

Female Indonesian Sufis: Shattariya *Murids* in the 18th and 19th Centuries in Java¹

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Introduction

Western scholars' academic interest in female Sufis has flourished since the early 20th century and continues today. In 1928, Margaret Smith wrote her book about Rābi'a al-'Adawīya (d. 185/801), a woman who was probably the greatest of all female saints in Islam (Smith 1984, a reprint of the 1928 first edition). It has remained an important reference for all scholars who study female saints in Islam. In her introduction to the reprint of the book, Annemarie Schimmel praised it as a source that "*caused a quite sensation among the scholars*" (Smith 1984, xxviii).

Smith's empirical study of the role of Rābi'a al-'Adawīya in the development of Sufism in its turn generated further studies on the presence and the role of female Sufis in the early formation of Islam. Some of these studies not only succeeded in finding the names of other female Sufis in early Islam but also 'discovered' the names of female Sufis, who had been active members in Sufi brotherhoods in later periods.

Scholars' enthusiasm for, and interest in, female Sufis ultimately took them to the important conclusion that, while mainstream male Sufi authorities hid the spiritual teachings of Sufi women, and even their existence, behind a veil of obscurity, Muslim scholars had since the 10th century paid attention to Sufi women and explained that their role was as important as that of men. In her study of the Sufi scholar and hadith expert (*muḥaddith*), Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī al-Naysābūrī (known as al-Sulamī 365/976-412/1021), Rkia E. Cornell, for example, convincingly concluded that al-Sulamī belonged to a small group of male Muslim scholars but commented that female Sufis "served their male brethren, studied with them, supported them financially, and even, at times, surpassed them in their knowledge" (Cornell 1999, 19). Al-Sulamī is one of the early Muslim scholars in the 9th to 11th centuries who was eager to collect anecdotes of *awliya'* and Sufis (Tonaga 2004, 3), but special because of his great attention to Sufi women.

Other scholarly references on Sufis and Sufism, demonstrate that the presence and role

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of female Sufis is increasingly obvious and can no longer be ignored. Annemarie Schimmel has pointed out that "...names of women saints are found throughout the world of Islam, though only few of them have been entered into the official annals..." (Schimmel 1975, 433). She examined a range of Muslim countries, including Iran, Turkey, countries in North Africa, India, and Pakistan, where Sufi women played important roles in the history and the civilization of these countries.

Schimmel and other Sufi scholars contributed greatly to the study of female Sufis by demonstrating their existence in Muslim countries, but unfortunately they failed to identify any female Sufis from Southeast Asia. This is rather surprising because so many experts on Southeast Asian Islam have agreed that Sufism has been an important and inseparable part of Indonesian Islam since its introduction in the 13th century (Azra 2004; Johns 1975; Laffan 2011).

I am convinced that the issue is not whether or not there were female Sufis in Southeast Asia, because when we look at the history of Sufism in various parts of the Muslim world, it is clear that it is an aspect of Islam that is favorably inclined to women, and thus differs from Islamic jurisprudence (*sharī'a*). In Sufism, a woman can enjoy full equal rights, even if a perfect woman is still referred to as a "man of God" (Schimmel 1998, 15). Accordingly, it is said that "when a woman walks on the path of God like a man, she cannot be described as a woman" (Walther 1981, 76). In order to justify this conviction, Sufis often quote verses from the Qur'an which repeatedly state "*muslimūn wa muslimāt, mu'minūn wa mu'mināt*", the "Muslim men and women", "the faithful men and women" (see for instance Q.S. 33:35).

It is for this reason that the Sufi intellectual tradition is also more effective in viewing Islam in a comprehensive way, because this approach examines things more substantially. Sachiko Murata pointed out that Sufi representatives ask about the "why" of things, not simply the "how", while jurists, who speak for the Sharī'a, are largely concerned with telling people what they must do (Murata 1992, 2). This is the reason why a purely legal approach to gender in the study of Islam fails, because its scope is limited to the legal content of the *Sharī'a* and does not address the nature of reality (see also Ernest 1994, 678).

This article aims to fill the gap in the study of Indonesian Sufi women, described above, by focusing on the history of Javanese Islam in the 18th and 19th centuries, and, more specifically, on women whose names are mentioned in the manuscripts of Shaṭṭārīya genealogy (*silsila*). This article is primarily based on my philological research on manuscripts of Shaṭṭārīya Sufi Order in collections in Aceh, Java, Mindanao (in the Southern Philippines) and Europe. One of the important findings of my research was that the Shaṭṭārīya *silsila* contains names of female members such as Hamidah binti Sulayman (Aceh), Kangjeng Ratu Kadospaten and Raden Ayu Kilen (both from Yogyakarta), and Kangjeng Ratu Ibu Cirebon, Ratu Raja Fatimah and Nyimas Ayu Alimah from Cirebon (Fathurahman 2016, 39–43, 49–70).

Nevertheless, in the wider context of female Sufis, the sources I found were still “silent”, only offering transcriptions of as yet publicly unknown primary sources about the *silsila* of this order. In addition, these texts of the *silsila* merely mention the names of these female Sufis, without any further information about their lives or teachings as members of the order. I only managed to find information about the identities of these names through secondary sources.

In view of the difficulty in accessing primary and secondary sources, this article will particularly focus on the two women from Yogyakarta, namely Kangjeng Ratu Kadospaten and Raden Ayu Kilen, together with Ratu Pakubuwana who, in fact, was not among the women mentioned in the manuscripts on the Shaṭṭārīya genealogy but whose presence and spiritual role has often been discussed by scholars, most prominent among them M.C. Ricklefs (1998), so that the fact that she was a Javanese female Sufi is indisputable.

Women and Islam

The available sources on women in Islam generally agree that not just men, but women have also contributed significantly to the construction of Islamic civilization since early times. Scholars first point to the strong women in the Prophet Muhammad’s family like Khadīja binti Khuwaylid, ‘Āisha binti Abī Bakr, and Fāṭima, the Prophet’s daughter (see, for example, Schimmel 1998, 26–33). Khadīja was the first to follow Islam at a time when other people considered Muhammad a fraud and a dreamer; ‘Āisha was a reliable authority on the prophetic tradition, while Faṭīma was of particular importance in later Islamic history, especially for the Shi‘ites (Walther 1981, 74–76).

Islamic history has eternalized ‘Āisha as the woman who had an important role in the textual transmission of the Qur’an. She was lucky that the Prophet loved her more than any other of his wives so that she often heard passages of the Qur’an from the Prophet himself when he had himself only just received them from the angel Gabriel. Subsequently, it was also ‘Āisha who was instrumental in the preparations for the recording of a full written copy of the Qur’an, monitoring the writing process and correcting mistakes made during the recording process (Roded 1999, 27). Her role was not only important, but clearly decisive in ensuring that the original text of the Qur’an would be maintained up to this day. Moreover, apart from being the transmitter of the most important text in Islam, historians also agree that she was instrumental as the primary transmitter of the Prophetic traditions (hadith), with about 1,210 hadiths traceable to her (Roded 1999, 49).

As will be elaborated below, after the time of the Prophet and the Companions, women were also involved in many roles in the public domain, including great Sufis such as Rābi‘a al-‘Adawīya, and Fāṭima al-Naysābūrīya. Sources show the important role of Muslim women who were involved in politics, as wives and mothers and sometimes even as rulers themselves (Schimmel 1998, 12–13). As Wiebke Walther wrote:

“...in the course of Islamic history, there have been women who influenced their leader husbands or sons on political questions. But rarely indeed and then only for a short time did women themselves ascend to a throne...” (Walther 1981, 81).

The role of women in the development of Sufism was more significant, however. One of the clearest examples is Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), the Magister Magnus of Sufism and the great Sufī master, who was educated in Cordova by the female saint, Fāṭima. As Annemarie Schimmel argues, it is perhaps because of this and because he met the proficient Persian woman, Niẓām, while undertaking his pilgrimage in Mecca, that Ibn ‘Arabī dedicated several of his mystical works to place a woman in a highest important position (Schimmel in Smith 1984, xxxi).

Women’s involvement in the public domain was not unusual in the history of Islam in Indonesia. During the second half of the 17th century, for instance, the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam was ruled by four consecutive female rulers: Tāj al-‘Ālam Ṣafīyat al-Dīn (r. 1641–1675), Nūr al-‘Ālam Naqīyat al-Dīn (r. 1675–1678), ‘Ināyat Shāh Zakīyat al-Dīn (r. 1678–1688), and Kamālat Shāh (r. 1688–1699) (Azra 2004, 78; see also Hadi 2004, 85). Azra’s study shows that during the reigns of these queens, Aceh became the center of Islamic scholarly and intellectual life in the Malay-Indonesian world, where ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf ibn ‘Alī al-Jāwī al-Fanṣūrī, in particular, wrote many works on Islam and became the *Qāḍī Malik al-‘Ādil* (office of Chief Qāḍī), who was responsible for religious and social political affairs. One prominent Aceh queen, mentioned by al-Fanṣūrī in the opening part of his *Mir’at al-Ṭullāb*, is Tāj al-‘Ālam Ṣafīyat al-Dīn, also known as *Sulṭānah Tāj al-‘Ālam Ṣafīyat al-Dīn berdaulat ẓill Allāh fī al-‘ālam* (Azra 2004, 79). The *Mir’at al-Ṭullāb* is a work on Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). It covers many topics, not only matters of worship and prayer (*fiqh ‘ibāda*), but also those dealing with interpersonal relations including in politics, trade and commerce (*fiqh mu‘āmalah*).

Tāj al-‘Ālam Ṣafīyat al-Dīn became the first queen to rule Aceh after her husband, Sultan Iskandar Tsani (r. 1636–1641) died without leaving a male heir. Apparently, once she took over the rule of Aceh, she did not perform as well as a male Sultan but she is nonetheless portrayed as “...possessing excellent qualities as a just, devout, loving, wise, and disciplined ruler who respected and revered the ‘ulamā...” (Hadi 2004, 73).

Tāj al-‘Ālam Ṣafīyat al-Dīn’s biography resembles that of Sultanah Shajarat al-Durr (r. May 1250–July 1250), who was the first Muslim woman to rule in Egypt and the first ruling queen in Islamic history, after the death of her husband, al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb (d. 1249) and his son and successor, Ghayāth al-Dīn Tūrānshāh (r. 1249–1250) (Walther 1981, 81). Another woman ruled in the Sultanate of Delhi in India in the 13th century, Sultāna Razīya al-Dīn (r. 1236–1240), came from a Turkish slave background and was the only woman ever to rule that Sultanate. She ascended the throne because her father recognized her abilities and he

appointed her as his successor, despite the fact that he had several sons (Walther 1981, 82).

Scholarship on Female Sufi Studies

When I started to write about female Indonesian Sufis, I realized how sparse the sources were on the issue. There are quite a few studies on women and Islam in Indonesia but most of them look at the subject taking the legal approach of the *sharī'a* or in the context of feminism, democracy and human rights (Burhanudin and Fathurahman 2004; Hasyim 2006). Martin van Bruinessen, however, wrote an article in which he delivered important, although very limited, information about Javanese women who were members and even *murshids* (spiritual guide of Sufi order), of the Naqshbandīya Mazharīya Sufi Order in Madura in the twentieth century (Bruinessen 1995, 14, 1996, 197–98). In his comprehensive account of the Naqshbandīya Order in Indonesia, Van Bruinessen wrote a sub-section, “Mursyid Perempuan” (Female Murshids), in which he explained that the presence of these female *murshids* in the Naqshbandīya Mazharīya Order in Madura was truly unique and had never been encountered before in Indonesia or in any other country (Bruinessen 1996, 197).

Van Bruinessen says that in the mid-20th century at least three female Sufis in Madura were active as *murshid*. They offered guidance to thousands of female *tarekat* (Ind.: Sufi order) members. The first was Nyai Thobibah who obtained her full authorization from Kyai Ali Wafa (d. 1976) from Ambunten in Sumenep. The second was Syarifah Fatimah from Sumenep, who was initiated by Kyai Sirajuddin (d. 1953). Her female students can be found not only in Madura but also in Western Kalimantan and South Malang. The third was Syarifah Nor, also known as ‘Pah Nong’, from Gondanglegi. Van Bruinessen pointed out that only in Madura, could female members of the Naqshbandīya Mazharīya obtain their *ijāza* (license to teach or propagate) from someone of their own gender and that this was probably related to the more equal relationship between men and women common in Madurese society at the time (Bruinessen 1996, 197–98).

Van Bruinessen’s information is very interesting although I hasten to add that it, of course, does not represent the role and involvement of women in Sufism and *tarekats* in Indonesia or in Southeast Asia in general. This is because the heyday of Sufism and *tarekats* in the region was actually in the period from the 17th to the 19th centuries. It was in this period that the Islamic intellectual tradition in the Malay regions of Peninsular Malaysia, the Southern Philippines and Southern Thailand was to a large extent colored by Sufi orders such as Shaṭṭārīya, Khalwatīya, Qadarīya, Naqshbandīya, and Rifa‘īya. During that time, elite religious figures not only wrote religious treatises but were also active in social movements, especially against colonialism (Drewes 1925; Islam 2016; Laffan 2011; Ricklefs 2001). Scholars call this period of increased Sufi activism and strengthening of Sufi organizations the ‘rise of neo-Sufism’ (Voll 2008, 315).

In contrast to the Indonesian example above, studies of, and interest in, the history of female Sufis in the Muslim world have flourished, particularly since the early 20th century. In the beginning of this article, I highlighted Smiths' excellent study of Rābi'a al-'Adawīya, which stimulated other scholars to conduct further studies on Sufi women in Islam. I briefly mentioned Rkia E. Cornell, who studied Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī, one of a few male Muslim scholars in the 10th century, who wrote *Dhikr al-niswa al-muta'abbidāt al-ṣūfiyyāt* (Memorial of Female Sufi Devotees), a work that presents the vignettes of 82 female Sufis he had known over his lifetime and descriptions of each of their spiritual experiences.

Cornell points out that al-Sulamī is believed to have disagreed with his predecessor, Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Ishāq al-Bukhārī al-Kalābādhī (d. ca. 380/990), who, in his work, *Kitāb al-ta'arruf li-madhab ahl al-taṣawwuf* (Introducing the Way of the Sufis), portrayed Rābi'a al-'Adawīya "more of a trope, a rhetorical device, than as a real person" (Cornell 1999, 17).

Indeed, it would seem that al-Kalābādhī in his work intentionally 'overlooked' female Sufis. He wrote a chapter entitled *fī rijāl al-ṣūfiyya* (On Famous Men among Sufis), in which he presented a list of male Sufis who, after the Companions (*waṣāfa aḥwālahum qawlan wa-fi'lan ba'da al-ṣaḥāba*), giving utterance to their sciences (*naṭaqa bi-'ulūmihim*), related their experiences (*'abara 'an mawājīdihim*), publishing their stations (*nashara maqāmātihim*), and described their spiritual states, in word and deed (see also Arberry 1966, 12–13; Kalābādhī 1994, 10–11). It presents a true picture of male Sufis. Al-Kalābādhī, however, tends to ignore female Sufis. In his *Kitāb al-ta'arruf*, he only cites Rābi'a al-'Adawīya three times by name on three separate pages: first, when he refers to the meaning of repentance (*al-tawba*); second, when he offers an illustration of the doctrine on satisfaction (*riḍā'*), and third, when he explains God's favors (*laṭā'if al-Ḥaqq*) (Kalābādhī 1994, 64, 73, and 121). Al-Kalābādhī did not otherwise discuss the famous female saint from Basra. That is why Cornell, in her introduction, states that the 'discovery' of al-Sulamī's text of *Dhikr al-niswa* was part of a wider effort to 'discover' the female Sufi tradition (Cornell 1999, 15).

It is important to note here that, regardless of the fact that Cornell is the first Western scholar to contextualize the importance of al-Sulamī's *Dhikr al-niswa* for Sufism scholarship (which she considers too patriarchal), scholars are actually indebted to Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāhī's early philological work on this text. He 'discovered' al-Sulamī's essential text on female Sufis in 1991, after scholars before him had been convinced that it had been lost.² Nevertheless, according to Cornell, al-Ṭanāhī failed to contextualize al-Sulamī's very important text as part of the study of Sufism and Sufi literature (Cornell 1999, 45).

In her 'revised edition' of the *Dhikr al-niswa*, Cornell very clearly sets out that early Arabic sources, including the *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa* (the Nature of the Elect) by Abū al-Faraj

² In her *My Soul is a Woman*, the German edition of which was first published in 1995, Annemarie Schimmel mentioned the significance of this work by al-Sulamī's on pious women, but she thought it had unfortunately been lost (Schimmel 1998, 19).

ibn al-Jawzī from Baghdad (d. 597/1201), *Nafaḥāt al-uns* (Breaths of Intimacy) by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī from Herat (d. 899/1492), and *Kawākib al-durrīya* (The Glittering Spheres) by the Egyptian Sufi ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Munāwī (d. 1031/1622), indicate that they did not have direct access to the original text of the *Dhikr al-niswa*. Indeed, some of them, especially al-Jāmī, quote from the text using a secondary source (Cornell 1999, 43).

As a result of al-Ṭanāḥī and Cornell discovering and contextualizing al-Sulāmī’s long-lost text, we have become increasingly aware that in the early formation of Islam, women’s participation in Sufism was not unusual; indeed, they were rarely excluded from the public aspects of spiritual life.

The characteristics of female Sufis in the initial phase of their development differed somewhat from those in later periods. In the early formation of Sufism, most female mystics, including Rābi‘a al-‘Adawīya, were characterized by their extreme asceticism, celibacy and ability to perform miracles (*karāma*) (Elias 1988, 209–14), even though we learn through many stories that Sufi women were by no means all celibate or unmarried. Fāṭima al-Naysābūrīya (d. 223/837) is the most impressive and outstanding figure among the married Sufi women of this early period. She was married to the renowned ascetic, Aḥmad al-Balkhī b. Khidrūya (d. 854) (Schimmel 1975, 427, 1998, 40).

By contrast, female Sufis in the subsequent periods were pictured as active figures who played important roles in politics, court circles and the public sphere. Women’s active involvement in Sufism continued into the next centuries and not only in Islam’s birth place, the Arabian peninsula, but also in areas outside Arabia. Annemarie Schimmel wrote:

“...Throughout the ages we find names of pious women who pursued the mystical path, either independently or as consorts or mothers of Sufis. Many of their names are noted in the hagiographical works, and the memory of many saintly women is kept alive in small sanctuaries found in North Africa, Anatolia, and particularly in Muslim India...” (Schimmel 1984, 114).

Jamal J. Elias (1988) discussed research by other scholars on female mystics and the roles they played in India, Turkey, North Africa, Central and South Asia and Pakistan from the 14th to the 19th centuries. For instance, in 14th century India, Fāṭima Sām was a respected female mystic who was frequently referred to as a man sent in the form of a woman. Female saints’ active involvement in Sufism and *ṭarīqa* (Sufi order) in India flourished over the next three centuries.

One of the best known female Indian saints in the Mughal period was Jahānārā (d. 1092/1681), the eldest daughter of the Emperor Shāh Jahān and the sister of Dārā Shikūh, who was deeply interested in mysticism. She became a Qādirīya disciple of Mullā Shāh and a follower of the Chishtīya, the traditional Mughal Sufi order in India.³ She was highly

3 A further detail explanation on the Chishtīya order, see (Rizvi 1992, 264–318).

respected as an intellectual Sufi woman who wrote two treatises. The first, *Ṣāhibīya*, is an incomplete biography of Mullā Shāh, in which she relates her travels on the mystic path and her political lineage. The second, *Mu'nis al-arwāḥ*, is a biography of Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī (d. 633/1236), the founder of the Chishtīya Sufi order (Elias 1988, 222–23). She assembled the latter work from multiple sources, including Dārā Shikūh's treatise, *Safīnat al-awliyā'*.

Jahānārā was a typical lady of the court and she had everything anybody could possibly want: wealth, power, and respect. She had the world at her feet and was beloved by all, but chose to devote her life to God as a saint.⁴ Jahānārā made a tremendous contribution to the development of Sufi thought and was influential in the compilation of a series of works on Islamic mysticism, including numerous commentaries on Rūmī's *Mathnawī*, the most popular mystical work of Indian Muslims (Schimmel 2005, 153).

In Turkey, Fakhr al-Nisā', commonly known as Mihrī Khātūn (d. 912/1506), is regarded as the most important Turkish female mystical poet. She was affiliated with the Khalwatī Order. Elias quotes a Turkish source that mentions Şeref Hanim (d. 1276/1858) who was associated with the Qādirī and Mawlawī Orders, and whose poetry consists mainly of eulogies (*qaṣīda*) and supplications (*istimād*) to Rūmī and 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (Elias 1988, 222).

'Āisha al-Bā'ūniya (d. 923/1517) from Damascus was born into a family of respected religious scholars and poets. She was affiliated with the Qādirīya Sufi Order. She is regarded as one of the most learned and prolific female scholars throughout Islamic history. She composed over a dozen works in prose and poetry (Bā'ūniyah and Homerin 2011, 16). Her important mystical works include the *Dīwān 'Āishā al-Bā'ūniya* (the collected works of 'Āisha al-Bā'ūniya), *Fayḍ al-faḍl wa-jam' al-shaml* (The Emanation of Grace and the Gathering Union), and *al-Muntakhab fī uṣūl al-rutab fī 'ilm al-taṣawwuf* (Selection of [the works on] the Principles in Stations of Sufism). 'Āisha is unusual because even in the medieval Muslim period very few female Sufis wrote original works. Thanks to Homerin's studies of the manuscripts of 'Āisha's work, such that have survived, some important perspectives on the viewpoints of a female Sufi about her own society, Islamic mysticism, and Islam in general are revealed.⁵

Examples of female Sufis from other sources prove that women definitely had a considerable share in the development of Sufism. Several studies confirm there is a continuation of women's involvement in mystical orders and popular Sufi ways of life across central Islamic lands, from Morocco to India (Elias 1988, 223).

There is no doubt that in Islam, Sufi values reinforced equality between women and men. It is not a coincidence that al-Sulamī, in his *Dhikr al-niswa*, uses the masculine term

⁴ A number of similarities between Jahānārā and Kangjeng Ratu Kadospaten in Yogyakarta, Central Java, are discussed below.

⁵ Th. Emil Homerin has provided an English translation, with a very enlightening introduction, of 'Āisha's *Dīwān* and *al-Muntakhab* (Bā'ūniyah and Homerin 2011; Homerin 2014).

ustādh rather than *ustādha*, when he describes Ḥukayma al-Dimashqīya, an important Syrian female Sufi who was a teacher and a friend of Rābi‘a [or Rabī‘a] binti Ismā‘īl from Damascus (*wa-kānat ustādh rābi‘a wa-ṣāhibatahā*).⁶ Al-Sulamī repeated his use of these masculine terms when he discussed Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī’s sayings on Fāṭima al-Naysābūrīya: *hiya walīya min awliyā’ Allāh ‘azza wa-jalla, wa-hiya ustādhī* (‘she is a saint among the friends of Allah, the Glorious and the Mighty, she is also my teacher’) (Cornell 1999, 144–45; Ṭanāḥī 1993, 62).

This is the reason for Cornell’s criticism that Al-Ṭanāḥī was insufficiently sensitive and moreover unfamiliar with the Sufi tradition of the sacred biography. He stated that the designation *ustādh* al-Sulamī, used in relation to Ḥukayma dan Fāṭima, was a linguistic anomaly (*turfā lughawīya*). Rather than an anomaly, Cornell argues, “...this use of gendered terminology is an example of what was becoming a recurring trope in Sufi literature: that of elevating exceptional women to the ranks of honorary men...” (Cornell 1999, 45). This, of course, has nothing to do with Cornell’s acknowledgment that al-Ṭanāḥī’s critical edition of *Dhikr al-niswa* is of great importance for the study of female Sufis in Islam.

The descriptions in al-Sulamī’s *Dhikr al-niswa* of Ḥukayma and Fāṭima’s spirituality, and of that of other women, enable us to determine that in the Islamic tradition male and female Sufis had the same roles and authority. Because of this we also have no reason to assume that the authority of female Sufis was restricted to guiding female Sufi disciples as was done with the four contemporary female Sufis in Madura discussed by Van Bruinessen. We know, for instance, that Fāṭima of Nishapur instructed not only Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī, but also the other, great and prominent, early Sufi, Bāyazīd al-Biṣṭāmī, in spiritual and mystical teachings (d. 261/875 or 264/877-878). Al-Biṣṭāmī is quoted as saying:

“...*mā ra’aytu fī ‘umrī illā rajulan wa-imra’atan, fa-al-mar’a kānat Fāṭima al-Naysābūrīya. Mā akhbartuhā ‘an maqāmin min al-maqāmāt illā wa-kāna al-khabar lahā ‘iyānan...*” (...in all of my life, I have only seen one true man and one true woman. The woman was Fāṭima of Nishapur. Wherever I informed her about one of the stages of spirituality, she would take the news as if she had experienced it herself...). (Cornell 1999, 144–45; Ṭanāḥī 1993, 61).

Female Sufis and Indonesian Shaṭṭārīya

For a century, Western scholarship on female Sufis has, as mentioned above, unfortunately completely ignored Indonesia and Southeast Asia. This may be due to a lack of access to primary sources but, more than that, it may be because Islam in Indonesia and Southeast Asia is not considered an important subject for Islamic Studies, despite the writings of scholars like Anthony Johns, Michael F. Laffan, Michael Feener, and Azyumardi Azra. They have already

6 (for a further annotation on Ḥukayma, see also Cornell 1999, 126; Ṭanāḥī 1993, 53).

testified to the tremendous authority of Islamic Sufi intellectual traditions in this region and their connections with other parts of the Muslim world.

For more than half a century, Anthony Johns has clearly made this point. After studying Sufi manuscripts written by Muslim scholars from Nusantara, Johns came to the conclusion that "...the role of Sufism in our region is not all that different from that of Sufism in other parts of the Muslim world..." (Johns 1995, 183). It is for this reason that Johns cannot accept Clifford Geertz' conclusion that "...it is very hard, given his tradition and his social structure, for a Javanese to be a 'real Moslem'..." (Geertz 1976, 160), that is, because what Geertz saw as the syncretic character of Islam in Java, with animist, Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic elements are intertwined. On the contrary, for Johns,

"...not only was the most highly developed commercial centre of the Indonesian world at that time becoming thoroughly Muslim, but even its deviation from orthodox Islam was, in this instance, not a matter of syncretism with primitive cults, but a deviation that was part of the Islamic tradition itself..." (Johns 1955, 70).

Having investigated the Western academic approach to the study of Islam in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia, Chiara Formichi concluded that "...the marginalization of this field finds its roots in the legacy of a colonial vision of Java—and of much of the region—as intrinsically Hindu-Buddhist...". Formichi suggests that the best way to bridge this is to more proactively welcome the study (and teaching) of Southeast Asian Islam as a source of further enrichment (Formichi 2012, 716).

I would add that one of the reasons for the absence of empathic views on Islam in Southeast Asia is the lack of the use of texts on Islamic knowledge written by local Muslim people themselves, both in Arabic and in local languages like Malay, Javanese, Sundanese, etc. Islamic texts written in the Malay region have been studied more than those from Java even though Islamic Javanese texts, both those written in Javanese script and those in Arabic script (*pegon*), are no less in number. In other words, the lack of a discourse on female Sufis in Indonesia is apparently part of the larger picture of the general marginalization of Islamic Studies in Southeast Asia and of the scant appreciation of local Islamic texts on the other. In this article, I will focus on the second argument that a proper understanding of the texts written by local authors will strongly influence and direct our understandings of Islam in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. As Johns says:

"...it is works such as these that the Muslim elite wrote for themselves and each other. It is from a study of such works in their regional settings that a clearer and perhaps more worthy understanding of Islam in Southeast Asia may be won..." (Johns 1975, 55).

As mentioned above, I located information about female Sufis in Indonesia when doing research on the genealogy of the Shaṭṭārīya Sufi order, based on manuscripts in various collections

(Fathurahman 2016). Below I list the names of these female Sufis according to the region where they were born, rather than chronologically, because the years of their births are often still unclear.

Aceh

The first is Ḥamīdah binti Sulaymān from Zawiyah Tanoh Abee, Seulimum, Aceh Besar, North Sumatra.⁷ So far there is no information whatsoever about her life let alone about her activities as a *ṭarīqa* member. All we know is that she was initiated into the Shaṭṭārīya by her *murshid* ‘Abd al-Wahhāb b. Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ (d. 1894), better known as Teungku Chik Tanoh Abee. We can thus assume that she lived in Aceh in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The Shaṭṭārīya *silsila* that mentions her name is found in ff. 100v-101v of manuscript Or. 16767 in the collection of the British Library. It is one of the 17 Aceh-origin manuscripts that the British Library acquired in 2004 from Arthur Probsthain, an Oriental bookseller established in London in 1902.⁸ In the *silsila*, Ḥamīdah binti Sulaymān is linked to al-Qushāshī, the key Shaṭṭārīya teacher in Medina, not via the main figure of ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf b. ‘Alī al-Jāwī al-Fanṣūrī, but Mulā Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī and his descendants (Fathurahman 2016, 39–43). It says:

“...telah mengambil talqin tarekat Shaṭṭārīya oleh Ḥamīdah binti anak Sulaymān Lam f-l-s daripada Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahhāb anak Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ...”.

[Ḥamīdah the daughter of Sulaymān took her initiation in the Shaṭṭārīya with ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, the son of Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ].

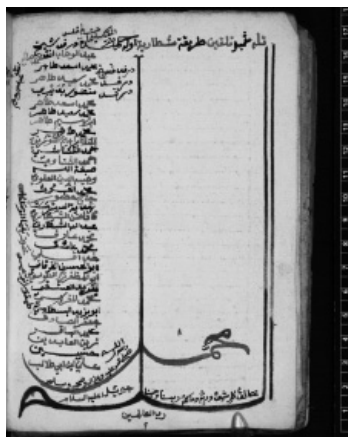


image 1. *Silsila* of Ḥamīdah binti Sulaimān
f.101v of Or. 16767 of the British Library Collection

7 Zawiyah Tanoh Abee is a traditional Islamic education institution developed by Shaykh al-Fairūsī al-Baghdādī in the sixteenth century (Özay 2011). It preserves a remarkable number of Islamic manuscripts that originated from the seventeenth century onward (Abu Bakar and Abdullah 1992).

8 Ricklefs, Voorhoeve and Gallop 2014: 267, 312–313. This manuscript, and the other 126, have been digitalized and available online at http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Or_16767 (accessed 02 May 2017).

The question that arises here is whether we can claim that a person is a Sufi simply because his or her name is listed in the genealogy of a Sufi order? In order to answer this question, we have to take a look at the time before the 12th century when Sufism was usually not linked to a *ṭarīqa*, so it is probably impossible to decide if a person belonged to a particular Sufi group or not. However, when *ṭarīqa* organizations became stronger, one indicator to discern which Muslim had been a Sufi and whether he or she is included in a *ṭarīqa* genealogy or not. For Trimingham, the emergence of genealogies of Sufi orders can be regarded as the start of a process by which the mystics' creative freedom was channeled into institutions (Trimingham 1971, 11). It is because of these organizations, however, that Sufi teachings have been handed down through more or less continuous chains of succession, starting with the organizations' founders (Subhan 2009, 160).

A *silsila* is a criterion because in a *ṭarīqa* it represents the close spiritual relationship between a *murshid* and a *murīd* (aspirant on the Path). These relationships are one of the most important foundations of any traditional Sufi order. Furthermore, their validity is guaranteed by the orders, and they are linked to the Prophet. The accuracy of a linkage is essential and it must be historically demonstrable (Azra 2004; Rizvi 1992).

The significance of *silsila* in Sufism corresponds to that of *isnād* in the prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*). Both are regarded as fundamental for the development of Islamic knowledge (Voll 1980, 264–73). Indeed, Sufism and *ḥadīth* are two fields of Islamic learning that correlate and reinforce each other. Some Sufis, such as Aḥmad al-Qushāshī (d. 1660) and Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī (1615–1690), were involved in *ḥadīth* scholarship and connected with Sufi chains of authority (*silsila*) and chains of *ḥadīth* authorization (*isnād*) (Fathurahman 2011, 183–90; Voll 2002, 356–72).

A *murshid–murīd* relationship in a Sufi order only starts after a *murīd* has taken his or her vow of obedience (*bay'a*) to his or her *murshid* (see Trimingham 1971, 182–91). Only then will the *murshid* give his disciple permission (*ijāza*) to practice the rituals of the order or, in some cases, authorize him or her as a *khalīfa* to initiate others. Through this process, a *silsila* emerges.

Because of this (and despite the fact that only her *silsila* in the Shaṭṭārīya has been discovered), I no longer doubt that Ḥamīdah binti Sulaymān was a female Sufi born in Nusantara, in Tanah Rencong, Aceh. I am convinced that she was not just an ordinary female Sufi disciple because of the reputation of Teungku Chik Tanoh Abee who, as her *murshid*, initiated her. He was one of the most important figures in the expansion of Zawiyah Tanoh Abee (Özay 2011, 72–73). The golden age of the Zawiyah was during this era, when Islamic manuscripts were collected, some of which Teungku Chik Tanoh Abee copied himself. He was a central figure from whom other Acehnese students received their *ijāza* in the Shaṭṭārīya order.

Cirebon

About half a century earlier in Cirebon, West Java, in the second half of the eighteenth century, a female Sufi named Ratu Raja Fatimah is mentioned. Her name is listed, along with Kangjeng Gusti Sultan Anom, the ruler of Cirebon, in the Shaṭṭārīya silsila of manuscript EAP211/1/1/29 in the private collection of Bambang Irianto in Cirebon.⁹ Her *silsila* goes back to ‘Abd al-Muḥyī (ca. 1640–1715) through Kyai Mas Muhammad Arjain, who became the Pangulu (head of the religious hierarchy) in the Kanoman palace. The text says: “...*lan iya iku amuruk iya maring Ratu Raja Fatimah sami kang putera Kangjeng Gusti Sultan Anom kang muga-muga angasihana ingiya Allah taala ing dunya lan ing akhirat...*” (and he is who initiated Ratu Raja Fatimah and the son of Kangjeng Gusti Sultan Anom, May God have mercy upon them in this world and in the Hereafter) (Fathurahman 2016, 65–68).



Image 2. *Silsila* of Ratu Raja Fatimah

f.4v of EAP211/1/1/29 of the drh. Bambang Irianto Collection, Cirebon

The second female Sufi from Cirebon was Nyimas Ayu Alimah (ca. the first half of the nineteenth century), whose name is listed as a Shaṭṭārīya member in the Javanese manuscript EAP211/1/3/28 written in pegon, in the collection of the Keraton Kacirebonan.¹⁰ She was initiated by Bagus Kashfīyah from Wanantara (approximately 8 km southwest of Cirebon), a disciple of Kyai Muqayim from Sampiran Cirebon, who was, in turn, initiated by Emas Bagus Muhammad Muhyiddin, who was initiated by Dalem Bojong, who was initiated by ‘Abd al-Muḥyī. The text says: “...*lan iya iku amuruk iya maring Bagus Kashfīyah ing Carbon nagarane lan ing Wanantara padhukuhane lan iya iku amuruk iya maring Nyimas Ayu Alimah ing Carbon nagarane...*” (and he is who initiated Bagus Kashfīyah in the village of Wanantara,

⁹ MS EAP211/1/1/29 f.4v; all digital pages of this manuscript are available online for research purpose at http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_item.a4d?catId=209681;r=19895 (accessed 5 May 2017).

¹⁰ MS EAP211/1/3/28 f. 3v; all digital pages of this manuscript are available online for research purpose at http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_item.a4d?catId=209767;r=19072 (accessed 5 May 2017).

Cirebon, and he is who initiated Nyimas Ayu Alimah in Cirebon) (Fathurahman 2016, 68–70).

I have to admit that the primary sources I have at my disposal do not allow for a complete reconstruction of the total picture of the presence and the role of female Sufis in the Malay World. The roles of Ḥamīdah binti Sulaymān in Aceh and those of Ratu Raja Fatimah and Nyimas Ayu Alimah in Cirebon in the development of Sufism in their respective regions is, at present, totally unknown. The only thing we now know is that female participation in the world of Sufism and *ṭarīqas* occurred not only in Arabia and other places in the Muslim world but also in the Malay world, although admittedly to a lesser degree.



Image 3. *Silsila* of Nyimas Ayu Alimah

f.3v of EAP211/1/3/28 of the Keraton Kacirebonan Collection, Cirebon

Apart from the fact that there are less female Sufis compared to men, their role was mostly limited to that of aspirant disciples (*murīd*). That is why, in their *silsila*, only the names of these three Sufi women is mentioned and no indication is given as to whether they had disciples, let alone male ones. The question is, whether restrictions existed in the Sufi world that prohibited women from initiating disciples. I do not think there were, because many sources, including Van Bruinessen's article on female Sufis from Madura in the twentieth century, state that not few female *murshid* initiated and guided disciples who were also female.

Were female Sufis allowed to initiate and offer spiritual guidance to male disciples? So far, I have found no information that answers this question satisfactorily. However, when we examine the sources at our disposal, it appears that in the early years of Sufism the role of female Sufis seems to have been somewhat larger in this regard. We have already discussed above how al-Sulamī in his *Dhīr al-niswa* mentioned that Fāṭima of Nishapur used to offer spiritual guidance and mystical teachings to Bāyazīd al-Biṣṭāmī, another great and prominent early Sufi (Ṭanāḥī 1993, 61).

Once *ṭarīqa* organizations started to prosper, however, we have insufficient proof to assert that it was not unusual for a female *murshid* to take the vow of a male disciple even though female involvement in *ṭarīqa* activities and rituals continued to develop in the Muslim world, especially in regions like India and Turkey. Elias stated that “...among the Turks, the Qādirī, Naqshbandī, and Mawlawī orders had the most female adepts, while in India the Chishtī and Qādirī orders were most tolerant towards female participation...” (Elias 1988, 222). In the case of these *ṭarīqas* the situation in Indonesia differs. So far, my textual studies show that the Shaṭṭārīya Order, in particular, included women in its *silsila*. More generally speaking, since its presence in Aceh in the second half of the seventeenth century, the Shaṭṭārīya Order may be said to have been the *ṭarīqa* that mostly passed down written texts. Below we will see that the Shaṭṭārīya Order, in addition to including the names of female members in Aceh and Cirebon in its authoritative *silsilas* (as described above), also included female members from Central Java, in this case from Yogyakarta.

Yogyakarta

Researching Javanese manuscripts written in *pegon* about the *silsila* of the Shaṭṭārīya Order, I examined manuscript Jav. 69 of the Mackenzie Collection in the British Library (Ricklefs, Voorhoeve and Gallop 2014, 69). It lists the name of Kangjeng Ratu Kadospaten (Kadipaten) as a Shaṭṭārīya disciple of four different *murshids*. The text in the *silsilah* reads: “...*lan iya iku amuruk iya maring Kangjeng Ratu Kadospaten kang palenggah ing Negara Yogyakarta Adiningrat nagarane, lan ing Sokawati kamajan Pawong sanake...*” (and he is who initiated Kangjeng Ratu Kadospaten who stayed in Yogyakarta Adiningrat, and whose family members came from the district Sokawati).¹¹ The *silsila* of this female Sufi connects her with the main *murshid* of the Shaṭṭārīya order in West Java, Sheikh ‘Abd al-Muḥyī, through four of her *murshids*, namely Kyai Mufid from Karang Bolong,¹² Muḥammad Shākīr, Kyai Mas Nida Muḥammad, and Kyai Nurdaim Muḥammad from Karang (Saparwadi) (Fathurahman 2016, 49–53).

Unlike the other female Sufis mentioned above, the identity of Kangjeng Ratu Kadipaten (ca. 1734–October 17, 1803) is absolutely clear. She was one of the official wives (*garwa padmi*) of Sultan Hamengkubuwana I or Sultan Mangkubumi (r. 1749–1792), the first ruler of the Yogyakarta Sultanate, and the mother of the Crown Prince who later became Sultan Hamengkubuwana II (r. 1792–1810, 1811–1812, and 1826–1828). She was therefore named Ratu Kadipaten, because the term ‘Kadipaten,’ refers to the residence of the Crown Prince (Pangeran Adipati Anom) in the south-central Javanese court. Her father was Ki Ageng

¹¹ f.9r of Jav.69 manuscript of the British Library Collection.

¹² An area on the southern coast of Java that lies within the boundaries of the pre-1825 province of Bagelen. See (Carey 2008, 17).

Derpayuda, a prominent *kyai* from the Sragen district; she could also trace her descent to the Sultan of the sultanate of Bima in Sumbawa (Carey 2008, 76).

After 1792, Kangjeng Ratu Kadipaten was renamed Ratu Ageng Tegalreja. She was the sister of Raden Rongga Prawiradirja I, the Bupati Wedana of Madiun (ca. 1760–1784) and *emban*¹³ of Pangeran Dipanagara (1785–1855), the Javanese mystic and leader of the ‘holy war’ against Dutch colonialism. She played an instrumental role in the shaping of Islamic spirituality of the Pangeran Dipanagara from his childhood in the Kadipaten (1785–1793) until they moved to Tegalreja, where Kangjeng Ratu Kadipaten passed away in 1803 (Carey 2008, 760). She was thus one of the most important women in Yogyakarta in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Kangjeng Ratu Kadipaten lived at a time when women in the court of Yogyakarta occupied special positions as teachers and as representatives of the royal children, especially those with extraordinary talents like Pangeran Dipanagara. In his *Babad Dipanagara*, the prince acknowledges that he is indebted to his great-grandmother Kangjeng Ratu Kadipaten, the female member of the Shaṭṭārīya Order, for her initial teachings on Islam and Javanese spiritual practices (Carey and Houben 2016, 68–69). Therefore, based on the primary sources, it is safe to conclude that Prince Dipanagara’s role in the Java War was inspired by the ideas of the members of the Shaṭṭārīya Order’s networks.

This conclusion counters Van Bruinessen’s assumption that:

“...in the so-called Java war, the largest anti-Dutch rebellion of the 19th century, led by Prince Diponegoro (1825–1830), no tarekat appears to have been involved in spite of the religious motivation of many participants. One gathers that at that time no tarekat network was available in Central Java that could have been put to use by Diponegoro and his ulama advisers...” (Bruinessen 1994, 16).

Of course, Van Bruinessen himself indicated that he came to this conclusion because of the absence of reliable historical evidence at the time of writing. My conclusion is a continuation of Peter Carey’s work (Carey 2008, 113–114), which other scholars also agree with (see, for example, Laffan 2011, 45–46). Carey and Laffan stated that the Prince’s repeated references to mystical practices in his autobiography indicate his inclination to a Sufi order, although, at the time, neither Carey nor Laffan pointed specifically to the Shaṭṭārīya or the Naqshbandīya Orders.

As Annemarie Schimmel wrote, it is not unusual in Sufism for a woman to adopt the role of the ‘mother’ of a great Sufi leader. Many religious leaders, such as Pangeran Dipanagara, admitted that they received not only their first religious instruction but also their preliminary training in their pursuit of the mystic path from their mothers, grandmothers or other women

¹³ “Guardian or nurse of a young child or youth below the age of majority, which in Java is sixteen years” (Carey 2008, 840).

close to them. Schimmel illustrates this with various great Sufi figures, including ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, whose mother and aunt significantly contributed to his spiritual formation as a Sufi master (Schimmel 1975, 430). In Java, this is true in the cases of Kangjeng Ratu Kadipaten, and Ratu Pakubuwana (see below).

We have not (yet) discovered historical evidence that Kangjeng Ratu Kadipaten initiated Pangeran Dipanagara or others into members of the Shaṭṭārīya Order. We also have yet to find one single written text that indicates Kangjeng Ratu Kadipaten’s level of spirituality as a Sufi. As a member of the order, however, she must regularly practice the ritual of Sufi *wird* (litanies), for the manuscript Jav. 69 includes what it called as *wiride Kanjeng Ratu Kadospaten* (the litanies of Kanjeng Ratu Kadospaten); the text says: “...*bismillahirrahmanirrahim, utawi ikilah wiride Kanjeng Rahatu ing Kadospaten sawuse zikir nafyi ithbat...*” (f.22v) (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent the Merciful, here is the Sufi litanies belongs to Kanjeng Ratu Kadospaten). In the term of Sufi order, *wird* is one of the central principles should be practiced by its members to be close to Allah. It is usually a practice of repeating the name of Allah, and a set of invocation assigned to a *murid* by his or her *murshid*. The *wird* in the term of Sufi order is rather different with the *wird* practiced profanely by general Muslims, since the former is practiced in a more sacred context and with certain specific rituals (Turmudi 1998, 65).

In addition, the reliable sources we do have tell us that she was a pious, courteous and resolute female Sufi and that this forced her to abandon her luxurious life at court. Peter Carey, for example, explained that the reason behind Kangjeng Ratu Kadipaten’s decision to leave the Keraton Yogyakarta after the death of her husband, Sultan Mangkubumi, and to live in her new residence in Tegalreja in the middle of the rice paddies was triggered by her disapproval of the lifestyle of her son, the second Sultan and “in particular his nonchalant attitude towards Islamic religious observance” (Carey 2008, 81; see also Carey and Houben 2016, 71).

In Tegalreja, Kangjeng Ratu Kadipaten adopted a role as a formidable and pious Sufi woman and she certainly influenced the religiosity not only of her grandson, Pangeran Dipanagara, but also of other people around her. The *Babad Dipanagara* portrays her as a pious woman who was close to God (Carey 2008, 77–78):

*Kangjeng Ratu winarni/
pan tetanen remenipun/
sinambi lan ngibadah/
kinarya namur puniki/
lampahira gen brongta marang Yang Sukma.
[...]*

*langkung kerta Tegalreja/
 mapan kathah tiyang prapti/
 samya angungsi tedhi/
 ingkang santri ngungsi ngelmu/
 langkung ramé ngibadah/ punapa déné wong tani*

We describe the Ratu [Ageng]:
 [how] she delighted in farming
 and in her religious duties.
 She made herself anonymous
 in her profession of her love of God.
 [...]
 Tegalreja became extremely prosperous
 for many people came to visit.
 All sought food
 [while] the santri sought [religious] knowledge.
 There was much devotion and prayer,
 moreover, there were also farmers.

Nearing her death on 17 October 1803, Kangjeng Ratu Kadipaten again showed herself to be a person who prioritized spirituality above earthly splendor. She whispered her last words to her son, Sultan Hamengkubuwana II:

“Sultan! The path I have to lay aside is difficult and now I feel that I am essentially no more than an ordinary person. My son, keep that in view and do not believe that, although you are now ruler, after your death you will be anything more than a common coolie. So live accordingly!” (Carey 2008, 81; see also Carey and Houben 2016, 71).

Kangjeng Ratu Kadipaten’s behavior reminds us somewhat of Jahānārā the female Indian Sufi in Mughal India discussed above, who preferred the spiritual life as a member of the Qādirīya and Chishtīya Orders to enjoying majesty and splendor in the court she inherited from her father, Emperor Shāh Jahān. Jahānārā and Kangjeng Ratu Kadipaten were typical court elite ladies. The first was the daughter of the Emperor of India in the second half of the seventeenth century and the second the wife of the Sultan of Yogyakarta about a century later. Both had everything they could possibly want and what almost everyone wants: wealth, power and respect. They had the world at their feet and were apparently beloved of all but, as saints, they chose to spend their lives devoted to God and to their people.

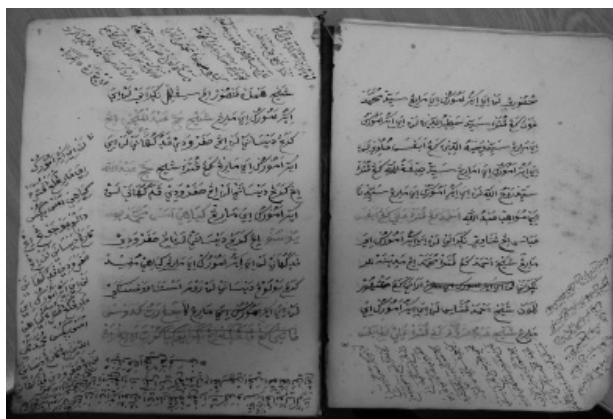


Image 4. *Silsila* of Kangjeng Ratu Kadospaten ff.8v-9r of Jav.69 of the British Library Collection

Sometime later, at the end of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century, another elite lady from the Yogyakarta Keraton joined the Shattāriya Order. This is recorded in manuscript MS Jav.83/IO 3102 in the British Library. She was Raden Ayu Kilen who may be identified as one of the concubines (*garwa pangrembe*) of Hamengkubuwana II who reigned from 1792 to 1810, 1811 to 1812, and 1826 to 1828 (Fathurahman 2016, 60–62). According to Ricklefs (1998), the manuscript used to be part of the royal collection of manuscripts in the palace and was probably acquired by Colin Mackenzie during the raid on the Keraton Yogyakarta in 1812 (see also Ricklefs 1997, 245–246). Having transcribed the *silsila* of Raden Ayu Kilen in the Shattāriya order in this manuscript, Fathurahman (2016, 63–64) also listed several important religious texts including *Kitab Daka* and *Kitab Fatahurrahman*, Javanese treatises that demonstrate that Sufism was very influential and remained important in court thought until the eighteenth century.

The combination in one volume of texts on the *manunggaling kawula gusti* (the unity of God) doctrine or *waḥdat al-wujūd* and the *silsila* of the Shattāriya Order at least gives us a picture of the kind of Sufi understanding of its followers, including the Order’s members, among the palace elite in Keraton Yogyakarta. And indeed, the *waḥdat al-wujūd* has always been an inseparable part of this Order’s teachings everywhere the Shattāriya Order prospered, not just in Yogyakarta. An exception may be Minangkabau, West Sumatra, where some of its members removed the *waḥdat al-wujūd* doctrine from the Shattāriya Order’s teaching (a further discussion on this issue, see Fathurahman 2008).

This manuscript source does not provide us with enough information about Raden Ayu Kilen’s identity. She is mentioned in the *silsila* as *Kangjeng Raden Ayu Kilen ingkang garwa* [the wife of] *Kangjeng Sinuhun Sultan Pakubuwana Abdurrahman Sayidin Panatagama Senapati Alaga*. Raden Ayu Kilen was, however, a common title for ladies in the Javanese

courts, both in Surakarta and Yogyakarta.¹⁴

Unlike Kangjeng Ratu Kadipaten, there is uncertainty about Raden Ayu Kilen's spiritual role as a female member of the *ṭarīqa*. We also do not have enough sources to be able to know much about her life apart from the fact that she got her *ijāza* from Pangeran Pakuningrat, a prince of the old Mataram lineage and a distinguished member of the Javanese aristocracy, who had studied the Shaṭṭārīya teachings from Kyai Abdullah, a senior ulama from Bagelen and a teacher in Pesantren Alang-alang Ombo in Central Java, known as Seh Kastuba (Carey 2008, 790). It may be that she did not have the same important spiritual influence as Kangjeng Ratu Kadipaten, particularly because her husband, Hamengkubuwana II, is portrayed as not very pious, particularly when compared with his father, Hamengkubuwana I or Pangeran Mangkubumi, who was reputed in his youth to have engaged in major acts of asceticism and piety and was even considered Java's greatest king after Sultan Agung (Ricklefs 2007, 6). Peter Carey says of Hamengkubuwana II that:

“...He appears to have rarely visited the great mosque, Mesjid Ageng, the official worshipping place of the Yogya rulers, although he seems to have been rather more diligent about dispatching court santri to undertake pilgrimages to Mecca and to various holy sites in south-central Java and the north coast...” (Carey 2008, 81).



Image 5. *Silsila* of Raden Ayu Kilen
ff.25v-26r of Jav.83 of the British Library Collection

Ratu Pakubuwana: A Woman Sufi?

Based on the sources I will discuss below, the most formidable woman in the Javanese royal dynasty was probably Ratu Pakubuwana from the Kartasura period who lived much earlier than both Kangjeng Ratu Kadipaten and Raden Ayu Kilen. As we have no data on her involvement in a Sufi order and thus not about her involvement in the, at that time, highly

¹⁴ f.26r of Jav.83 manuscript of the British Library Collection.

popular Shaṭṭārīya, however, it is not clear if she can be classified as a Sufi.

To answer this, we should first examine Ratu Pakubuwana's identity and role in the Islamic Javanese kingdom in the eighteenth century, and whether there a precedent in the history of *ṭarīqas* in the Muslim world for women like Ratu Pakubuwana to be categorized as Sufis? In my discussion below, I depend to a large extent on Ricklef's works on the history of the Javanese kingdoms.

Ratu Pakubuwana (d. 1732) was the wife of Pangeran Puger, a descendant of the Kings of Mataram. He was the first king of Kartasura, who reigned under the title of Pakubuwana I (r. 1704–1719). On becoming the Queen of Kartasura, Ratu Pakubuwana inherited the continuing conflict between the ruler of the Javanese palace and Muslims that had ended in the murder of 5000–6000 Muslim clerics and their families in the great square (*alun-alun*) before the court as a result of actions taken by Amangkurat I (r. 1646–1677). When her husband assumed the throne, Ratu Pakubuwana started to engineer the second major reconciliation between the *keraton* (court) and Islam, and to make the *keraton* again the centre of Islamic mystic piety, as it had been during the time of her ancestor, the greatest of Javanese kings, Sultan Agung (r. 1613–1646), almost a century before (Ricklefs 2007, 4–5).

There is unfortunately still insufficient information to explain the origins of the Ratu's Sufi spiritual knowledge and from where she acquired her spiritual experiences. Who had she taken as her teacher? How was she able to have a more outstanding personality than the male elite members of the *keraton* around her? From an examination of the role she played we can be sure that Ratu Pakubuwana was indeed a keen intellectual, that she was highly respected in her time and that she was very familiar with the world of spiritual Islam. The other texts I discuss below demonstrate that Ratu Pakubuwana was probably influenced by Sultan Agung's spirituality.

One proof of Ratu Pakubuwana's learnedness is that from 1729 to 1730 she took the initiative (*ingkang ayasa*) to have three magically powerful books written to shape the future, namely *Carita Sultan Iskandar* (The Story of Sultan Iskandar), *Carita Yusuf* (The Story of Yusuf), and *Kitab Usulbiyah* (the Book of Usulbiyah). The first work presents King Iskandar Zulkarnain (Alexander the Great) as a model of conquering kingship and piety and ends with pious admonition. The second is the Javanized story of the Prophet Yusuf in Egypt, as related in the Qur'an. The third tells a story about a dialog between God and Muhammad, in which the former gives instructions and the latter accepts them. The story continues with an encounter between the Isa (Jav. *Ngisa*) and Muhammad, but in the local Javanese setting, which is central to this work (a very detail discussion and analysis on this topic, see Ricklefs 1998, 40–103). Of the three books, Ricklefs suggests that *Kitab Usulbiyah* or *Ngusulbiyah* is the most extraordinary and could be seen as a spiritually potent weapon in the hands of Ratu Pakubuwana. It was a vehicle for mystical teaching and moral instruction, and a book that

claims to have miraculous powers (Ricklefs 1998, 67). Ricklefs portrays Ratu Pakubuwana's relation to the manuscripts as follows:

“...she became *ingkang ayasa* of books which, as will be seen below, invoked not only the supernatural authority of Islam and her own spiritual standing, but also the aura of Sultan Agung, the conquering, Islamizing paragon of Javanese kingship, the royal pilgrim at Tĕmbayat in 1633...” (Ricklefs 1998, 39–40).

Ricklefs explains that in the cultural context of eighteenth century Java, the literary use of the word *yasa* indicates that the work offered spiritual and supernatural power to the person who initiated its writing. Thus, the *ingkang ayasa* can be understood as a person who determined the contents of a work and was thus associated with its composition, but not necessarily the one who wrote it out. In the case of Ratu Pakubuwana, for instance, we know that by 1729–1730, when she was associated with these three books, she had been completely blind for some time (Ricklefs 1998, 36). The text of the *Carita Iskandar* distinguishes the initiator (*ingkang ayasa*) from the person who wrote the texts (*kang anulis*) (Ricklefs 1998, 43).

Apart from the *Carita Sultan Iskandar*, *Carita Yusuf* and the *Kitab Usulbiyah*, there is another text that is no less important and even clearer about Ratu Pakubuwana's affiliation with Sufism, the *Suluk Garwa Kancana*, which was also rewritten in 1730. This text clearly presents the Javanese philosophy of kingship conceived in Islamic mystic terms and its sponsor is stated as Sultan Agung who, in this text, is called ‘Susunan Ratu’ (Ricklefs 1998, 112–113).

Ratu Pakubuwana therefore should be considered a Javanese female Sufi, particularly because she made a huge contribution to Javanese Sufi literature by initiating the composition of the works linked to her. We can, moreover, compare her initiatives with what was done by Jahānārā, the Moghul female Sufi who made a huge contribution to the development of Sufi thought in India, and was the initiator for a series of works on Islamic mysticism (Schimmel 2005, 153).

In this way, irrespective of the fact that there is no evidence of her spiritual genealogy and association to a Sufi order, Ratu Pakubuwana can reasonably be categorized as a Javanese female Sufi. Ricklefs portrays Ratu Pakubuwana during the reign of Pakubuwana II as beginning “...to emerge as a major political force. She was also a litterateur of significance, a master of the occult and a pious Sufi mystic...” (Ricklefs 2007, 4).

Epilogue

At the beginning of this article I discussed the studies of female Sufis written by scholars from countries that are firmly rooted in Islamic history, such as Arabia, India and Turkey. In general, however, these scholars never address the possibility of the existence of active female Sufis in the history of Sufism in Indonesia. Martin van Bruinessen is an exception, discussing

the important role of women as teachers in the Naqshbandīya Mazharīya order in Madura, East Java. But even that mention was very brief and concerned the contemporary era, when Sufism and its orders were no longer the main elements in the development of Islam.

Examination of manuscripts in many Indonesian collections have led to the conclusion that the long history of Sufism in Indonesia has made an important contribution to the development of female Sufis in the 18th and 19th centuries. This article agrees with the argument made by a number of scholars that, based on the study of manuscripts, it is clear that Javanese women, in particular, played a very important role in the history of the court elites in the 18th and 19th centuries and that they were involved in literary activities. Ann Kumar's 2008 study of *Prajurit Perempuan Jawa* (Javanese Female Soldiers) is a good example. This study examines a diary written by a female member of an extraordinary institution, the Corps of Female Soldiers of the Kingdom of Java, and describes the atmosphere in the palace of Mangkunegara I from 1781 to 1791.

Kumar's conclusion is important because Islam in Java, as Clifford Geertz argues (Geertz 1976), is seen as less Islamic and contains many Hindu-Buddhist and *kejawen* (Javanese mysticism) elements, an often-cited conclusion. I agree with Chiara Formichi that the belief that Javanese Islam is less Islamic and inspired by many non-Islamic elements — as stated by Geertz — is a “rehashing of Colonial Scholarship on the Indies” (Formichi 2016, 712). In my view, another and no less important reason is that very few studies on Javanese Islam have been based on the study of manuscripts written by Javanese Muslims themselves so that we actually do not yet have a proper understanding of Javanese Islam as the Javanese wrote and understood it.

Literary texts that, initially, do not look like ‘Islamic texts’ not infrequently project an image of the hegemony, or at least the strong influence, of Islam on Javanese culture and society. Nancy Florida's study on the *Babad Jaka Tingkir*, the history of Jaka (or “the Youth from”) Tingkir is a good example. She stressed that: *Babad Jaka Tingkir* is “...an epic history that concerns the emergence of Islamic power in Central Java...” (Florida 1995, 8). Through her translation and detailed study of the text, Florida simultaneously strongly criticized the tendency of the orientalist who, since colonial times, had consistently obscured the Islamic roots of Javanese literature. Rather, she concludes that,

“...with Babad Jaka Tingkir, a prophetic Javanese poet composed the history of a critical period in the Javanese past: the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, a period that saw the transition from the ancient Hindu-Buddhist East Javanese regimes to the beginnings of Central Javanese Islamic hegemony...” (Florida 1995, 9).

We cannot deny that there is a Hindu-Buddhist influence in the Javanese Islamic Sufi tradition. It may also not be an overstatement to assume that prior experience with Hinduism and Buddhism enabled the Javanese, including people in court circles, to swiftly and broadly

adopt Sufism in Java, because there are similarities in the universal values of both systems. In this case, we may make a comparison with Sufism in India, which was so successful because it fused the ideas of Islamic mysticism with the Indian thoughts of Hinduism (see the chapter viii “the Relation of Sufism to Indian Thought” in Subhan 2009, 132–58).

It is no doubt that Java, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries, was a fertile ground for the emergence and the prolific development of female Sufis. The atmosphere among the Javanese court elite was highly religious, as is evident from the sources I discussed above. The emergence of a neo-Sufi movement in the 18th and 19th century in the Islamic world was marked by changes in the Sufi orientation from merely ascetic to activism (Voll 2008). This factor contributed to strengthening Sufism among the palace elite, especially in Java.

Unlike in regions such as Turkey and India, the Sufi order that most stood out as the ‘home’ for female Indonesian Sufis was the Shaṭṭārīya. In Turkey, as stated earlier, several female Sufis were associated with the Qādirīya Naqshbandīya, and Mawlawī Sufi orders. In India, they participated mostly in the Chishtīya and Qādirīya (Elias 1988, 222).

Why do the sources discussed above only mention the names of Sufi women in the royal courts and not those from the general population? Martin van Bruinessen explains that Sufism in Indonesia during the 17th to the 19th centuries was limited to the courts:

“...the few indigenous sources that we have, strongly suggest that the orders found their followings in court circles and only at a much later stage did this filter down to the population at large...” (Bruinessen 1994, 13).

Nevertheless, I need to stress that conclusions presented in this article were drawn from a study of Javanese manuscripts on the Shaṭṭārīya. I am convinced, however, that were I to study other Islamic manuscripts from Java, and from Indonesia in general, I may have come up with the names of female Sufis other than those mentioned above. These may come not just from palace circles but also from the general population.

This is particularly likely because al-Sulamī’s work, *Dhikr al-niswa*, discussed above, contains hints that women categorized as female Sufis were so categorized not because they proposed Sufi doctrines or because they wrote their own works but because of their pious acts. The complete title of the work itself is *Dhikr al-niswa al-muta‘abbidāt al-ṣūfiyyāt* (Memorial of Female Sufi Devotees) which suggests to the readers that al-Sulamī is writing about a distinct group of women who are to be included among the Sufis because they practice ta‘abbud, which literally means “making oneself a slave” (Cornell 1999, 54; see also Omar and Hardman 2003, 95). If we had the primary sources about the piety of Sufi women, the way they executed their religious duties and their proximity as servants of God, we should also be able to identify more Sufi women in Indonesia.

I already pointed to the similarities between the motives for the emergence of female Sufis in the Javanese court circles and phenomena that took place elsewhere in the Muslim

world, such as in Mughal India. Although this article does not purport to prove direct links between Indian and Javanese Sufism, universal values can clearly be detected in both regions, particularly in the acknowledgment of the equal roles of men and women. We know that some of the women whose names are mentioned above wielded great power from behind the scenes as the mothers of Sultans and princes who guided their religious education and early spiritual experiences.

Sufi women can emerge everywhere, in every social circle and Sufis may be men and women because Sufism preserves the universal values that enable the equality of every human being regardless of their ethnic, class or gender identities.

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