad Mangir*, 7–8. Here and in the following, all transcriptions from Javanese and translations from Javanese and Indonesian are my own.

*Mantri, bupati sapanĕkaripun sami sowan jĕjĕl sĕk-sĕkan, kĕbak rĕrĕngan ingkang linangkung, gĕbyaring kilat thathit anyarĕngi, teja maya sumorot asri, awit saking prabawaning narendra [...] Cahyaning praja angrĕsĕpakĕn dumĕling ing inggil gumawang, pratondha narendra tĕdhak rĕmbĕsing madu, trah andana warih, wiwinih matĕng ing tapanipun, misuwur ing kaprawiranipun wasis ing paprangan lir pendah Raden Dananjaya.*³³

This description of the king invokes a religious and narrative textual memory that provides the interpretive framework for the ensuing events. In Javanese literature, light is a stock image symbolizing spiritual knowledge and power,³⁴ and the description of the king is reminiscent of formulae characterizing the ideal ruler in the Javanese shadow-play (J. *wayang*).³⁵ Raden Danajaya is one of the Javanese names for Arjuna, one of the Pandawa brothers and a hero of the originally Sanskrit Bhagavad Gita that was widely read in Java. In the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna is reluctant to enter battle³⁶ because he is unable to stand the idea of killing his own kin. His charioteer, who turns out to be Lord Krishna, admonishes him that it is his duty to go forth in battle, an explanation that Arjuna ultimately accepts. He enters the battle, faithful to his God-given obligation as a warrior. His initial hesitation seems to suggest that his motives for fighting and killing are not greed or his own ambitions. Through this reference to Arjuna, Senapati, who is about to quash a fellow Muslim ruler, seems to be likewise cleared of such base motives—he is simply enacting his royal duty. But Suradipura was likely aware that Arjuna was often a morally ambivalent figure in Javanese literature,³⁷ pointing perhaps to his own ambivalences regarding Senapati's behavior. Even so, human judgment is dismissed as irrelevant

33 Suradipura, *Sĕrat Babad Mangir*, 8–9.

34 While pre-Islamic texts already made use of this light symbolism, Muslim poets Islamized this image by associating it with the Muhammadan Light (A. *nūr Muĥammadī*), Muĥammad's transhistorical, illuminating entity. Bernard Arps, *Dewa Ruci and the Light that is Muhammad: The Islamization of a Buddhist Text in the Yasadipuran Version of the Book of Dewa Ruci* (Jakarta: Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2011).

35 Such formulae include the presence of subordinates that are full of admiration; an enumeration of the king's qualities, especially his handsomeness and bravery; and an endorsement of his noble ancestry. For an example in the *wayang*, see Bernard Arps, *Tall Tree, Nest of the Wind: The Javanese Shadow-Play Dewa Ruci Performed by Ki Anom Soeroto. A Study in Performance Philology* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2016), 119–20.

36 The *Bhagavad Gita* is part of the epic *Mahabharata*. It is set at the start of the Baratayuddha, the war between the Pandawas and their cousins, the Kurawas. It became very popular as a Javanese literary text in the late colonial period.

37 For an example of such an ambivalent representation of Arjuna, see Willem van der Molen, "The Art of Storytelling in Old Javanese Prose as Illustrated by the Story of Ekalawya," *Wacana* 17, no. 2 (2016): 1–26.

as his decision to send Pěmbayun and her escorts to Mangir with the explicit intent to deceive Ki Ageng Mangir into coming to Mataram is conceptualized in theo-political terms as God's will.³⁸ While Senapati's language would have felt boastful and arrogant to a Javanese reader,³⁹ perhaps hinting once more at Suradipura's own ambivalences, the divine and royal will needs to be fulfilled for the defense and salvation of the kingdom and its subjects. In Senapati's exchange with Pěmbayun, he tells her:

You, dear, are sent to seek out the human sacrifice that will serve to bring welfare to all my people and to ensure that I continue to grace the kingdom of Mataram [...] Darling, follow the will of God the Most High.

*Sira nyawa, ingsun utus angupaya tumbal sarananing nagara, Kang minongka agawe raharjane kawulaningsun kabeh, tuwin lěstariningsun angrěnggani kraton ing Ngeksi Gonda [...] Nini, angestokěna karsaning pangeran kang mahasukci.*⁴⁰

The integrity of the realm, the continued welfare of all its subjects, and the king's continued rule are not clearly differentiated here. The king personifies the prosperity of land and people. His status, and the status of his command to Pěmbayun, evoke Carl Schmitt's understanding of sovereignty. Although Schmitt's conceptual framework may not map neatly onto the theo-political imaginary of early modern Java,⁴¹ his representation of sovereignty in seventeenth-century Europe, where the monarch is identified with God, resonates with the text. Here, Senapati is also represented as an extension of the divine on earth. He occupies a position in the polity that is less compatible with standard Sunni, Ash'arī interpretations of sovereignty, where the sovereign's task is to secure a public domain in which different rational orientations

38 This also becomes evident in the passage before the departure of Pěmbayun and her companions for Mangir, where in a long prayer the Prophet Muḥammad, the saints of Java, and other authority figures in Islam are invoked to ensure the mission's success. Suradipura, *Sěrat Babad Mangir*, 28–30.

39 I am grateful to Willem van der Molen for drawing my attention to Senapati's arrogant tone.

40 Suradipura, *Sěrat Babad Mangir*, 15–16.

41 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Carl Schmitt was theorizing political theology in the context of the modern, secular and post-Christian or western state that has completed a process of rationalization and liberalization, arguing that political concepts are secularized religious concepts. In Senapati's case, like in Schmitt's historical examples, the interconnectedness between religious concepts and political rule is not implicit or denied, but explicit and deliberate.

can coexist,⁴² than with Schmitt's monarch whose status is "analogous to that attributed to God in the Cartesian system of the world."⁴³ In Schmitt's famous definition of sovereignty, the sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception. Sovereignty is a "borderline concept"⁴⁴ because even though the sovereign upholds prevailing legal and moral norms, sovereign decision suspends any such legal or moral order and thus lies outside of it. This seemingly unconventional interpretation of sovereignty in a text written in a milieu shaped by Ash'arī thought, the most influential school of Sunni Islam that has also long been very strong in Java, may be surprising at first, but ultimately points to an even deeper insight in Ash'arī theology: God's goodness is irreducible to conventional understandings of the good. Islamic ethics and conventional morality may condemn murder as bad, but sovereign decision in the service of the polity can normalize the act; and because the king is identified with God who embodies absolute goodness and hence cannot will evil, his decision is redefined as good.

The task of the pious subject is to understand the royal/divine redefinition of the good. Pěmbayun is exemplary in doing so. Initially upset by the burden her father has placed on her, she appears to falter for a moment, but then accepts his reasoning and understands her task to offer herself up to Mangir as bait as a God-given duty.

The princess, on hearing the words of her father, was shocked, her heart pounding; overwhelmed, her eyes welled up as she said to herself: "What is my father thinking, sending someone who is still a young girl to perform such a difficult task [...] The king is the deputy of God who is both father and king to me, so I cannot refuse him [...] Fortune and misfortune are set because they have been determined by the Almighty, because they have been written down on the Preserved Tablet for humans to carry them out." Finally, the princess said in a voice inciting pity that she would honor her father's wishes.

42 For an account of a mainstream Sunni, Ash'arī understanding of sovereignty in the work of the medieval Islamic theologian Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 1085), and its differences from western political theology, see Ahmed Abdel Meguid, "Reversing Schmitt: The Sovereign as a Guardian of Rational Pluralism and the Peculiarity of the Islamic State of Exception in al-Juwaynī's Dialectical Theology," *European Journal of Political Theory* 19, no. 4 (2020): 489–511.

43 Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 46.

44 Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5.

*Sang Diah Rĕtna sarĕng mirĕng pangandikaning rama, kumĕmp[y]ur ing galih tarataban kabĕlĕd waspanipun carocosan pangunandikanipun: Ora kahaya Kangjeng rama, tĕka wong isih kĕnya kinon anĕmpuh pakewuh [...] Nata warananing pangeran winantu sudarma miwah ratu, dadi ora kĕna kapopo pisan-pisan [...] Bĕgja cilaka wus padha atas panduming Hyang kang Maha Sukci, karana wus tinulis ana ing lokil makpul manungsa mung sadĕrma anglakoni. Wusana sang Dyah Rĕtna matur mlas-asih angĕstoka-ken karsaning rama.*⁴⁵

Pĕmbayun agrees to play her part, convinced that her father, the king, is God's representative on earth. As such, what he commands her to do is not merely his will, but a divine order. Going further even, Pĕmbayun expresses a strong understanding of predestination, where everything, both fortune and misfortune, are determined by God and have been written down before the beginning of history in the Preserved Tablet (*A. al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz*, here vernacularized as *lokil makpul*).⁴⁶ Pĕmbayun's reasoning is embedded in the Islamic Ash'arī theological tradition, according to which obedience to divine laws is a virtue irrespective of whether these divine laws correspond to what is conventionally understood as rational or good and ethical by humans.⁴⁷ But even though the future is entirely in the hands of an incomprehensible God, the theological vision of predestination need not result in passivity. As Pĕmbayun says, although the future has been preordained, she cannot be idle but is obliged to carry out God's plan. And while this plan is most unwelcome for her, her attitude is not one of passive acceptance, but active contribution: To bring about God's plan, humans must continuously work on themselves to cultivate a pious attitude of patience and forbearance. This resonates with the work of scholars who have shown that predestination need not result in fatalism but can be a

45 Suradipura, *Sĕrat Babad Mangir*, 16–17.

46 The concept of the Preserved Tablet appears in the Qur'ān only once, where it is linked explicitly to the Qur'ān: "This is truly a glorious Qur'ān [written] on a preserved Tablet." Muhammad A.S. Abdel Haleem: *The Qur'an, Translated by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010), 85:21–22. Before entering history through the revelation to the Prophet Muḥammad, the Qur'ān already existed with God in eternity. In a Ḥadīth, the scope of the Preserved Tablet's content is widened, as we read that "God created the preserved tablet from a white pearl with a ruby surface; its pen and its writing being of light—upon which all worldly affairs are laid out." Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal as cited in Richard McGregor, "Preserved Tablet," in *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge 2006), 506. According to this understanding, not merely the Qur'ān but all events in history are recorded, and through this record executed in history.

47 George Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

motivating force to work toward a desired future while actively realizing a life where human agency and divine ordinance are intimately interwoven.⁴⁸

On the narrative level, there seems to be little ambivalence about the legitimacy of Senapati's behavior in Suradipura's version. But by calling on both Indic and Islamic religious imaginaries to justify the king's actions, the writer shows that the events related in the story are far from easy to digest. A whole battery of religious and mythological resources is activated to show why Senapati is good, good against all appearances. This vision is very different from contemporary notions of a normative Javanese Islam, the peaceful Islam of Mataram, because it does not reject violence but integrates it into a moral project embedded in a theo-political vision where one's service to a violent ruler or regime may be divinely ordained by the incomprehensible God. All people can do is faithfully execute God's plan, even if it includes violence. It is difficult to know for certain what Suradipura, a colonized subject working in the colonial service, was intending when rewriting the story, but it is hard to imagine that the vexed history of Java's Islamic kingdoms didn't resonate with him. Like Pěmbayun who went to Mangir, he actively realized what he may have understood as his own divinely determined life through his role in the colonial system. At first glance, this may look like a legitimization of colonial rule; but against the background of the work's understanding of predestination, what was at stake for Suradipura was perhaps not political legitimization but personal ethical cultivation. His rewriting of history may have been a way to give meaning to contemporary experiences of oppression and violence, integrating violence into visions of virtue rather than proclaiming peacefulness while silently accepting implicit mechanisms of oppression. Things may have looked very bad and wrong indeed for Suradipura, even antithetical to what he understood Islam to be telling him about the role of a righteous sovereign and ethical behavior. Yet if he and others realized their divinely determined life, they could actively contribute to the future God has already ordained. This is a

48 For the entanglement of free will and predestination in classical Islamic thought, see Maria De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought: Theoretical Compromises in the Works of Avicenna, al-Ghazālī and Ibn 'Arabī* (London: Routledge, 2014). For scholarship highlighting contemporary Muslims' understandings of their agency against the background of the doctrine of predestination, see, for instance, Sherine Hamdy, "Islam, Fatalism, and Medical Intervention: Lessons from Egypt on the Cultivation of Forbearance (Sabr) and Reliance on God (Tawakkul)," *Anthropological Quarterly* 82, no. 1 (2009): 173–96; Laura Menin, "The Impasse of Modernity: Personal Agency, Divine Destiny, and the Unpredictability of Intimate Relationships in Morocco," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 21, no. 4 (2015): 892–910; Alice Elliot, "The Makeup of Destiny: Predestination and the Labor of Hope in a Moroccan Emigrant Town," *American Ethnologist* 43, no. 3 (2016): 488–99.

future that promises to be good, as Suradipura lets his story of Mangir end on a hopeful note:⁴⁹

At that time, King Senapati Ngalaga was the king of Ngeksi Gonda, famous all over Java, his realm thriving and prosperous, clothing and provisions easily accessible, there were none who committed crimes; order and peace prevailed because of his Majesty's kingship, a king who was held in respect by the neighboring rulers.

*Ing nalika samantĕn Kangjĕng Sri Narendra Senapati Ngalaga, nata ing Ngeksi Gonda misuwur sa-ĕrat nuswa Jawi, karatoning gĕmah raharja miwah mirah sandhang tĕdha, botĕn wonten janma lampah dursila, tata tĕntĕrĕm awit panjĕnĕngan Narapati kineringan para ratu ing ngamonca.*⁵⁰

Mangir in the New Order: Mimicking and Mocking from the Indonesian Gulag

The second version is a modern play titled *Mangir*, written in Indonesian by the renowned Javanese author Pramoedya Ananta Toer (d. 2006). Pramoedya emerged in the first decades of Indonesian independence as the young nation's preeminent prose writer. His play *Mangir* is a part of a tetralogy called *Countercurrents* (I. *Arus Balik*) in which Pramoedya reinterprets historical events in Java's medieval and early modern kingdoms to cast light on more recent political events in Indonesia.⁵¹ A proponent of revolutionary nationalism in his youth, Pramoedya was both a victim and an outspoken critic of the New Order, a regime he understood to stifle the nation's vitality. As an impediment force against the national spirit, the New Order was inherently neocolonial for him.⁵² Considered a threat by the government, Pramoedya was imprisoned with thousands of other political prisoners for fourteen years (1965–79) in a

49 Indeed, Suradipura seems to have deliberately opted to end so optimistically. Sasrawinata's version used as a model by Suradipura (see above n. 27) ends much more pessimistically. Sasrawinata, *Sĕrat Babad Bĕdahipun ing Mangir*, 75–6.

50 Suradipura, *Sĕrat Babad Mangir*, 93.

51 The other titles of this tetralogy are *Arok Dedes*, *Mata Pusaran*, and *Arus Balik*. Of these, only the first has been translated and published in English, and *Mata Pusaran* is lost. Gerry van Klinken, "The Battle for History after Suharto," in *Beginning to Remember: The Past in the Indonesian Present*, ed. Mary Zurbuchen (Singapore: NUS Press, 2005), 233–58.

52 Pheng Cheah, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 250–55.

penal colony on Buru Island in the Moluccas.⁵³ Along with his most celebrated works, *Mangir* was first composed during his imprisonment and was published only after the end of the New Order in 2000.

From the vantage point of his opposition to Soeharto and the political persecution of critics like himself, Pramoedya wrote his play as a damning exposure of the Indonesian politics of his day.⁵⁴ The *pěrdikan* Mangir is an almost utopian place, a “village republic”⁵⁵ with a democratic style of government that had emerged before Hindu, and later Muslim forms of feudalism became pervasive in Java. Pramoedya’s representation of the *pěrdikan*, where leadership is determined through elections⁵⁶ and the ruler is always accountable to the people,⁵⁷ reflects his ideal of the democratic nation-state as a formation where the public acts as a collective ethical agent that can hold rulers in check.⁵⁸ Mataram disrupted and destroyed these ideal polities by “shamelessly forc[ing] the village republics into submission by means of intrigues.”⁵⁹ Pramoedya’s Senapati, the prototype of a tyrannical ruler, and his ruthless advisors are legible as allegorical stand-ins for Soeharto and his collaborators. Like Senapati who destroyed the village republics, the ruling elites of the postcolonial state had betrayed the Indonesian people.

But Senapati, according to Pramoedya, is not the only one to blame. The Javanese people themselves were at fault for their superstitious acceptance of and submission to otherworldly forces and magical spells, escaping from reality through a “web of mystifications.”⁶⁰ Pramoedya himself had to experience

53 The political persecution of communists and other leftists occurred in the aftermath of the transition from Indonesia’s first president Sukarno to the New Order under Soeharto in 1965/66, during which an estimated 500,000–1 million alleged Communists were killed. For more on these events, see Geoffrey Robinson, *The Killing Season: A History of the Indonesian Massacres, 1965–66* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

54 Pramoedya was not the first one to use the Mangir story as such an explicit exposition of a corrupt government. Even during colonial times, some outspoken critics, like Dr. Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo, used it to denounce both the colonial government and the feudal Javanese elites that supported them. For more on Tjipto’s use of a play on Mangir, see Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912–1926* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 182–84.

55 Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *Mangir* (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2000), xxviii.

56 Pramoedya, *Mangir*, xxxiii.

57 For example, Pramoedya’s Mangir must justify his decision to marry Pěmbayun before a council of fellow villagers. Pramoedya, *Mangir*, 20–38.

58 Cheah, *Spectral Nationality*, 256.

59 Chris GoGwilt and Pramoedya Ananta Toer, “The Voice of Pramoedya Ananta Toer: Passages, interviews, and Reflections from ‘The Mute’s Soliloquy’ and Pramoedya’s North American Tour,” *Cultural Critique* 55 (2003): 235.

60 Cheah, *Spectral Nationality*, 281–82.

how after the coup of 1965/66 the Indonesian left just allowed themselves to be quashed. Under Soeharto's spell, they were incapable of fighting back. Just like the New Order deployed an essentialized spiritual form of inheritance⁶¹ to enframe and authorize political will, the rulers of Mataram used Islam to legitimize their own selfish interests. Indeed, like the Senapati of the *babad*, Pramoedya's Senapati also insists to his father, Ki Ageng Pamanahan, that he is merely carrying out God's plan:

I am only a *wayang* puppet in the hands of the Almighty. Mataram's rivals and competitors, all those who are still standing up straight are required to humbly orient themselves toward this throne. [...] Mataram standing upright means that it has been ordained by the Almighty that all shall belong to it [...] Because, father, if God has truly made your son king, there would be no point if others were not ordained to crawl underneath his feet.

*Sahaya hanya anak wayang di tangan Yang Maha Kuasa. Pesaing dan pelawan Mataram, semua yang masih tegak dan berdiri, wajib runduk berkiblat pad takhta ini ... Mataram berdiri berarti, Yang Maha Kuasa kodratkan semua jadi miliknya ... Karena, ayahanda, taka da gunanya Yang Maha Kuasa benarkan putranda jadi raja, bila yang lain-lain tidak dikodratkan merangkah di bawah kakinya.*⁶²

The theological vocabulary here is not generically religious, but at least in part specifically Islamic. Senapati's throne is the center of political loyalty and devotion, in the same way in which Muslims orient themselves toward (*berkiblat*, from A. *qibla*) the Ka'ba in Mecca. God has ordained it that way: it is *kodrat* (from A. *qadar*), a theological concept affirming the divine determination of human acts, analogous to the *lawḥ mahfūz* Pëmbayun invoked in Suradipura's version. Not everyone, however, believes Senapati's pious words. Sepanati's father Ki Ageng Pamanahan, an old man who is called senile (I. *pikun*) by the others, has a role akin to the fool in Pramoedya's play, representing a voice of conscience. "This is not how a warrior acts," he says when details of the ruse to trap Mangir are discussed, and cynically comments that "For a victorious Mataram, everthing is right and made right."⁶³ Even more explicitly, he denies that Senapati is a *wayang* puppet in the hands of God; rather, he is a puppet in

61 John Pemberton, *On the Subject of Java* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

62 Pramoedya, *Mangir*, 97.

63 Pramoedya, *Mangir*, 92.

the hands of Ki Juru Martani, Senapati's ruthless advisor.⁶⁴ The Islamic legitimation of the plot is thus presented in the play, but is ultimately not accepted and debunked as a pious pretext for Mataram's political machinations.

By making his critique of Senapati explicit, Pramoedya departs from the style of the writers of the *babad*, the historical sources of his play. He acknowledges the difficulties associated with recovering the historical events related in the story, and the fact that he was basing his play on texts that seemed—at least at first glance—to have a political agenda diametrically opposed to his own. Like Pigeaud, he asserted that the court poets of Mataram and its successor dynasties—including the Dutch colonial and New Order governments—had limited options for speaking truth to power. But unlike Pigeaud, he recognized that the Javanese poets did criticize the historical events on which they reported and the dynasties for whom they wrote, albeit in an indirect form. Inspired by social realism, Pramoedya thought that the aspects that he considered to be “fairy tales” or fantastical had to be read allegorically to uncover historical events that the court poets were unable to spell out concretely. For instance, the story of Barukuping, the severed tongue of the powerful snake turned into a spear, encoded the true story where Barukuping was a person greatly hated by Senapati and his advisors, an illegitimate son of Mangir's former ruler who had great military and strategic skill. Pramoedya argues that poets turned him into a magical spear because it was too shameful for Mataram that an illegitimate son would pose such a threat.⁶⁵

But even as he challenged the assessment that Javanese texts were worthless as historical sources because they could be decrypted to reveal, to employ a Rankean phrase, “what actually happened,” Pramoedya was in fact deploying a different strand of colonial scholarship. While indirect communication and figurative or paradoxical expression was characteristic of Javanese literature⁶⁶ and, indeed, Islamic—especially Sufi—literature more generally,⁶⁷ colonial and postcolonial analysis has often reduced it to an encrypted code.⁶⁸ C.C. Berg, an influential historian of ancient Java in the mid-twentieth century, agreed

64 Pramoedya, *Mangir*, 96–97.

65 Pramoedya, *Mangir*, xxvi f.; xxx.

66 Florida, *Writing the Past*, 275–77.

67 Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

68 Tony Day, “What Lies Behind the Veils of Semu? Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future. History as Prophecy in Colonial Java by Nancy K. Florida,” in *Indonesia* 64 (1997): 139–148. While I agree with Day's assessment that this reductive understanding of Javanese literature has been pervasive since the colonial period, I disagree that Florida's work is an example of this reductionism.

with Pigeaud that the traditional Javanese sources were “valueless” as direct sources for adequate facts, but asserted that they were invaluable as “mythical document[s]” that constituted an invaluable source of “the priestly cultivation of verbal magic”⁶⁹ that could be used as a “key for obtaining access to and enlightenment about historical reality.”⁷⁰ In a similar manner Pramoedya, aware that the court poets—as well as the writers working on the colonial service, including Suradipura—were not able to voice their criticisms directly, reasons that they employed “historical and poetic puzzles”⁷¹ that could be decoded by their future readers.

The similarities in Berg’s and Pramoedya’s understanding of these sources witness the pervasiveness of colonial categories in postcolonial intellectual discourse, even the discourses that are explicitly decolonial. And yet, Pramoedya’s interpretation and retelling of the tales on which his play is based does more than just copy Orientalist methodology. For him, decoding allegories was not merely an intellectual exercise but a self-conscious political act. He presumed that the belief in supernatural objects stifled people’s desire for freedom and ability to resist oppressive powers because it encouraged fatalism and surrender to supernatural forces. By deciphering the true meaning of the code, he sought to educate and liberate his fellow Indonesians. His project seems very different from Suradipura’s who, through a Pramoedyan lens, appears to have promoted this very fatalism that Pramoedya so despised. Nonetheless, like Pramoedya, Suradipura’s version also uses a colonial platform to push back against a historical vision where goodness and virtue are defined by those in power. Where Suradipura promoted pious self-cultivation, Pramoedya demanded political action: It takes no magical spear to fight oppressive powers; it takes human initiative.

Pramoedya especially singled out the stylistic form of *sanepa* as a way in which the court poets spoke their minds. In literature, the *sanepa* is a figure of speech making use of contradictory comparisons,⁷² but in contemporary

69 C.C. Berg, “The Javanese Picture of the Past,” in *An Introduction to Indonesian Historiography*, ed. Soedjatmoko (Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, 2007), 90. I am grateful to Tony Day for pointing out these similarities to me.

70 For example, Berg would use correspondences between numbers to establish relations between different figures across works and time periods. For more on Berg’s historiography, see F. Bosch, “C.C. Berg and Ancient Javanese History,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 112, no. 1 (1956): 1–24. The citation can be found on p. 21.

71 Pramoedya, *Mangir*, xxii.

72 Stuart Robson and Singgih Wibisono, *Javanese-English Dictionary* (Singapore: Periplus, 2002), 649; Edwin Wieringa, “Satan’s Sermon: A Late Nineteenth-Century Javanese Courtier’s Criticism of His Own Class,” in *Transformations of Religions as Reflected in Javanese Texts*, ed. Yumi Sugahara and Willem van der Molen (Tokyo: Research Institute

usage, it also has a wider meaning of indirect critique through allusions, irony, or sarcasm.⁷³ Decoding what the court poets were communicating indirectly, Pramoedya mimics colonial discourse demystifying Javanese history while also mocking it⁷⁴ by putting it in the service of a liberatory agenda. This becomes most visible in the beginning of the third and final act in which Mangir is killed. Here, Pramoedya has a “troubadour” appear on stage who tells what at first glance appears to be the more traditional version of the story:

Beneath Senapati’s foot, the son-in-law
Barukuping no longer has a shaft⁷⁵
With Princess Pĕmbayun, Wanabaya prostrates himself

Senapati Mataram receives the head of his son-in-law
And strikes it down on Watu Gilang below his feet
Smashed
Wanabaya lies sprawled below the throne

In Kotagedhe there is the royal cemetery
Only one grave that is ruptured by the walls
There Wanabaya is buried

From the middle to the feet it is acknowledged that he is the king’s son-
in-law
From the middle to the head he is considered an enemy of Mataram
Stretched out, he escapes
Out of the royal cemetery’s territory

Finished here am I, who tells the story
A warrior was not defeated on the battlefield
Betrayed and killed, he was at his enemy’s feet because he loved

for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2018), 649.

73 Yosep B. Margono-Slamet, “Socio-Political Engagements of Contemporary Javanese Literature,” *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies* 21, no. 3 (2021): 220.

74 I adopt the conceptual language of mimicry and mockery from Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 121–32. See also Day, “Veils of Semu,” 145–48.

75 Pramoedya is alluding to a version according to which the shaft of Barukuping breaks off when Mangir attempts to bring it through the low door leading to the room in the *kraton* where Senapati receives him. With the shaft broken, the spear no longer has magical powers. The spear’s seemingly accidental destruction is, of course, by design.

*Di bawah kaki Panembahan Senapati yang mertua
Baru Klinting tombak pusaka tiada bertangkai lagi
Dengan Putri Pembayun Wanabaya bersembah-bakti.*

*Senapati Mataram sambut kepala menantu
Dihantamkan pada Watu Gilang di bawah kaki
Pecah,
Wanabaya menjelempah di bawah takhta.*

*Di kota Gede adalah kuburan keluarga raja
Hanya satu makam diterjang tengah pagar tembok
Di situ Wanabaya diistirahatkan.*

*Dari pusat ke kaki diakui dia menantu raja
Dari pusat ke kepala dianggap dia musuh Mataram
Membujur sunyi
Di luar wilayah kuburan keluarga raja.*

*Selesai di sini aku punya cerita
Seorang panglima tak terkalahkan di medan-perang
Tertipu tewas di kaki musuh karena cinta.⁷⁶*

The traditional narrative events are related here but are then contrasted with the subsequent third act which contradicts and abrogates this account with a new rendition where Wanabaya arrives at the *kraton* ready to defeat Senapati but is tricked and ultimately overpowered by the king's soldiers. Perhaps giving expression to Pramoedya's critique of the lack of effective resistance against Soeharto in his own time, his version is singular in letting Mangir fight back. Mangir does not die submissively at the king's feet, but standing up and fighting, defending himself and Pembayun and calling Senapati the "king of all liars"⁷⁷—unlike the Indonesian left that died submissively at Soeharto's feet. Perhaps Pramoedya intended this third act with its preface as an extended *sanepa*, a contradictory comparison of two incommensurable versions that aim to teach the spectator how to use the "keys of *sanepa*"⁷⁸ to understand the intentions of the Javanese *babad* writers that are not communicated directly. Senapati should have had no claim on Mangir, first because he never defeated

76 Pramoedya, *Mangir*, 78–79.

77 Pramoedya, *Mangir*, 113.

78 Pramoedya, *Mangir*, xxii.

Mangir in battle but treacherously turned his virtue of love into a vulnerability. And Senapati also should have had no claim on Mangir because Mangir never wanted to be acknowledged by him. He should be uncontainable, escaping even the confines of the royal cemetery.

Moreover, while demystifying the political world with the aim to forward a liberatory view, Pramoedya took his mimicry and mockery further by putting spiritual truth back into the historical project itself. For him, writing about history was a way of “looking back into history to go forward.”⁷⁹ By rewriting the story of Mangir, a “jewel of Javanese literature” not because of its literary form but because of “its historical signification,”⁸⁰ he sought to activate a memory of the past to revitalize the Indonesian nation by animating his people’s historical consciousness to recognize despotism in the past and the present,⁸¹ to not just invoke peace while perpetuating certain forms of oppression as is the case with Islam Nusantara, but to struggle using force if necessary to work toward a better future. This reactivation of the past is not merely a cognitive or intellectual exercise. According to Cheah, Pramoedya’s project in his historical fiction was to “actualize the spiritual truth of history,”⁸² to construct history as a field of potentiality that can disrupt the seeming inevitability of the present. In other words, history, when remembered, can act on the present and bring about a future liberated from the yoke of oppression. Fighting this fight may entail failure and death, as it did for Mangir, and as perhaps it felt to Pramoedya in his Moluccan labor camp. But by fighting this fight, a new struggle for life is introduced into history, to give life to future struggles.

Conclusion

There was something behind all monumental events in both ancient and modern Indonesian history, Pramoedya mused, a “Factor X” that has played a determining role in the shaping of Indonesia.⁸³ Perhaps contemporary proponents of Islam Nusantara would agree, claiming that this “Factor X” is the peaceful history of Islam in Java. Nonetheless, the two accounts of Islam in early Mataram, the political cradle of Javanese Islam, have nothing to do with these contemporary normative notions of a teleology of peace and their

79 Cheah, *Spectral Nationality*, 253.

80 Pramoedya, *Mangir*, xxi.

81 Cheah, *Spectral Nationality*, 261; Florida, *Writing the Past*, 392–93.

82 Cheah, *Spectral Nationality*, 260.

83 Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *The Mute’s Soliloquy: A Memoir* (New York: Hyperion East, 1999), 3.

alignment with global political visions of what a “good” Muslim looks like. For both authors, the cultivation of Islamic virtue and the pursuit of justice sometimes did entail violence. Suradipura did not reject violence because even violence may be part of God’s plan. This simultaneously meant denying that surrender to the Dutch was ultimately about legitimating the Dutch; instead, it was about the cultivation of a virtuous self that was actively working toward whatever future God had ordained. Pramoedya went a step further still by inscribing into Indonesia’s history a teleology of his own, a teleology not of peace but of struggle, a struggle against the “Factor X” that was oppression in its different guises.

I have argued that the Mangir narrative offered both authors a productive canvas for processing and giving meaning to their own respective experiences of violence at the hands of those in power. Yet neither of the two stories is purely oppositional to those powers. Suradipura wrote a version of the Mangir story that may have been legible to some, including his colonial censors, as an endorsement of Mataram and, perhaps by extension, of the colonial government that published his work. Pramoedya, writing from the vantage point of explicit critique and opposition, appropriated the same “traditional” categories he himself thought were stifling the political maturity of the Indonesian people to make sense of Javanese history. Like Mangir’s grave, the two authors are both inside and outside of given power structures, uncontainable even for those who seek to claim them. Their ambiguous positionalities are also reflected in the style they chose to tell the story—Suradipura claiming fidelity to his *babad* sources, but transposing them into prose, and Pramoedya translating the Javanese story into Indonesian. Between power and resistance, between languages and cultures, they inhabited what Bhabha has called a hybrid “third space” that disrupts teleological visions of history and allows new readings and new memories to emerge,⁸⁴ in hopeful anticipation of a future that is yet to be born.

For its part, NU’s program of Islam Nusantara disavows violence and struggle as a formative and virtuous practice, rendering the Mangir narrative incompatible with its preferred telling of the history of Javanese Islam. While this shows NU’s commitment to a moderate and peaceful Islam, it is also limiting as it leaves little room to inhabit the ambiguities of such a third space, making narrative and theological sense of being both inside and out, of experiences of and struggles against violence, as well as the inherent limitations of such a

84 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 53–56, and Tony Day, “Between Eating and Shitting: Figures of Intimacy, Storytelling and Isolation in Some Early Tales by Pramoedya Ananta Toer,” in *Clearing a Space: Postcolonial Readings of Modern Indonesian Literature*, ed. Tony Day (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 213–36.

peaceful vision. It is unlikely that NU's leadership could ever wholeheartedly embrace this aspect of the Mangir story. But cognizant of the limitations of human moral and theological reasoning, perhaps they too could put a story they can neither fully accept nor fully reject to productive use in articulating their vision against the background of their complex positionalities in the contemporary world.

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