

CRITIQUE OF THE SUBORDINATION OF RELIGION BY THE JAVANESE STATE IN *HIKAYAT MARESKALEK*

KRITIK TERHADAP SUBORDINASI AGAMA OLEH NEGARA JAWA DALAM HIKAYAT
MARESKALEK

Riqko Nur Ardi WINDAYANTO

Philological Studies, Department of Literature, Faculty of Humanities,
Universitas Indonesia, Prof. Dr. Selo Soemardjan Street, Pondok Cina, Beji, Depok City, WestJava 16424,
Indonesia
riqko.nur@ui.ac.id

Received: 26th March 2025

Accepted: 18th October 2025

ABSTRACT

This study discusses the critique of the subordination of the state's subordination of religion in Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Misri's *Hikayat Mareskalek*, revealed through the interpretation of the episode depicting the encounter between Mareskalek and Susuhunan Kalijaga. This topic is examined due to its relevance to the relationship between the state and religion, offering insights into the author's ideas underlying the critique. The study addresses two main issues: the meaning of the encounter between the two characters and the implications of the critique embedded in it. This study aims to generate knowledge about the state-religion relationship as a critical reflection on the role of religion in the formation of the nation-state. Methodologically, this study applies Mieke Bal's narratology theory (particularly the concept of actor opposition) and hermeneutic interpretation to address the first issue, while dialectical analysis is used to examine the critical context pertaining to the second issue. This study shows that the encounter between the two characters builds an oppositional relationship that symbolically critiques the Javanese state (the Mataram–Surakarta Sultanate), which subordinated Islam to political power by transforming the title *susuhunan* from a spiritual saint (*wali*) to a royal title. al-Misri emphasizes the importance of state and the religion being equal in status, and the role of religious scholars (*ulama*) as a central consultive authority, based on Wahhabi thought in the 19th century. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that *Hikayat Mareskalek* is not merely a work of fiction, but a piece that offers political ideas as a critical reflection relevant to contemporary debates on the relationship between the state and religion.

Keywords: religion-state; *Hikayat Mareskalek*; Java; Malay literature; subordination

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini membincangkan kritikan terhadap subordinasi agama oleh negara dalam *Hikayat Mareskalek* karya Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Misri yang diungkap melalui penafsiran episod pertemuan antara Mareskalek dan Susuhunan Kalijaga. Topik ini dikaji kerana berkaitan dengan hubungan antara negara dan agama, serta memperlihatkan gagasan pengarang yang mendasari kritikan tersebut. Berdasarkan pertimbangan itu, kajian ini menjawab dua persoalan utama, iaitu makna pertemuan kedua-dua tokoh dan implikasi kritikan yang terkandung di dalamnya. Tujuan kajian ini ialah untuk menghasilkan pengetahuan baru tentang hubungan antara negara dan agama sebagai refleksi kritikal dalam menilai peranan agama dalam pembentukan negara-bangsa. Dari segi metodologi, kajian ini menggunakan teori naratologi, khususnya konsep oposisi watak oleh Mieke Bal, serta tafsiran hermeneutik untuk menjawab persoalan pertama, manakala analisis dialektik digunakan untuk meneliti konteks kritikan bagi menjawab persoalan kedua. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa pertemuan kedua-dua tokoh membentuk hubungan oposisi yang secara simbolik mengkritik negara Jawa (Kesultanan Mataram—Surakarta) yang telah menundukkan Islam demi kepentingan kekuasaan melalui transformasi gelaran *susuhunan* daripada gelaran wali menjadi gelaran raja. Al-Misri menekankan kepentingan agar negara dan agama berada pada kedudukan yang setara serta peranan ulama sebagai pihak berautoriti dalam konsultasi politik, berasaskan pemikiran Wahabi abad ke-19. Berdasarkan penemuan ini, dapat disimpulkan bahawa *Hikayat Mareskalek* bukan sekadar karya fiksiyen, tetapi sebuah buku teks yang menawarkan gagasan politik sebagai refleksi kritikal yang relevan dengan perbahasan kontemporari mengenai hubungan antara negara dan agama.

Kata kunci: agama-negara; *Hikayat Mareskalek*; Jawa; kesusasteraan Melayu; subordinasi

Introduction

In mid-2024, a national controversy arose when the Indonesian government enacted Government Regulation (PP) No. 25 of 2024. This regulation governs the granting of mining concessions to religious mass organizations. For Islamic organizations, the concessions were granted to Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. However, this policy was perceived as a political tool for the government to control and co-opt religious groups and organizations, ensuring they would not become oppositional or critical of state policies (Irawan, 2024; Pandu, 2024). This event demonstrates that religion has been positioned under the state to serve its interests and power, resulting in subordination. Yet, this phenomenon is not new in Indonesian history. Tracing back to the 19th century, religious subordination had already occurred in Java during the Mataram Sultanate. Islam was subordinated through both coercive (violent) and hegemonic (marital and political disempowerment) means (Moertono, 2017, pp. 46–48). This subordination later prompted criticism from Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Misri, articulated in his fictional work *Hikayat Mareskalek*.

Hikayat Mareskalek has been widely studied across diverse topics, including the Great Post Road Anyer–Panarukan (Nas & Pratiwo, 2002), power and statehood (Alatas, 2009), the formulation of political theory (Chambert-Loir, 2009), authorship and al-Misri's identity (Mandal, 2013, 2018), socio-political contexts (Windayanto, 2021), al-Misri's position and strategy in the Malay literary arena (Upartini, 2023), as well as the prophetism (Soleh, 2023). Meanwhile, the relationship between the state and religion within Javanese power structures has been discussed by Ricklefs (1992) and Moertono (2017). Based on a synthesis of previous studies, it appears that scholars of *Hikayat Mareskalek* have not specifically examined the issue of religious subordination by the state. A brief mention exists in Alatas (2009), but it does not include further analysis of how the author's critique of this issue is constructed or which political ideas underpin it. Similarly, Ricklefs and Moertono discuss the state–religion relationship within the frameworks of Javanese historiography and philology. Therefore, this study offers a new contribution by analyzing the critique of religious subordination by the Javanese state within a Malay text and from the perspective of a Malay author. It not only reveals the critique itself but also elaborates on the political thought that shaped it.

Hikayat Mareskalek narrates the leadership of Mareskalek (referring to Herman Willem Daendels) in 19th century Java. His leadership concerns issues of development, the native population, the state, and power in Java. The text is significant as a corpus as it contains a noteworthy episode: Mareskalek's encounter with Susuhunan Kalijaga in a dream. In this dream, the *wali* (saint) rebukes Mareskalek for his arrogance in calling himself *susuhunan*. Realizing his pride, Mareskalek remarks that the Susuhunan of Solo (Surakarta) is a proud ruler who will fall if he continues to use that title. Although minor within the overall story, this episode highlights that the term *susuhunan* carries meanings related to specific discourses of power, making it a potentially rich subject of study. This interpretation is supported by historians who argue that the use of the *susuhunan* title by the Islamic Mataram dynasty—particularly Surakarta—illustrates the subordination of religion by the state, whereby Islamic religious centers and scholars lost their authority (see de Graaf, 1953; Ricklefs, 1992; Ichwan, 2005; Nguitragool, 2012; Moertono, 2017). The topic of state–religion subordination also merits investigation, as it provides insight into state formation. As Day (2002, p. 2) notes, state formation is an ongoing process that has continued since the era of traditional Indonesia. Thus, discussing this topic within *Hikayat Mareskalek*, a text from that traditional era, remains relevant to the present context.

In *Hikayat Mareskalek*, the title *susuhunan* is associated with two figures: the king or sultan as the representative of the state (within Javanese political power) and Susuhunan Kalijaga as the

representative of religion. This study refers to Geertz (1980, p. 4), who defines the state as a “kingdom”—or a sultanate in the context of Islamic-era Java. Meanwhile, Mareskalek’s criticism of the Susuhunan of Solo represents al-Misri’s critique of the state’s subordination of religion. This is evident in the ruler of Solo’s use of the *susuhunan* title. Hence, this and the preceding discussion imply that the seemingly minor episode of Mareskalek’s encountering with Susuhunan Kalijaga—arising as a conflict over the use of the *susuhunan* title—constitutes a significant issue concerning the relationship between the state and religion. In this relationship, religion is incorporated into the state merely to support and legitimize its power, but it possesses no substantial authority or autonomy.

Based on a preliminary reading of *Hikayat Mareskalek* and related literature, this study assumes that Mareskalek’s dream encounter with Susuhunan Kalijaga implies al-Misri’s critique of the Javanese state, which integrates religion solely for political purposes. This critique is implied through al-Misri’s use of the Mareskalek character, who emphasizes that the Susuhunan of Solo will perish if he continues to bear that title. This assumption leads to the formulation of the main research question: How does al-Misri critique the subordination of religion by the state as implied narratively through Mareskalek’s encounter with Susuhunan Kalijaga? This question is divided into two sub-questions: (1) what is the meaning of the encounter between Mareskalek and Susuhunan Kalijaga in *Hikayat Mareskalek*? and (2) how does al-Misri’s critique of religious subordination by the state emerge from the meaning of that encounter?

Methodology

This study interprets the text *Hikayat Mareskalek* Cod. Or. 1724, which was previously edited and published by Zaini-Lajoubert (2008). In this context, *Hikayat Mareskalek* serves as the primary source of data, while the main data consist of the narrative episodes depicting Mareskalek’s encounter with Susuhunan Kalijaga. The data were collected using the read-and-note technique. The validity of the data was ensured by including textual quotations as evidence supporting the analysis.

To answer these questions, this study employs Mieke Bal’s (2017) narratology framework, focusing on the element of “actors” within the fabula as the main analytical tool. This theory was chosen because it offers analytical concepts aligned with the research problem. Moreover, Bal’s theory has a broad analytical scope, encompassing both textual and cultural dimensions. As Bal (2017, p. xx) explains, narratology is a narrative perspective on culture, and her theory allows narratives to be understood as expressions of culture—what she calls “cultural analysis”. Bal (2017, p. 176) also argues that the actors in a fabula can be classified in oppositional pairs, revealing psychological and ideological relations between them. This theory is first applied to textual analysis to address the first research question. Subsequently, the meanings uncovered serve as the basis for a cultural analysis to reveal al-Misri’s critique and the political thought underlying it, answering the second research question.

The analysis was then conducted through interpretative methods to construct oppositions between actors and to uncover the psychological and ideological relations underlying these oppositions, as articulated in narratology theory. The data were interpreted within the theoretical framework and by comprehending the story as a whole, allowing textual data to be understood in their proper context. This stage of analysis produced findings relevant to the first question. To answer the second question, supplementary data were obtained from prior studies discussing the life of al-Misri, the production of *hikayat*, and the political, power, and state structures of 19th-century Java. The analysis involved examining the dialectical relationship between text and its context and comparing the findings with those of earlier studies. The analytical technique employed was hermeneutic analysis. In hermeneutics, interpretation is not only possible but must be justified as more plausible than alternative interpretations (Ricoeur, 2021, p. 383). Guided by the principle of “the

more plausible interpretation,” hermeneutics provides a sound methodological foundation for applying the cultural analysis emphasized in narratology theory. Finally, the results of the analysis are presented, followed by the conclusions.

Result And Discussions

The Meaning of the Encounter between Mareskalek and Susuhunan Kalijaga

Hikayat Mareskalek begins with Mareskalek’s arrival aboard a merchant ship that docks in Banten, after which he continues his journey to Batavia to assume leadership over the island of Java on behalf of the *Negeri di Bawah Angin*. His arrival and the succession of power are described by the narrator as the divine decree (*kodrat Allah*) descending from the heavens. The narrator also states, “*Maka sesungguhnya perintah Allah kerasnya Allah taala itu di atas orang kulit putih yang di tanah Jawa berlaku pada masa itu*” (Zaini-Lajoubert, 2008, p. 46). This statement emphasizes that Mareskalek’s coming is a divine decree, predetermined and unchangeable. For this reason, according to the narrator, Mareskalek is portrayed positively (see Zaini-Lajoubert, 2008, p. 50).

Mareskalek’s positive image is evident through various policies he implements in Java. His policies reflect a visionary outlook, as he commands the native population to work on clearing the mountains to build a road. Through this road, the towns and rural areas of Java become more vibrant and prosperous due to improved accessibility. In contrast, the natives are depicted as ignorant, lazy, and narrow-minded. Within the text, it is recounted that Mareskalek decides to call himself *Tuan Susuhunan Kanjeng Sinuhun Mangkurat Mangkubuwana*, believing that he holds the highest rank among all kings in Java. As a consequence of this decision, he then experiences the following event.

Maka ada suatu malam, Mareskalek melihat dalam tidurnya datang kepadanya Susuhunan Kalijaga almarhum wali Allah taala. Maka kepada tangannya suatu tongkat besi, beratnya lima puluh kati pada penglihat mata kepala. Maka berkata almarhum itu, “Aduh Mareskalek, takabur sungguh engkau ini bernama Susuhunan, nama wali Allah taala, aku inilah Susuhunan Kalijaga belum lagi kami wali Allah itu mati dan tiada pula mati kami seperti mati orang yang fasik durhaka kepada Allah taala itu”

(Transliterated by Zaini- Lajoubert, 2008, p. 62).

The phrase *takabur sungguh* (“truly arrogant”) in the excerpt above illustrates that Mareskalek’s arrogance—his decision to name himself *susuhunan*—is being problematized. The use of this title originates from Mareskalek’s experience in the realm of reality, which is then interpreted in the dream world as the reason for the appearance of Susuhunan Kalijaga, who comes to admonish his arrogance. While in the real world such arrogance is perceived as normal and even part of Mareskalek’s positive portrayal, in the dream world his arrogance is condemned. This is reflected in the fearful and tense atmosphere of the encounter, marked by the appearance of Susuhunan Kalijaga wielding an enormous iron staff, symbolizing divine authority. He rebukes Mareskalek, who then appears diminished, submissive, and powerless before the saint. This interpretation is reinforced by Mareskalek’s condition upon waking: his body feels weak, his face pale, and fear continues to stir within his heart. As a result of this dream, and after learning the identity and miraculous nature of Susuhunan Kalijaga, Mareskalek reflects upon the matter, as shown in the following excerpt.

...dan berkata di dalam hati Mareskalek, “Barangkali tongkat Susuhunan Kalijaga itu asā Muṣa alaihi ‘l-salām yang disebutkan di dalam Qur’an Muhammad anak Abdullah tongkat mukjizat sangat heran dijadikan Allah tongkat itu membelah laut dan gunung menjadi /67/ ular”.

(Transliterated by Zaini-Lajoubert, 2008, p. 63).

According to Mareskalek, Susuhunan Kalijaga resembles the Prophet Moses. If the prophet's staff can split mountains and transform into a snake, the saint's staff can split Mount Renggat Telaga Urang—a miracle that Mareskalek will witness during his pilgrimage to Gresik. This understanding is inseparable from the dream world. Alatas (2019, p. 6) asserts that dreams facilitate creative dialogical exchanges between the dreamer and other ontologically distinct entities. The ontological natures of Mareskalek and Susuhunan Kalijaga are clearly different. The dream serves as an imaginary space that enables a dialogical exchange within Mareskalek, allowing him to creatively equate the saint with the prophet. As Ricci (2023, p. 149) observes, the parallelism and connection between a saint and a prophet form part of Javanese-Islamic pedagogy. Through the dream, therefore, Mareskalek is portrayed as a figure who deeply understands this pedagogy.

This understanding is concretely manifested in his decision to undertake a pilgrimage to the east (*tanah wetan*), visiting the tombs of the saints, including that of Susuhunan Kalijaga. After a long pilgrimage, Mareskalek returns to Batavia. One night, he dreams again of Susuhunan Kalijaga. The tone of this encounter is neither tense nor frightening, but rather calm and reflective. Susuhunan merely reminded Mareskalek that *“burung yang terbang sangat tinggi itu ke bawah juga akhirnya dan matahari yang sangat tinggi itu turun juga nanti, tiada boleh naik lagi”* (see Zaini-Lajoubert, 2008, p. 65). Mareskalek wakes from the dream and understands the metaphor: his tenure in Java will come to an end, just as a bird descends after flying high and the sun sets after rising.

Unlike the first dream, the second dream is didactic and prescriptive. It provides a sign that Mareskalek's real-world experience as a leader in Java will soon end. In this regard, the dream does not cause the collapse of Mareskalek's position and power, but merely signals impending events. These events include the arrival of General Janssens from *Wolanda* (the Netherlands), coming aboard a warship to assume authority, prompting Mareskalek to board a ship and depart. This sequence confirms that, after two encounters with Susuhunan Kalijaga and Mareskalek's departure from Java, colonialism continues unabated.

Therefore, this study argues that the encounter between the two figures is not related to resistance against colonialism. This contrasts with Windayanto (2021, p. 277), who contends that Susuhunan Kalijaga's appearance in the dream represents imaginative resistance against colonialism. That view is based on the fact that Mareskalek is admonished for his arrogance and that his power ends in the dream. However, this interpretation is reductive, as it overlooks subsequent events in the story, which portray Mareskalek very positively: he understands Javanese-Islamic pedagogy, practices Islam, shares goodness, and venerates the saints. These facts indirectly affirm and strengthen his positive image in the text, as “promised” by the narrator at the beginning. The admonition does not degrade or dismantle Mareskalek's position but rather serves as a “gateway” to reaffirm his positive characterization. Through this encounter, Mareskalek even receives guidance to criticize Susuhunan Solo, as shown in the following excerpt.

“Maka Mareskalek pun mangkin bertambah takutnya lalu berkata Mareskalek, “Tiada patut yang lain daripada wali Allah sembilan orang ini bernama Susuhunan. Maka tiada rela aku dipanggil orang akan Susuhunan. Maka sesungguhnya Susuhunan Solo jikalau tiada berhenti ia daripada menamakan dirinya Susuhunan, tiada boleh kekal kerajaan itu melainkan binasa ia tiada Susuhunan lagi di dalam negeri Solo ini”.

(Transliterated by Zaini-Lajoubert, 2008, pp. 64—65).

Mareskalek realizes that no one was truly worthy of using the title *susuhunan* except for the nine saints. Consequently, he remarks that Susuhunan Solo cannot maintain his kingdom (which would eventually collapse) if he continues to use the title. This study argues that the encounter between

Susuhunan Kalijaga and Mareskalek is structurally more than a mere narrative conflict. The admonition further extends to another figure who does not appear in the story but is mentioned through Mareskalek's focalization: Susuhunan Solo. The excerpt above also emphasizes that the issue between Mareskalek and Susuhunan Kalijaga—and, by extension, the critique of Susuhunan Solo—is fundamentally about the use of the title *susuhunan*.

Based on the discussion of the context of the encounter between Mareskalek and Susuhunan Kalijaga, this study underscores that their relationship is formed as an opposition. As Bal (2017, p. 176) explains, examining oppositional relations among actors allows for the disclosure of ideological connections between them. The opposition between the two characters is linked by the issue of Mareskalek's use of the *susuhunan* title, which Kalijaga considers an act of arrogance. The title *susuhunan* functions as a key term that psychologically and ideologically represents the principle of propriety—who is entitled or not entitled to bear the title. Kalijaga is a figure deserving of the title, whereas Mareskalek, unworthy yet assuming it, is deemed arrogant. Within this opposition, Mareskalek recognizes his arrogance and decides to relinquish the title.

Mareskalek's decision has direct implications for the oppositional relationship. The relationship between Mareskalek and Susuhunan Kalijaga is not one of mutual negation or absolute contradiction; rather, it is a complementary one. This is evident from the narrative, where Mareskalek is further constructed as a positive figure and is able to issue criticism toward Susuhunan Solo. This underscores that the opposition between them is interconnected. Moreover, the critique of Susuhunan Solo is noteworthy, since Susuhunan Solo never appears in the story and is represented solely through focalization. The critique emphasizes that Susuhunan Solo is ideologically unfit and undeserving of the title once reserved for the saints. Violating this principle of propriety constitutes arrogance, which will inevitably bring misfortune, ultimately leading to the collapse of his power.

To clarify why the title *susuhunan* becomes problematic in the story, it is necessary first to explain why the title is associated with Susuhunan Kalijaga and applied to Susuhunan Solo. There is no evidence that al-Misri personally knew Susuhunan Kalijaga in historically. More crucial is the reason he selected Kalijaga among the nine saints as a key figure toward the end of the story. This study argues that Kalijaga was chosen because of his historically significant role in the spread of Islam in Java and his extensive textual recognition in various Nusantara literary traditions. In local historiography, the nine saints islamized the island of Java, with their stories widely known through oral and written traditions (Feener, 1998, p. 575). Among them, Susuhunan Kalijaga was the most prominent (Meyer, 2021a, p. 137). This was linked to his success in spreading Islam, including in Majapahit, effectively making Islam's triumph associated with Susuhunan Kalijaga (Drewes, 1968, p. 209). In literature, Susuhunan Kalijaga's renown extends beyond Javanese literature into broader Southeast Asian Islamic literary traditions as he disseminated Islam through Javanese cultural and aesthetic institutions (Meyer, 2021b, p. 676). These scholarly views indicate that Susuhunan Kalijaga is a key figure in the discourse of Islam in Java and in connection with Javanese Islamic courts, making him an appropriate choice for inclusion in *Hikayat Mareskalek*.

The title *susuhunan* carries both linguistic and political significance in relation to the history of Islamic sultanates in Java. Ricklefs (2001, p. 49) notes that the term *susuhunan* is often abbreviated as *sunan*, viewing the two as synonymous in structural linguistic terms. He observes semantic similarity without explaining the implications. Moertono (2017, p. 50) emphasizes that *susuhunan* conveys a higher degree of respect than *sunan*, incorporating the reduplication of the syllable *su* with the insertion of *hu*, which highlights an inherent dimension of authority. According to Florida (1995, p. 95), the title *susuhunan*, in its various forms (*sunan*, *sinuhun*, and *susunan*), was initially restricted to the saints and later used exclusively by rulers in the Surakarta Court after the Mataram division in the 18th century.

Indeed, prior to the 18th century, *susuhunan* appeared in two Middle Javanese texts, *Kidung Sunda* and *Kidung Harsawijaya* (Berg, 1927, p. 13; 1931, p. 157). In other words, the term predates the saint's era and has a longer historical trajectory than Florida suggests. Nevertheless, the meaning of a word is neither fixed nor constant, and interpretation must consider the temporal and spatial context. In *Hikayat Mareskalek*, *susuhunan* should be understood in the context of the time of writing (between 1813 and 1816) and the life of al-Misri (late 18th to early 19th century). By then, the title had shifted from the saints to become the exclusive right of the Surakarta rulers. Within this context, and without disregarding its earlier usage in Middle Javanese vocabulary, this study argues that the appearance of the *susuhunan* title in reference to Susuhunan Solo in the Malay text is intended to highlight and critique the Surakarta rulers, who exclusively claimed the title previously held by the saints. This shift reflects a transformation in meaning—from a religious title to a sovereign title.

Considering the significance of the *susuhunan* title, this study underscores that the encounter between Mareskalek and Susuhunan Kalijaga symbolizes a meta-narrative critique by al-Misri of the Javanese state, represented in the text by Susuhunan Solo. The state is criticized for subordinating religion to political authority, symbolically represented by the appropriation of the *susuhunan* title, once reserved for the saints. Contrary to Windayanto (2021, p. 277), this study proposes an alternative finding: the encountering of Mareskalek and Susuhunan Kalijaga is not the author's critique of colonialism, but a critique of the Javanese state. Textual-narratological analysis, focusing on the oppositional relationship between actors, reveals that Mareskalek and Susuhunan Kalijaga are indeed oppositional, but the author's objective is achieved through this opposition—not as negation, but as complementary. Their encounter in the dream world implies al-Misri's critique of Javanese authority in the relationship between state and religion: a state that subordinates and dominates religious authority through the appropriation of the title.

Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Misri's Critique of the Subordination of Religion

The first subsection presents the preliminary finding that al-Misri's critique is directed at the fact that religion occupies a subordinate position. This relationship is represented by Susuhunan Solo (the state) appropriating the title *susuhunan* (an act of subordination) from Susuhunan Kalijaga and the other saints (religion). The second subsection aims to elaborate further on the critique articulated by al-Misri. This discussion also situates the critique within its historical and political context, as criticism does not arise in isolation. In addition, it introduces an alternative vision that al-Misri intended to convey through his writing of *Hikayat Mareskalek* and explains the political philosophy underlying it. This study argues that al-Misri criticizes the imbalance in the relationship between the state and religion. According to him, the state and religion should be positioned on an equal footing in the governance of Java. To substantiate this argument, Benedict Anderson's concept of Javanese power must first be considered.

Anderson (2000, p. 47) posits that one formulation of power in the Javanese worldview is that power is a concrete and real force. Power is an existential reality, an unseen and mysterious force that sustains the cosmos. Within the Javanese conception, what matters most is the accumulation of power through the signs of authority sought both by those who wield power and by the the society over which they rule (Anderson, 2000, pp. 50, 59). Regarding the issue of the *susuhunan* title, the title was employed by Sultan Agung in 1624 after the conquest of Madura (Ricklefs, 2001, p. 51). At that time, Sultan Agung and Susuhunan Kalijaga held equal status. This equality is reflected in a traditional Javanese text, *Sĕrat Nitik Sultan Agung*, in which Susuhunan Kalijaga and Sultan Agung both propagate Islam in Java and become patrons of the performing arts; In this text, Sunan Kalijaga serves as a strong supporter, advisor, and spiritual mentor to the Mataram king, while also attending to issues of welfare (Bogaerts, 2023, pp. 216–217). This demonstrates that religious authority and state power were

intended to operate side by side. However, the political configuration shifted over the course of history. The saints then came to be regarded as potential threats to state power. This aligns with Ricklefs' observation (1992, p. 663):

"A central problem in both the political and the intellectual history of Java is the disparity between the ideal of a unified state and the historical reality of fragmented power and authority, between image and the reality of pre-colonial Javanese political history".

In the Javanese political concept, the state envisages power and authority to be centralized solely in the king. However, in the broader political arena, other sources of power and authority emerged distributive, disrupting the ideal vision of the state. One such authority is Islamic religious leaders. According to Ricklefs (1992, p. 663), the emergence of several religious authorities caused the political history of 18th-century Java to become fragmented. To realize the ideal vision of the state, the state sought to eliminate the power and authority of Islam. Indeed, until the 16th century, the saints played a significant role in state policy formulation, indicating the influence of Islam in political leadership (Nguitragool, 2012, p. 734). Likewise, the *ulama* were crucial in the political processes that shaped precolonial and colonial Indonesia (Ichwan, 2005, p. 45).

However, these roles gradually declined as Islamic leaders were increasingly marginalized by the state. Moertono (2017, pp. 46–48) explains that the Mataram Dynasty actively exercised hegemony—both coercive and consensual—over Islamic religious centers, including: (1) conquering the Giri forces, (2) bringing Cirebon under Mataram supremacy through marriage, (3) stripping the power of Adilangu, Demak, namely the title of Susuhunan Kalijaga, which persisted for the first five generations, later changed by the kings of Surakarta to Panembahan Natapraja, and (4) destroying the Islamic center in Kajoran. Among these four hegemonic practices, the stripping of Susuhunan Kalijaga's power is reflected in the *Hikayat Mareskalek*. While it is true that this *hikayat* is a literary work and its story is based on the leadership of Daendels rather than the stripping of power in Adilangu, the act of stripping power is narratively depicted the encounter between Mareskalek and Susuhunan Kalijaga, and symbolically through the use of the title *susuhunan* by the Susuhunan of Solo. According to de Graaf (1953, p. 77), the title *susuhunan* signifies that its bearer is adorned with the highest sacred title and is a divine envoy, thereby reviving the conception of divine kingship in Javanese Hindu society. This aligns with Lombard's view (2005, p. 344), who states that the appropriation of Islam was intended to assimilate it into the state so that Islam would conform to the cult of the state and the king as the axis of the world.

This study argues that in *Hikayat Mareskalek*, the use of the title *susuhunan* signifies the state's domination and conquest over Islamic power and actors. Their existence and authority were appropriated, seized, and stripped away by the state. Symbolically, the use of this title represents the accumulation of power by displacing the saints' title as the royal title to position religion under state control. This simultaneously demonstrates that secular power undermined and seized religious power in Java, subordinating religion. This was aimed at realizing the ideal vision of a centralized state without fragmentation. The king stood as the cosmic center and divine representation on earth, possessing power and authority that could not be challenged or rivaled. Such a position necessitated the suppression of any religion that could potentially threaten it.

Regarding the destruction of Islamic centers, Moertono (2017, p. 48) describes it as the formation of a secularized Mataram power. This study partially disagrees because, although Islamic centers were physically and culturally dominated, Islam was not completely eliminated. Islam was merely co-opted to legitimize the king's position. Therefore, it is important to examine the nature of the state-religion relationship. Theoretically, there are three characteristics of this relationship: separation, unification, and recognition (Weithman in Ropi, 2017, p. 15). In the Mataram-Islam context,

the state and religion each possessed their own power and authority. Concerned about religion, the state intervened and exercised hegemony to seize Islamic authority and merge it with state power, thereby strengthening the state. The result was unification. Weithman (in Ropi, 2017, p. 16) notes that unification refers to the condition in which the state and religion overlap without distinction. However, in the Mataram Dynasty context, the condition was specific: religion was not given autonomous space, so no true overlap occurred. At the same time, religious elements, such as the title *susuhunan*, were used to reinforce the king's position. In other words, this unification did not place the state and religion on equal footing.

Considering the historical context presented by Ricklefs, Moertono, and de Graaf, this study posits that *Hikayat Mareskalek* articulates a critique of the unification of state and religion, which merges religion solely for political and power purposes rather than giving it equal standing. This critique was not aimed solely at the Susuhunan of Solo. Given that Mataram hegemony had been ongoing since Sultan Agung's reign over the saint descendants for several generations, the encounter between Mareskalek and Susuhunan Kalijaga, and the issue of using the title *susuhunan* together imply a critique directed discursively and broadly at the Mataram Dynasty, culminating with its successor, Surakarta, regarding their treatment of various once-revered Islamic centers. In the *hikayat*, this is represented by Mareskalek's warning that one day the Solo Sultanate would collapse, and its king perish if he insisted on retaining the title. Furthermore, this critique defends not only Susuhunan Kalijaga but also other saints and their descendants across generations.

This study concludes that al-Misri envisioned a state-religion relationship, between the Javanese sultanate and Islam, based on unification. In this context, unification refers to a theocratic model in which the state and religion are integrated (Ropi, 2017, p. 17). Importantly, in this model, religion is not merely a tool to legitimize royal power and politics. Religion is integrated into the state as a basis for policy making, law, and politics. Religious leaders are scholarly authorities who should serve as sources of guidance and advice. At the same time, religion itself retains an authority that must be acknowledged.

In *Hikayat Mareskalek*, the importance of religious leaders is implicitly evident in the excerpt on pages 52–53, namely "*memeriksa kepada orang yang tahu*". Additionally, the first subsection notes that the saints in the Nusantara and prophets in the Occidental lands (Arabia) are interconnected, forming a parallel Javanese-Islamic pedagogy. This is supported by Ricci (2023, p. 149), who analyzes *Sĕrat Ambiya* and finds that Susuhunan Kalijaga's role in establishing the first mosque in Demak paralleled Prophet Ibrahim's role in founding the first mosque in Mecca. The parallel highlights the vital role of religious leaders in the life of Javanese Muslim society, bridging the community with prophets who spread Islam in Arabia. Consequently, as a figure pedagogically linked to the Prophet, Susuhunan Kalijaga holds an important position in the exercise of power and governance in Java. This aligns with Alatas (2009, pp. 429–431), who states that in al-Misri's worldview, the *ulama* should be an independent group and a consultative center for state administrators to ensure justice. This is the alternative vision proposed by al-Misri.

Finally, how can we trace the intellectual or ideological foundation underlying al-Misri's alternative perspective in writing *Hikayat Mareskalek*? Chambert-Loir (2009, pp. 243–244) notes that al-Misri was a 19th-century author from a foreign tradition influenced by Islamic (Arab and Persian) literary traditions, producing writings that reflected observations of political life and changing times. This tradition differs from authors influenced by Western education (Chambert-Loir, 2009, p. 243). Based on Chambert-Loir's view, understanding al-Misri's alternative thinking requires tracing Islamic, rather than Western, political thought.

By elaborating on the alternative context behind *Hikayat Mareskalek* and supported by Alatas (2009), this study argues that al-Misri was influenced by Wahhabi ideas. Islamic expression in Indonesia, even during the colonial period, was interconnected with transnational Islamic networks and ideas (Hasan, 2010, p. 676). Franklin (2020, p. 579) reinforces that Mecca was the source of the Wahhabi movement, driving Islamic reform, including among Muslims in the Dutch East Indies (reformist Muslims). Franklin's observation shows that by the early 19th century, when the *hikayat* was written, Wahhabism had already developed as a school of Islamic thought that influenced al-Misri. Politically, this perspective views the state and religion as requiring total unification: ulama as holders of jurisprudential authority, and *umara* as political leaders who consult with the ulama to exercise state hegemony (Al-Atawneh, 2016, p. 180).

Al-Atawneh's view connects to the findings on state-religion unification, placing state and religion on equal footing. Thus, the second subsection's analysis confirms that *Hikayat Mareskalek* is not merely a literary work existing within a fictional world. It is grounded in the historical reality of Herman Willem Daendels' leadership under Dutch-French rule. Through this historical reality, al-Misri crafted a narrative that articulates a critique of Javanese state-religion unification, which subordinates religion merely as a support for power. For him, state and religion must be equal as governance requires religion, a principle conceptualized in Wahhabism thought. The critique, alternative scenario, and the school of thought underlying al-Misri's perspective collectively demonstrate that the *hikayat* is not ordinary fiction but a literary work offering a political idea of an equal and interdependent relationship between state and religion.

Conclusion

Based on an analysis of a minor episode in *Hikayat Mareskalek*—namely, the encounter between General Mareskalek and the Susuhunan Kalijaga through the realm of dreams—this study ultimately highlights that the meeting between a colonial figure and a Islamic saint is not merely a structural element involving two characters within a certain setting that shapes the emergence of conflict. More importantly, the encounter constitutes a narrative construction built upon complementary oppositional relations that serve a symbolic role: to articulate al-Misri's critique of the Javanese state (the Mataram–Surakarta Dynasty) for subordinating religion (Islam). This critique is expressed through a narrative strategy that problematizes the use of the title *susuhunan* within the story. By situating this symbolic critique in a historical and political context, the study also concludes that *Hikayat Mareskalek* was written not merely as a work of fiction but as a textual form of resistance opposing the idea of unification—namely, the subordination of Islam to the state for the sake of political power. Conversely, through this *hikayat*, the author emphasizes that Islam should be treated as an equal partner to the state, and that the ulama should serve as a central consultative authority for political rulers (kings or sultans), in line with Wahhabi thought.

References

- Al-Atawneh, M. (2016). Reviewed work(s): *Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab* by Michael Crawford. *Bustan: The Middle East Book Review*, 7(2), 180–182.
- Alatas, I. F. (2009). Disrupting spatiality and temporality: Authority and statecraft in *Hikayat Mareskalek*. *Studia Islamika*, 16(3), 415–438. <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v16i3.523>
- Alatas, I. F. (2019). Dreaming saints: Exploratory authority and Islamic praxes of history in Central Java. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 25(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.13025>

- Anderson, B. R. O'.C. (2000). *Kuasa kata: Jelajah budaya-budaya politik di Indonesia* (R. B. Santosa, Trans.). Mata Bangsa.
- Bal, M. (2017). *Narratology: Introduction to the theory of narrative* (4th ed.). University of Toronto Press.
- Berg, C. C. (1927). *Kidung Sunda: Inleiding, tekst, vertaling en aanteekeningen. Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië*, 83(1), 1–161.
- Berg, C. C. (1931). *Kidung Harṣa-Wijaya: Middel-Javaansche historische roman uitgegeven. Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië*, 88(1), 49–238.
- Bogaerts, E. (2023). Words of power and wisdom: Credible authorities and reliable sources in the *Sĕrat Nitik Sultan Agung*. In R. Ricci (Ed.), *Storied island: New explorations in Javanese literature* (pp. 201–234). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004528620_010
- Chambert-Loir, H. (2009). Abdullah al-Misri: Penulis sebuah teori politik di Jawa awal abad ke-19. In B. Kanumoyoso, H. Farid, I. A. Ahsan, & M. Fauzi (Eds.), *Kembara bahari: Esei kehormatan 80 tahun Adrian B. Lapijan* (pp. 223–246). Komunitas Bambu.
- Day, T. (2002). *Fluid iron: State formation in Southeast Asia*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- de Graaf, H. J. (1953). Titels en namen van Javaanse vorsten en groten uit de 16e en 17e eeuw. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 109(1), 62–82. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-90001548>
- Drewes, G. W. J. (1968). Javanese poems dealing with or attributed to the Saint of Bonan. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 124(2), 209–240. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-90002851>
- Feener, R. M. (1998). A re-examination of the place of al-Ḥallāj in the development of Southeast Asian Islam. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 154(4), 571–592. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-90003703>
- Florida, N. K. (1995). *Writing the past, inscribing the future: History as prophecy in colonial Java*. Duke University Press.
- Franklin, N. J. (2020). Islam and the Dutch in the East Indies: Oppression or opportunity? *The European Legacy*, 25(5), 572–587. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10848770.2020.1760467>
- Geertz, C. (1980). *Negara: The theatre state in nineteenth-century Bali*. Princeton University Press.
- Hasan, N. (2010). The failure of the Wahhabi campaign: Transnational Islam and the Salafi madrasa in post-9/11 Indonesia. *South East Asia Research*, 18(4), 675–705. <https://doi.org/10.5367/sear.2010.0005>
- Ichwan, M. N. (2005). 'Ulamā', state and politics: Majelis Ulama Indonesia after Suharto. *Islamic Law and Society*, 12(1), 45–72. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1568519053123883>
- Irawan, A. (2024, August 14). Implikasi konsesi tambang untuk ormas agama. *Detik*. <https://news.detik.com/kolom/d-7488116/implikasi-konsesi-tambang-untuk-ormas-agama>

- Lombard, D. (2005). *Nusa Jawa: Silang budaya bagian II: Jaringan Asia* (W. P. Arifin, R. S. Hidayat, & N. H. Yusuf, Trans.). Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Mandal, S. K. (2013). The Indian Ocean in a Malay text: The *Hikayat Mareskalek* in transregional perspective. *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 41(120), 237–254. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2013.806088>
- Mandal, S. K. (2018). *Becoming Arab: Creole histories and modern identity in the Malay world*. Cambridge University Press.
- Meyer, V. H. (2021a). *Memory and difference: Coherence and paradox in Javanese Muslims' stories of the past* (Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University).
- Meyer, V. H. (2021b). A wali's quest for guidance: The Islamic genealogies of the Seh Mlaya. *Wacana: Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia*, 22(3), 675–692. <https://doi.org/10.17510/wacana.v22i3.1037>
- Moertono, S. (2017). *Negara dan kekuasaan di Jawa abad XVI–XIX*. Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia.
- Nas, P. J. M., & Pratiwo. (2002). Java and De Groote Postweg, La Grande Route, the Great Mail Road, Jalan Raya Pos. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 158(4), 707–725. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-90003746>
- Nguitragool, P. (2012). God-king and Indonesia: Renegotiating the boundaries between Western and non-Western perspectives on foreign policy. *Pacific Affairs*, 85(4), 723–743. <https://doi.org/10.5509/2012854723>
- Pandu, P. (2024, August 26). Pemberian konsesi tambang untuk ormas keagamaan merusak kehidupan bernegara. *Kompas*. <https://www.kompas.id/baca/humaniora/2024/08/26/pemberian-konsesi-tambang-untuk-ormas-keagamaan-dinilai-merusak-kehidupan-bernegara>
- Ricci, R. (2023). Situated prophethood: Reading the *Sĕrat Ambiya* in nineteenth-century Jawa. In R. Ricci (Ed.), *Storied island: New explorations in Javanese literature* (pp. 149–175). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004528620_008
- Ricklefs, M. C. (1992). Unity and disunity in Javanese political and religious thought of the eighteenth century. *Modern Asian Studies*, 26(4), 663–678. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00010502>
- Ricklefs, M. C. (2001). *A history of modern Indonesia since c.1200* (3rd ed.). Palgrave.
- Ricoeur, P. (2021). *Hermeneutika dan ilmu-ilmu humaniora* (Y. Santoso, Trans.). IRCiSoD.
- Ropi, I. (2017). *Religion and regulation in Indonesia*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Soleh, R. (2023). Muatan tugas kenabian dalam sastra Melayu klasik: Kajian sastra profetik. *Semiotika*, 24(2), 289–302. <https://doi.org/10.30813/s.v24i2.4305>
- Upartini, D. P. (2023). Posisi dan strategi Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Misri dalam arena sastra Melayu klasik. *Arif: Jurnal Sastra dan Kearifan Lokal*, 2(2), 323–348. <https://doi.org/10.24252/arif.v2i2.47707>

Windayanto, R. N. A. (2021). Struktur, pandangan dunia, dan struktur sosial dalam *Hikayat Mareskalek* karya Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Misri: Tinjauan strukturalisme genetik. *Jumantara: Jurnal Manuskrip Nusantara*, 12(2), 263–280. <https://doi.org/10.37014/jumantara.v12i2.826>

Zaini-Lajoubert, M. (2008). *Karya lengkap Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Misri*. Komunitas Bambu bekerja sama dengan École française d'Extrême-Orient.