Article

Sufism and the Sacred Feminine in Lombok, Indonesia: Situating Spirit Queen Dewi Anjani and Female Saints in Nahdlatul Wathan

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Abstract: This article is a feminist ethnographic exploration of how ‘indigenous’ notions of a ‘sacred feminine’ shape Sufi praxis on the island of Lombok in the eastern part of Indonesia in Southeast Asia. I demonstrate through long-term immersive anthropological fieldwork how in her indigenous form as Dewi Anjani ‘Spirit Queen of Jinn’ and as ‘Holy Saint of Allah’ who rules Lombok from Mount Rinjani, together with a living female saint and Murshida with whom she shares sacred kinship, these feminine beings shape the kind of Sufi praxis that has formed in the largest local Islamic organization in Lombok, Nahdlatul Wathan, and its Sufi order, Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan. Arguments are situated in a Sufi feminist standpoint, revealing how an active integration of indigeneity into understandings of mystical experience gives meaning to the sacred feminine in aspects of Sufi praxis in both complementary and hierarchical ways without challenging Islamic gender constructs that reproduce patriarchal expressions of Sufism and Islam.

Keywords: sacred feminine; divine feminine in Sufism; Sufi orders; female saints; female leadership in Sufism; Dewi Anjani; Nahdlatul Wathan; Lombok; Indonesia; indigenous feminine

1. Introduction

The ‘sacred (also read as divine) feminine’ as cultural praxis is an under-researched area in the anthropology of Sufism in Indonesia, mostly because normative Sufism as organized through the tariqa, like Islam, is structurally and ideologically patriarchal and formally speaks to a male audience. While we can access Her (the sacred or divine feminine) intellectually and mystically, particularly in the work of medieval Sufi scholar Ibn Al-Arabi, and come to know of Her in the form of esteemed Sufi women and saints through hagiographies, poetry, and research on contemporary Sufism and gender, in general, She hides under a long tradition of male scholarship and authority in Islam.

In the culturally diverse Southeast Asian archipelagic nation-state of Indonesia—the world’s most populous Muslim society—we are hard pressed to find formal discourse on the divine feminine in traditional orthodox Sufi orders. The reason for this is that the kind of Sufism that formally dominates Indonesian Islam is that of Al-Ghazali’s orthodox Sufism. Al-Ghazalian gender ideology tends not to support the notion of a divine feminine or divinity in women and nor does it afford her centrality in seen and unseen realms.

Scholars of Indonesian Sufism have noted that various Sufi teachings were taught during the early Islamization of Indonesia, including Ibn Al-Arabi’s doctrine of Unity of Being, which integrated into indigenous mystical fields of practice (see Riddell 2001; Wahyuni 2017; Woodward 1989, 2010). State projects of modernization and formalization of religion, however, eventually led to a preference for Al-Ghazali’s orthodox Sufism together with the Syafi’i school of jurisprudence (Wahyuni 2017). Therefore, in the contemporary milieu, rarely is Ibn Al-Arabi’s thought taught in the majority of formal Sufi orders, with exceptions being in a few orders only such as Akbariyah, neo-Sufi groups and in intellectual
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Sufi circles in urban centers. Even so, including in academic courses in universities, Ibn Al-Arabi's discourses on the feminine remain under-studied in Indonesia.

In practice, however, we do find veneration of and orthopraxic engagement with the sacred feminine through popular belief and ritual in Muslim (especially agrarian) communities and some Sultanates across Indonesia that co-maintain and integrate Islamic and pre-Islamic beliefs that engage goddesses, female ancestors, and female saints (Headley 2004; Heringa 1997; Jordaan 1984, 1997; Pigeaud 1962; Sanday 2002; Smith and Woodward 2016; Wessing 1997). These female spirits primarily derive from the indigenous Malayo-Polynesian branch of Austronesian culture and Buddhist-Hinduized religiosities of pre-Islamic Indonesia.

In Muslim farming communities, Mother Rice Spirits and Goddesses, such as Dewi Sri, were and are integral to community and family life relating to food, hearth, prosperity, and community well-being. Thus, their sacred maintenance was, and in some Muslim communities, still is, not only central, but also obligatory (Heringa 1997). Spirit Queens (also read as Goddesses) play roles in the unseen ‘mythical,’ eternal realms in their augmentation of power in human kings or leaders through marriage or other historical dynastic partnerships in Sumatra, the Sultanates of Yogyakarta and Surakarta in Central Java, and as I show here for the first time, also in Lombok. In such communities, we find an ongoing reproduction of ritual praxis that invokes the feminine as sacred in a cosmology that has indigenized Sufism. It is this variety of ‘feminine’ to which I refer as an ‘indigenous feminine’ in her sacred form among the indigenous Sasak people of Lombok.

There is next to no feminist ethnography on the inter-relationships between female deities, saints, gender, and Islam in Lombok, and so this article aims to deepen understandings about the complexities embedded in Sufi interactions in these realms. The orthopraxic engagement with the feminine differs from the formal, orthodox Sufism in the organized Sufi orders, but importantly it contextualizes the narratives that give meaning to ideas about gender in Lombok. Departing from the gender-neutral work of Sasak Muslim scholars, and based on long-term immersive anthropological fieldwork from 2008 to the present, I present new arguments that show how the realm of the sacred feminine plays an integral role in the Sufi orthopraxis of Lombok’s largest and most influential local Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Wathan.

In Nahdlatul Wathan and its Sufi order, Tarekat Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan, there is a history of female leadership held by the founding father’s daughter, Ummi Siti Raehanun (b. 1953), who is also considered to be a saint and Murshida (a female Murshid; Sufi teacher), and an emphasis placed on deceased female saints such as Rabia Al-Adawiyah together with Lombok’s indigenous Dewi Anjani, Spirit Queen of Jinn, who rules Lombok from the majestic Mount Rinjani. Dewi Anjani has been integral to the Islamization of Lombok and is said to hold a revered position in Nahdlatul Wathan that enjoins her in a sacred relationship with the historical Selaparang kingdom of East Lombok, as I examine later. Mythically, this relationship is rooted in the Sasak origin myth, Doyan Neda, which tells of how Dewi Anjani as Creatrix gave life to the first humans on Lombok from twenty royal jinn couples. The Islamization of the myth has not altered the power Dewi Anjani is understood to wield in her current identity as a holy female Muslim saint and ruler of Lombok, which in turn serves to legitimize Nahdlatul Wathan’s dominant position in Lombok socially and politically.

I explore how Dewi Anjani as a representation of an ‘indigenous feminine’ spirit has undergone change in historicized, politicized and religio-gendered contexts, particularly through interactions with Muslim praxis and the notion of sainthood. I therefore aim to represent her plurality and shifting identities across such contexts. I refer to her Sasak indigeneity to mark a contrast from ideas about gender in formal, orthodox Sufism where the feminine is located in a hierarchical relationship to men within the confines of shar’iah that formally designates men as leaders. An exception to this, as I show, is when a human female saint is revered, as in the case of Murshida Ummi Raehanun, as the daughter of Nahdlatul Wathan’s founding father and Sufi saint, Tuan Guru Hajji Zainuddin Abdul
Madjid (known as Maulana Syeikh), and who is also believed to share sacred kinship with Dewi Anjani. As I explore, Ummi Raehanun inherited both Dewi Anjani’s loyalty and her leadership from her father, the latter of which taps into issues of patriarchal dependency women Sufis of high rank experience throughout the Muslim world more broadly (see Ali Khan 2018; Hill 2018; Neubauer 2016; Pemberton 2004; Smith 2014b).

More generally, I aim to contribute to knowledge about the lesser understood and rarely researched (ortho)praxes and heterogeneity of the feminine in Islam cross-culturally by looking at the ways in which Sufis understand, commune and form orthopraxic relationships with aspects of the feminine in their daily and devotional lives. I situate my ethnography in a Sufi feminist standpoint related to Shaikh’s (2012) call for a new Islamic feminist inquiry that she draws from Ibn Al-Arabi’s recognition of a divine feminine. Here, my ethnography reveals the ways in which the sacred feminine is grounded by indigenous ways of knowing and accessing the mystical realms that move beyond the gender constraints of Islam more generally. By working with the decolonial analytic I call an ‘indigenous feminine’, my feminist ethnography of ‘Sufism’ situates indigenous understandings about gender and the sacred feminine in the form of goddesses, deified ancestors and other Islamized female spirits as central to a Sufi orthopraxis.

I would like to build on this Sufi turn in Islamic feminism anthropologically by showing how Sufi heterogeneity expressed in indigenous Sasak ways of knowing the feminine aspects of Creation that are cast as sacred points to an active embrace of both masculine and feminine in seen and unseen realms in ways that are complementary and hierarchical at the same time. The article suggests that indigenous ways of interacting with the feminine dimensions of Creation retain a sacred, powerful place in the kind of Sufism that has formed in East Lombok, and yet, do not necessarily suggest that there is anything sacred about the feminine in ordinary women. Furthermore, I demonstrate how Sufi interactions with the sacred feminine are non-challenging to the dominant Islamic patriarchal shari’ah-based and Al-Ghazalian Sufi gender constructs that formally shape orthodox gender relations in Lombok.

I begin by looking at what I call ‘Muslim ethnoscapes’ into which Islamic heterogeneity is inscribed through praxis in overlapping, shifting, and complex ways in Indonesia and Lombok, and then turn to locate Dewi Anjani in wider Indonesian patterns of sacred relations between Spirit Queens and rulers, in order to provide a depth of understanding for the ethnography that I present thereafter in relation to Nahdlatul Wathan’s Sufi order.

2. Muslim Ethnoscapes in Indonesia and Lombok

2.1. Islam and Sufism in Indonesia

Indonesia is the world’s largest Muslim nation. There are more than 300 ethnic groups in Indonesia and a population of approximately 270 million. An estimated 85% of Indonesians profess Islam. Indonesian Islam is heterogeneous in practice and reflects the diversity of ethnic groups throughout the archipelago (Beatty 1999; Woodward 1989). Islam is traditionally taught through schools attached to national Islamic organizations. Sufism is taught through Sufi orders either affiliated with or attached to these organizations or by teachers in urban groups. Prior to the arrival of foreign religions to the archipelago, the diverse peoples practiced varieties of indigenous Austronesian/Malayo-Polynesian religiosity, which can be described as shamanic and animist. The arrival of Hindu-Buddhism in Indonesia in the 4th century changed the religious landscape into a Hinduized (-Buddhist) indigenous one.

Sufi Islam is estimated to have arrived in the 13th century (or possibly earlier) and over a period of time, it was absorbed into the pre-existing indigenous Hindu-Buddhist landscape (see Ricklefs 2001). The kind of Sufism and Islam that developed initially was that of unorganized expressions of Sufism (Ricklefs 2001). The Sufism that has formed in cultural practice in Indonesia can therefore be described as fluid and plural in that it has been indigenized in culturally specific ways. I situate this fluidity and plurality of indigenized Sufi practice within the notion that I refer to as ‘Muslim ethnoscapes’. Muslim ethnoscapes represent the heterogeneity of Islam in cultural praxis and engage a
decolonial frame for interpreting Sufism and Islam more broadly. The ‘indigenous feminine’ is embedded within these Muslim ethnoscapes, as I demonstrate later.

Sufism as cultural praxis differs from orthodox Sufism that is formally organized through the tarîqa and taught in traditional Islamic schools known as pesantren. Orthodox Islam is organized through national and local organizations, the largest two being Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. Nahdlatul Ulama embraces cultural practices with a Sufi emphasis and Muhammadiyah is modernist and reformist. There are at present forty-three authorized tarîqa in Indonesia that are considered authentic by the national body that oversees the correctness of Sufi orders, called Jam’iyah Ahli al-Thariqah al-Mu’tabarah an-Nahdliyah. Some of the more popular tarîqa in Indonesia include Qâdirîyâh wa Naqshabandiyah, Syathariyah, and Rifâ’îyâh. In Lombok, Qadariyah wa Naqshabandiyah, Khalwatiyah and Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan are the more dominant tarîqa. The majority of these tarîqa work deeply with Al-Ghazali’s theology and that of his predecessors. There are also Sufi orders that exist alongside these ‘formally’ recognized ones, and some of these embrace the teachings of, and those derived from, Ibn Al-Arabi.

2.2. Varieties of Sasak Islam and Sufism: Reframing ‘Orthodoxy’ in Lombok

Lombok is a multi-ethnic island to the east of Bali in the West Nusa Tenggara province. The majority of inhabitants consist of the indigenous Sasak Muslims, followed by neighboring ethnic groups Sumbawanese, Bimanese, and Balinese Hindus, as well as Javanese, Bugis, and Arabs, amongst others. Approximately 95% of the island’s 3.7 million inhabitants practice a variant of Islam. Balinese Hindus are a minority along with Chinese Christians and Buddhists and the marginalized non-Muslim Sasak who practice an indigenous religiosity known as Sasak Boda.

Sasak Islam dominates the religious landscape and is typically classified by scholars into two major streams: Wetu Telu and Waktu Lima (Budiwanti 2000; Cederroth 1981; Freeman 1989; Muliadi 2019). The former, Wetu Telu (‘Three Times’), is represented as syncretic, Sufi Islam rooted in the Boda’s Hinduized animism. Waktu Lima (‘Five Times’) is referred to as orthodox Islam. Indonesian scholars often describe ‘Wetu Telu’ as Sufi oriented and ‘Waktu Lima’ as fiqh oriented (Quddus and Ariadi 2015). Such classification, while helpful in giving a broad picture, however, does not capture the complexities, heterogeneity and dialectics within the ‘Waktu Lima’ category, which Western-trained scholars tend to homogenize as ‘reformist’ (Budiwanti 2000; Harnish 2003, 2019; MacDougall 2005).

I draw on Sasak Muslim scholars’ recent re-framings of early 20th-century Dutch colonial and contemporary scholarship that reproduce binary constructions of Sasak Islam as ‘orthodox’ and ‘unorthodox/syncretic’, to provide new insights into indigeneity and gender in Sasak Sufism. I argue that homogenizing the notion of ‘orthodox’ fails to capture the plurality within this category of practice together with the indigenous complexity and depth of Sufi wisdom enmeshed in ‘orthodox’ life-worlds. In particular, I show how the Sasak Islam two-tier model overlaps and is capable of shifting in and out of indigeneity in politicized contexts.

With this in mind, I refer to Nahdlatul Wathan (established in 1953) as the largest local and most powerful Islamic organization in Lombok. Scholars (Budiwanti 2000; Harnish 2019; MacDougall 2005) represent Nahdlatul Wathan as a reformist organization intolerant of indigenous practices like those of the Wetu Telu. While this may partially be the case, and it certainly was in the 1930s, when its founder, Tuan Guru Hajji Zainuddin Abdul Madjid, was proselytizing after his return from lengthy study in Mecca, such accounts have overlooked the specific variety of Sasak Sufism in Nahdlatul Wathan that is anchored in indigeneity and acknowledges the sacred feminine in the form of the Spirit Queen of Jinn on Mount Rinjani—Dewi Anjani—as integral to its projects of Islamization, and which Tuan Guru Hajji Zainuddin Abdul Madjid is understood to have guided mystically through his sacred kinship with the Spirit Queen.
More recent Sasak Muslim scholarship reframes the ‘Waktu Lima’ ‘Wetu Telu’ debate by locating understandings broadly in the notion of Nusantara Islam or indigenized Islam/s in Indonesia (Fitriani 2015). In the case of Lombok, I draw on the notion of Muslim ethnoscapes to refer to sites of shifting Islamic practice embedded within the concept of Nusantara Islam, to elucidate the heterogeneity of Sasak Islam and to unearth a more gendered understanding of the kinds of Islam in practice. Particularly, this concerns a reinterpretation of the reification of ‘orthodox Islam’ to elucidate how it, too, has been shaped by Sufi cosmology and indigeneity.

Sasak religio-sociological history can only partially be interpreted and reconstructed due to limited written sources and varied oral sources (Mahyuni 2007). Prior to Islam’s arrival on Lombok, the powerful Javanese Hindu kingdom of Majapahit had penetrated sometime in the 14th century and greatly influenced the language, practices and religiosity of the indigenous Sasak Boda (Boda is also referred to as ‘Majapahit religion’ because it was Hinduized by the Javanese Majapahit kingdom) (Asnawi 2006; Kieven 2013). There is also speculation that prior to the Majapahit expansion, indigenous Javanese, Balinese and/or other ancestors had already settled in Lombok (Fauzan 2013).

It is generally agreed upon that Islam in its Sufi form first entered in North Lombok in the late 16th century from Java (Budiwanti 2000) and then later in East Lombok from Makassar (Harnish 2003). There are varieties of Sasak Islamic practice that have been identified ethnographically. The Sasak Boda indigenized Sufi Islam and henceforth it became known as ‘Wetu Telu’ (for a detailed description see Budiwanti 2000; Cederroth 1981). The work of Indonesian scholars (see Budiwanti 2000; Fitriani 2015; Muliadi 2019; and Saharudin 2019) demonstrates how Sasak indigeneity agentively absorbed Sufism into all aspects of life including agrarian rites, life-rites and worldview including the integral role of lontar (palm leaf) manuscripts in providing references for teaching. To this, I add understandings about gender, which I explore in the following section.

Balinese Hinduism from neighboring Bali entered Lombok after Islam, and overpowered the indigenous Sasak during the late 1600s and 1700s until Sasak Muslims regained power during the colonial era with Dutch assistance in the late 1800s (Harnish 2019; MacDougall 2005; Mahyuni 2007). The reformist Islamic agendas of the late 1800s and early 1900s rejected the indigenization of Islam and thus the ‘Waktu Lima versus Wetu Telu’ binary was formed upon Muslim leaders returning home from the pilgrimage in Mecca where they learned a shar’iah-strict orthodox Islam. MacDougall (2005) notes that in Mecca, not only did they embrace orthodoxy, but they also studied Sufism. The Qadiriyya wa Naqshbandiyya tariqa, in particular, played a defining role in Lombok’s modern history. Many Muslim leaders known as ‘Tuan Guru’ and Sufi masters were instrumental in overthrowing the Balinese, and then later, the Dutch in the revolts of the late 1800s (MacDougall 2005). It is at this intersection between Dutch colonialism and the rise of Sasak Islam that the politicization of the sacred indigenous feminine began in an explicitly Islamic context.

The Islamization process eventually transformed the indigenous Sasak emphasis on the ‘male and female couple’ into the dominant ‘Sufi masculine’, and in doing so, significantly marginalized and diminished the value of the feminine. The ‘sacred couple’ was, and in some cases still is, honored at Sasak sacred deity sites called pedewaq that consist of one or more erect stones that usually represent ancestral or deity male and female couples (Telle 2014). These sacred deity sites relate to the indigenous Upper World realm known across Indonesia as the Kahyangan, where ancestors and deities dwell.

Some of these sacred sites have been re-Hinduized and Islamized and others were destroyed by Muslim reformists. In their Islamic form, they transform from a place for interaction with ancestors and deities into the Sufi ‘maqam’ or station—a place where a male saint (walli) disappeared (moksa) or was last seen. These ‘maqam’ are now popular pilgrimage sites for Sufi Muslims from different parts of Indonesia. Islamization has further seen the formal replacement of the indigenous ancestral couple with Adam and Eve during rituals that remember and honor the ancestors and in the wayang kulit shadow puppet plays (Budiwanti 2011; Harnish 2003). The ritual focus on Eve as the first human mother
has not, however, overshadowed Dewi Anjani, who in myth is not only Queen of the Jinn, but is also a saint and ‘mother’ of Lombok and the Sasak people. I now turn to a discussion of Dewi Anjani before profiling Nahdlatul Wathan and how she shapes the organization’s Sufi orthopraxis later in the article.

3. The Indigenous Sacred Feminine in Lombok: Creatrix and Saint

Here, I draw on feminist anthropological considerations of links between gender and the maintenance of a revered ancient female deity or ancestor who wields great power in the unseen mythical realms, by looking at what understandings they shed about female deities, saints and gender in the Sufi context in Lombok. Later, I illustrate this through field data that suggest an ‘interspersing’ of Dewi Anjani with that of Ummi Raehanun through their shared sacred relationship inherited from Tuan Guru Hajji Zainuddin Abdul Madjid. Ethnography on Sasak Sufism pays no attention to what feminist anthropologist Sanday (2002) calls ‘female-oriented webs of significance’ or gendered aspects from a feminist standpoint. This is quite surprising given the prominent feminine symbology found on the island in the form of myths about Dewi Anjani, legends about princesses with supernatural powers, the esteemed position attributed to mothers and feminine associations with rice cultivation and sacred rituals that draw on the Goddess of Fertility, Dewi Sri, in her various forms (Saharudin 2019).

Sasak culture, dialect and lexicons are heterogeneous across the island (Mahyuni 2007) and yet there is consistency in reference to and maintenance of the centrality of a notion of the feminine. The island of Lombok in the Sasak language is known by several names, including Gumi Sasak (Land of the Sasak) and Gumi Nina (Land of Women) (Muliadi 2019, p. 32; Saharudin 2019). Local narratives relate that the reference to Lombok as ‘female’ reflects the island’s fertility, abundance in water, and prosperity. Other clues are available in several ‘myths’ that suggest the possibility of a past (Austronesian) Malayo-Polynesian, pre-Hindu notion of a mother-centered cosmology for the indigenous Sasak people of Lombok, as I discuss with reference to the origin myth, Doyan Neda (also known as Temelak Mangan).

Together with female-centered origin myths and the importance of Dewi Anjani in Lombok’s affairs, these feminine and maternal symbols demonstrate the integral role of the feminine in Sasak life-worlds, both seen and unseen. They further underscore and speak to a broader cosmological complementarity that generally places forms of indigenous feminine power in the eternal unseen realm (ghaib) and masculine power in societies expressed through patriarchy. Drawing on this, I argue that notions of complementarity and hierarchy co-exist by shifting across and in-between the plurality available in Sasak gendered life-worlds.

The anthropology of Indonesian cultures has unearthed aspects of ‘complementarity’ and ‘pairing’ in terms of gender within different societies and how they play out through ritual, customary law and kinship systems (Davis 1995; Errington 1990; Sanday 2002). Gender complementarity is sourced from indigenous Austronesian and Malayo-Polynesian animism that acknowledged a series of binaries such as ‘male/female’; ‘outer/inner’; ‘mountain/ocean’, etc. (Becker 1993; Weiss 2006). Scholars have suggested that these binary oppositions were neither in competition with each other nor in a hierarchical relationship; they were “mutually activating, both necessary in order for prosperity and community harmony to be maintained” (Weiss 2006, p. 70).

In contemporary Muslim society, the emphasis on complementarity shapes gender relations through matrifocality and bilateral kinship systems in negotiation with Islam, patrilineality and patriarchal hierarchical practices (Davis 1995; Errington 1990; Sanday 2002; Smith 2008; Sullivan 1994; Wardatun 2019). Such gender complementarity may have its roots within its historical Malayo-Polynesian indigeneity, yet it must be read and understood ethnographically in its relationship to patriarchy and Islam in the contemporary context and against the ‘sacred feminine’s’ shifting identities, roles and function throughout her mythical, religious and political history.
Later, I show how these feminine symbols have been incorporated into Nahdlatul Wathan’s Sufi order through gender complementarity that is framed by an Islamic gender hierarchy, and the ways in which maintaining Dewi Anjani as a revered saint with power over Lombok, serves to reproduce the legitimacy of Nahdlatul Wathan as Lombok’s most powerful Islamic organization.

3.1. Sacred Spirit Queens in Islamic Kingdoms

I locate Dewi Anjani in the wider Indonesian context by placing her alongside other Spirit Queens and Goddesses who continue to play important roles in contemporary Islamic societies. In pre-Islamic Indonesia, the world of spirits was filled with nature and tutelary spirits, ancestors (some of whom were deified), together with indigenous gods and goddesses as well as those from the Hindu-Buddhist pantheon. Once Islam had been embraced, saints were added to this multi-ethnic pantheon (see Quinn 2012).

Indonesian mythology and folklore are replete with tales about princesses who become goddesses or powerful spirits and goddesses who form relationships with humans, especially kings and rulers. Wessing (1997) has listed examples from India, China and Mainland Southeast Asia that share similarities with Indonesia.

In contemporary Muslim Indonesia, we find the maintenance of female deities, more so than male ones, or powerful female ancestral spiritual beings, referred to by indigenous or Hinduized names bearing the royal title of ‘Queen’. These Spirit Queens rule from the unseen worlds and augment political power in human kingdoms through partnership or marriage to a human king or ruler (Florida 1992; Jordaan 1997; Wessing 1997). Such Spirit Queens are usually understood to be ‘whole’ and are without a male spirit partner and can be either good or destructive in their use of power. They possess power over the fate of the kingdoms (people), including their human male partners/lovers.

We find such examples in the Sultanates of Yogyakarta and Surakarta with Nyai Loro Kidul’s (Spirit Queen of the South Sea) sacred marriage to the current Sultan and his predecessors, the Spirit Queen Mother Bunda Kanduang as matriarch and her relationship with the patriarchal royal family in Minangkabau culture (Abdullah 1970; Sanday 2002) and the Bugis myth about a ruler whose wife will emerge from the waves of the ocean, as Wessing (1997) has noted. To this, I add Spirit Queen Dewi Anjani, the Selaparang Kingdom and Nahdlatul Wathan’s male and female leaders.

Scholars tend to represent these Spirit Queens as Goddesses (Nyai Loro Kidul in particular, see Headley 2004; Jordaan 1997). Some myths about Nyai Loro Kidul and Dewi Anjani also place them as human women whose asceticism was so strong that they disappeared into spirit form. Their stories are multiple in number, each different, yet they share an original human form and possess eternal power with influence over human life and society.

Some of these Goddess–mortal king relationships have sexual elements, like in the case of Nyai Loro Kidul and the Sultans of Central Java, and others do not, such as Dewi Anjani and the kings of Selaparang. Nyai Loro Kidul is said to rule the south coast of Central Java, where her palace is located on the bottom of the ocean and houses communities of spirits and jinn. Jordaan (1997) argues that she was once an indigenous goddess who was Hinduized and subsequently was ascribed the role of ‘sakti’ of the deified Javanese kings. The Queen’s serial marriages to the lineage of Sultans is said to ensure the protection of the kingdom, and this practice has been maintained until the present time.

The sexual elements of these rulers’ relationships with the Goddess in part derives from Javanese Hindu notions of cosmological complementarity and the need for cosmic balance between the realms, which is enacted through the royal couple in sexual union (Wessing 1997). The king’s virility can only exist through copulation with his queen consort who is the ‘sakti’ activating principle. The sexual act in turn brings fertility, prosperity, well-being, and social order to the kingdom (Wessing 1997).

Nahdlatul Wathan’s orthopraxic engagement with Dewi Anjani does not possess sexual elements, most likely because the Muslim Dewi Anjani embodies the qualities
of ‘Queen Mother’ and ‘Holy Saint.’ As a Holy Muslim Saint who is said to reside in the highest Sufi stations, she is chaste, and like the first known Sufi female saint, Rabia Al-Adawiyyah (d. 801), who in the cosmology of the Nahdlatul Wathan Sufi order, sits beside her, she at times embodies a ‘virginal’ purity. Yet, like the Queen of the South Sea, Dewi Anjani can also be destructive. Many Sasak understand that Dewi Anjani caused the devastating earthquakes in 2018 as a reminder to the Sasak people to stay true to Islamic moral values (Muslim 2019).

Here, I present new arguments that situate Dewi Anjani’s relationship to Nahdlatul Wathan in terms of allegiance and loyalty to the organization’s founding father, Tuan Guru Hajji Zainuddin Abdul Madjid, and his daughter, Ummi Raehanun, both of whom are considered to be saints and royal descendants of the former Selaparang Kingdom in East Lombok, and show ethnographically for the first time, how this fits into the wider pattern of sacred relations between rulers and goddesses in Indonesia. While much can be said about the ambiguous and multiple relationships between Dewi Anjani and the Sasak people, my focus here concerns her ‘mythical transformation’ from an indigenous goddess or ancestral spirit into a Muslim saint who is revered not only in communities on Mount Rinjani, but also within Nahdlatul Wathan’s Sufi order.

3.2. Dewi Anjani in Myth and Life

Ahmad Fauzan (2013) explains that the Sasak origin myth, known as Doyan Neda, lays out Sasak adat (customary law and practices) and the rules of life across the spheres of politics, society, family, economy, the ecosystem, and religion. At the center of this system is Dewi Anjani, the Queen of Jinn on Mount Rinjani and Creatrix who transformed twenty royal jinn couples into the first forty Sasak humans on Lombok. For indigenous Sasak, Mount Rinjani was/is considered to be the center of the cosmos where the ‘Creator’ (read Dewi Anjani) and ancestors dwell. Indigenous Indonesian animism was grounded in an understanding that ancestors, gods and spirits dwelled on mountaintops in the Kahyangan realm. Dewi Anjani, from an animist perspective, then, can be described as a deified female spirit of the Sasak lineage. Clearly, this origin myth is at odds with the Abrahamic creation story about Adam and Eve and Islamic monotheism, and yet, the Sasak have reproduced, maintained and reconstructed versions of Doyan Neda in response to Islamization (and Hinduism).

Myths about Dewi Anjani, who is also known as Dewi Rinjani in some parts of Lombok, vary widely from place to place. In these myths, as indigenous Queen of Jinn, she lives and rules from the Kahyangan over the island’s iconic and sacred active volcanic Mount Rinjani that stands 3726 feet high in the northern part of the island. Mount Rinjani is Indonesia’s second largest active volcano. Muslim and Hindu pilgrims alike from Lombok and beyond trek Mount Rinjani in search of supernatural power, to appease and to honor Dewi Anjani. Before embarking on a trek, a ritual asking for permission from Dewi Anjani must be performed. She is both an indigenous native spirit and a pan-Goddess in the sense that she is shared across cultures, religion and geography. Her manifestations are found in Mother Nature such as waterfalls named after her crown and at sacred sites.

The broader historical identity known as ‘Dewi Anjani’, however, is a character from the Javanese wayang kulit shadow puppet play adapted from Hindu mythology and the Ramayana. In Hindu mythology and the Ramayana, she is mother of Hanoman the monkey. Anjani is represented as a mother and is often depicted holding her baby Hanoman in her arms. The Javanese possibly indigenized her Indian form by giving her the title ‘dewi’ (goddess), as she is a descendant of the God of Love (Batara Asmara). In the wayang kulit stories, Dewi Anjani dwells in the Kahyangan palace of the female jinn (bidadari) and is known for her powerful meditation (tapas).

Scholars (see Harnish 2003) assume the wayang entered Lombok sometime in the 1800s or 1900s and worked to Islamize the Sasak with a version of Sufi Islam, and like the Javanese, the Sasak incorporated indigenous ancestors and deities into the wayang pantheon. There are some similarities between the Javanese wayang Dewi Anjani and the
Sasak Dewi Anjani, but as to how and when the Sasak Dewi Anjani acquired this particular Hindu name is unclear, and if she was formerly understood to be ‘officially Hindu’ is ambiguous and divergent across communities. The Islamic version of the Sasak Dewi Anjani myth claims that she was never Hindu and came into existence after Islam entered Lombok, as I explore later.

There are four main myths (and many versions thereof) concerning Dewi Anjani/Rinjani and how she came to be Queen of Jinn in her celestial palace above Mount Rinjani. It appears that these myths originated with the origin myth, Doyan Neda, but have changed over time. Two of these imply that Dewi Anjani was originally a human before transforming into the Queen of Mount Rinjani. One of these two myths tells of how Dewi Rinjani was a human twin born to a King and his exiled Queen. Upon the twins’ reunion with their father, Dewi Rinjani’s twin brother became king and Dewi Rinjani was appointed the role of Queen of Jinn because her meditation on Mount Rinjani was so powerful. Some versions of this myth tell the same story but from within the Kahyangan. This myth taps into former Javanese and Balinese Hindu-Buddhist divine kingship practices of posthumous deification of queens and kings (Pringle 2004). Once Islam arrived and overpowered Majapahit, the practice of divine kingship came to an end and was replaced by the practice of sainthood and its veneration.

The other one of these two myths claims that Dewi Anjani was once a human who due to her father’s refusal to allow her to marry the man of her choice, retreated to the top of Mount Rinjani in tapas (mediation) and eventually disappeared in moksa into the unseen realm where she became the Queen of Jinn. This version is very similar to one of the narratives about the Queen of the South Sea, Nyai Loro Kidul, in Central Java (Smith and Woodward 2016).

The main Doyan Neda myth, however, tells the story about Dewi Anjani as Creatrix and the first kings in Lombok. Nowadays Doyan Neda is generally perceived as a children’s bedtime story, but beyond that, Doyan Neda is an origin story about how Queen Dewi Anjani created the first forty humans on Lombok from 20 royal jinn male–female couples in her Upper World realm on Mount Rinjani when the island was only covered in forest (Fauzan 2013). It narrates how these first humans became the kings of Selaparang, Pejanggik, Langko and Bayan, and tells of their plights, challenges, and so on, while illustrating Dewi Anjani’s ongoing loyalty to the main character who eventually becomes king of Selaparang. Queen Dewi Anjani has a magical chicken male–female couple (or birds in some versions) that assists her in earthly matters, together with a male governor. Here, we see ‘complementarity’ at play in the feminine-dominant realms.

Dewi Anjani is positioned as Queen of Jinn in the Upper World and as ‘mother’ of the Sasak people who rules from the majestic Mount Rinjani. She is the one with power to bring the king back to life with her ‘Water of Life’ from the sacred lake on Mount Rinjani with the help of her loyal chickens/birds. In her ‘Water’ form, she is integral to rice farming rituals and life in general, situating her in a very powerful realm with human fate in her hands (Herman et al. 1990). There are many oral versions of Doyan Neda in Lombok. As with any myth, reconstruction and anachronistic aspects shape and re-shape how we interpret it. In some versions of Doyan Neda, the Islamization of the myth has reconstructed how we read the roles of gender and indigeneity, especially so by referencing Adam as Dewi Anjani’s grandfather and his request for her to fill Lombok with humans. This, in effect, diminishes Dewi Anjani’s authority as ‘Creatrix’.

Being a myth, Doyan Neda’s origins are unclear. However, the myth is not to be overlooked in an analysis of Sufism in Nahdlatul Wathan for its important references to Dewi Anjani and the Selaparang kingdom. Beyond this, the myth parallels other myths about Spirit Queens and rulers, as well as that of indigenous Indonesian creation myths that begin with a figure from the Upper World who creates the first humans of a particular tribe or ethnic group. Austronesian creation myths typically explain the creation story of a particular people (tribe) or island rather than the creation of the Earth or the Universe (Green 2006). Creation or origin myths are considered to be sacred and true by those
who belong to them, as was the case of Doyan Neda amongst the Sasak in former times (Herman et al. 1990).

These contemporary versions of Doyan Neda appear to be a blend of myths and legends from differing cultural and historical eras (Malayo-Polynesian/Austronesian, Javanese Hindu and Javanese Islamic and Makassarese Islamic) at the same time in one story with one time-line and thus demonstrate the changing nature and adaptability of myth to integrate competing and contradictory religious beliefs and political contexts. Given that the Sasak have maintained this myth/s suggests that they are able to reconcile these contradictory elements and fuse them into Sasak prescriptions for living in a plural society framed by the Muslim ethnoscapes with which they interact.

3.3. Saint Dewi Anjani as Qomariah in Nahdlatul Wathan

In summary, field data reveal two major contradictory versions of the Dewi Anjani myths. First, Doyan Neda positions Dewi Anjani as Creatrix of the Sasak people and her unseen kingdom above Mount Rinjani as home of the original Sasak ancestral lineage. Second, the Islamic version of Dewi Anjani positions her as a former human who transformed into a holy saint in the realms above Mount Rinjani. As myths are living texts in motion and adapt to new environments on their travels (Van 1993), my analysis thus speaks to these two major myths and the variants within them. Either way, the reading in the contemporary context in Lombok is the same: Dewi Anjani is Queen of Jinn, Muslim saint, holy woman, and mother, all at once.

In her palace above Mount Rinjani, the Queen of Jinn in her indigenous ancestral form, at some point assumed a Hindu name (Dewi Anjani) and an Islamic Sufi identity as a Saint of Allah. I suggest that these three primary identities continue to co-exist in this Spirit Queen, as is demonstrated through the origin myth Doyan Neda and the Islamic myth supported by Nahdlatul Wathan that transforms her from a Goddess into a saint. The variety of Sasak Sufism prevalent in Nahdlatul Wathan relates a compelling version of the Dewi Anjani myths because it maintains her powerful ancestral legacy together with Mount Rinjani as integral to Sufi life-worlds. She has experienced a transformation—a Sufi one—that relocates her from the realm of the deities and ancestors into that of a Sufi ‘station,’ a holy mosque, where she has become a saint.

The Islamic myths identify her as a human woman, Qomariah, who lived in the 1500s and later transformed into a spirit in the world of jinn where she became a holy saint. A generally accepted version of the Islamic version of the Selaparang kingdom and Dewi Anjani myth is as follows. One of the first Sufi Muslim preachers in Lombok, claimed to be Gaos Abdul Razak from Saudi Arabia, is said to have travelled across Lombok leaving a series of ‘maqam’ (a place where a saint rested or performed dhikr). One of these ‘maqam’ sites is at the Selaparang graveyard which is said to be the location of former kings’ graves. Gaos Abdul Razak is said to have married a local woman and had two children: a son called Zulkarnain who went on to become Sultan Rinjani, and a daughter, Dewi Anjani, who became Queen of Jinn on Mount Rinjani.

This understanding of the origins of Saint Dewi Anjani is purely Islamic without a Hindu or pre-Hindu history, and nor does it not problematize her Hindu name. The Kahyangan above Mount Rinjani, which is the center of the cosmos, in the Islamic story transforms into a holy mosque where saints gather in the Sufi station of Divine Truth known in Indonesian as ‘hakekat’ (haqiqah, Ar.). The holy mosque is said to be located in the station in which Saint Dewi Anjani dwells and from where she rules Lombok as Queen of Jinn.

Dewi Anjani has thus undergone several transformations throughout religious history. If we consider the Islamic version to be a reconstruction of Doyan Neda, then we cannot rule out the possibility that Dewi Anjani is an historical Muslim woman who was ascribed ‘sainthood’ either during her life or posthumously as a way to reproduce royal dynastic power. It is this point particularly that connects Dewi Anjani most strongly in the person of Ummi Raehanun and which speaks directly to the centrality of the indigenous feminine. In
doing so, the indigenous feminine gives us mystical insight that moves beyond dominant readings of Sufism and Islam that generally reject anything indigenous and thus sheds a decolonial angle. I would argue that Dewi Anjani as the mythical ancestral ‘Creatrix’ is so embedded in Sasak indigeneity that she cannot be released and therefore has been actively integrated into Islam and inscribed into the manifest world through Ummi Raehanun’s female body as a container for not only sainthood, but leadership and lineage-derived power. I look at this more deeply shortly, in the context of Dewi Anjani’s ascribed position as a female Qutb.

For Nahdlatul Wathan, the historical Selaparang kingdom and Dewi Anjani have retained a central role in Islamization in Lombok and play a further role in legitimizing the powerful position of the Nahdlatul Wathan lineage in the Selaparang kingdom. In her role as Muslim Queen of Jinn she has the task of Islamizing indigenous spirits and ancestors and obtaining their loyalty to Nahdlatul Wathan. Therefore, there is a politicization of the ‘ghaib’ at play in the maintenance of Dewi Anjani’s Muslimness and the sacredness of the Selaparang kingdom. Clearly, for Sufis who engage their Sasak ancestral lineage in the mystical realms, Saint Dewi Anjani possesses a superior rank among Allah’s saints.

Tuan Guru Hajji Zainuddin Abdul Madjid’s daughter, Ummi Raehanun, who in the aftermath of the saint’s death in 1997 assumed the leadership of Nahdlatul Wathan and its Sufi order (from 1998 to 2019), is also understood to be a saint with a special inherited relationship with Dewi Anjani and therefore reproduces the ‘royal’ sacred lineage in a Sufi container framed by Selaparang’s connection to Mount Rinjani. Here, I develop my earlier work on this theme (see Smith 2012; Smith and Hamdi 2014) to suggest that Ummi Raehanun may very well be amongst a minority of female Sufi leaders and saints in Indonesia who is perceived to have the backing of a Spirit Queen with whom she shares an ancestral lineage. Some Sufi teachers claim that Ummi Raehanun ‘embodies’ Dewi Anjani, but I note that this view is controversial and somewhat marginalized because it touches on Hindu notions of ‘deification’ and ‘reincarnation,’ which are non-normative and transgressive in orthodox Islam.

4. Gender, Female Saints and Indigeneity in Nahdlatul Wathan’s Sufi Order

The orthopraxic recognition of the sacred feminine does not mean that Sufi women in Lombok experience gender in a more equal, equitable or ‘sacred’ manner than elsewhere. In fact, gender issues in Lombok are sites of contestation especially in the contexts of marriage (underage, serial, divorce and polygamy), low literacy rates for girls, domestic violence, and so on. (See Bennett 2005; Platt 2017; Smith 2014a). The ethnographic examples I explore provide insights into a Sufi cultural orthopraxis that engages the sacred feminine, and yet, do not necessarily suggest that there is anything sacred about the feminine in ordinary human women indicative of a Ghazalian gender order. This last point differs from Sufi thought such as that from Ibn Al-Arabi, who presents the possibility of witnessing the divine feminine in women, which we do see aspects of in Ummi Raehanun’s ‘royalty,’ ‘deification’ and sainthood.

Below, my field data show how Sufis are able to strategically shift between hegemonic Islamic and non-hegemonic ideas about gender in indigenous ways of knowing located within their ancestral lineage linked to Dewi Anjani. Dewi Anjani’s mythology presents a doorway into indigenous feminine forms of power and opens a point of entry for a decolonial analysis of the ways in which Sufism is practiced in relation to ancient feminine cosmic figures and how they are maintained through understandings about gender and the heterogeneous aspects of orthodoxy.

4.1. Nahdlatul Wathan

Nahdlatul Wathan is the largest local Islamic organization in Lombok and wields considerable political and social power across the island. Sufi saint and scholar Tuan Guru Hajji Zainuddin Abdul Madjid, popularly known by his beloved students as Maulana Syeikh, founded the organization in 1953. Upon his death in 1997, the younger of his
two daughters—Ummi Raehanun—replaced him as leader of the organization and Sufi order until 2019, when her son, Tuan Guru Hajji Muhammad Zainuddin Atsani, succeeded her. The rise of Ummi Raehanun to the leadership set off violent conflicts in Nahdlatul Wathan communities in East Lombok from 1998 to 2002 due to Islamic debates about female leadership (see Hamdi 2019; Hamdi and Smith 2012; Smith and Hamdi 2014; Smith 2012). Conflict led to a dual leadership of the organization consisting of Ummi Raehanun in Anjani and her nephew, ‘Tuan Guru Bajang’ Muhammad Zainul Majdi, in Pancor. In March 2021, the organization legally resolved the conflict but a new organization (called NWDI) was created in the process under the leadership of Tuan Guru Bajang in Pancor.

Tuan Guru Hajji Zainuddin Abdul Madjid (from now on: Maulana Syeikh) was born in East Lombok in 1898 (d. 1997). Following in the footsteps of other young Indonesian Muslim men in the early 1900s, he embarked on lengthy study in Mecca where he acquired distinguished academic standing. When he returned to Lombok, he started proselytizing in communities. In the early days, he was feared and rejected for his reformist teachings. Eventually, the community came to accept him and he established a boys’ madrasah in 1937 and one for girls’ in 1943. The Syeikh’s spiritual charisma strengthened over time and he eventually came to be known as a Ulama and Waliyullah, a Saint of Allah. He authored many books, was a master healer, and could accurately predict the future.

The Syeikh married a total of seven women throughout his life. He had only two daughters, from different wives, and no sons. Before he died, his loyal disciples claimed that he issued a fatwa stating that his youngest daughter, Ummi Raehanun, was to succeed the leadership of Nahdlatul Wathan upon his passing. This fatwa was at the center of the conflict that ensued in the aftermath of the Syeikh’s passing in 1997 and continues to haunt the Nahdlatul Wathan organization until the present day.

Maulana Syeikh is said to be a royal descendant of the Selaparang kingdom in East Lombok and some of his beloved students even suggest that he is a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Because the history of Lombok is unclear due to a lack of documentation, we know little about the Selaparang kingdom. We know that the Majapahit kingdom entered and heavily influenced the Selaparang kingdom in the 14th century and that the Regent Gajah Mada visited in 1334 (Clegg 2004). It has been suggested that the Javanese Majapahit kingdom heavily influenced Sasak culture during this time (Pelras 1996). Selaparang converted to Islam in the 1500s and the Islamic kingdom of Makassar had strong relations with Selaparang from 1638 to 1678, at which point it was forced out when the Balinese were colonizing Lombok (Andaya 1981).

Maulana Syeikh’s glorified status as a royal descendant of Selaparang during its Makassar era and as a Saint of Allah is reproduced generationally and maintained by a fatwa that each leader of Nahdlatul Wathan must be a saint. This fatwa came after Ummi Raehanun had assumed the position of leader. Prior to assuming the leadership of the organization and its Sufi order, Ummi Raehanun was a housewife and mother without a special status, other than being the daughter of a very famous Sufi saint. Her life changed dramatically with the passing of her father and then stepping into his former role as leader. At that time, she did not know of her own future sainthood or of the deep ways in which Dewi Anjani would feature in her inherited position as Murshida of her late father’s Sufi order. It was from her father, Maulana Syeikh, whom she not only inherited leadership, but also Dewi Anjani’s loyalty, as a leader of Nahdlatul Wathan. Again, the ‘indigenous feminine’ analytic gives us entry into the mystical realm/s of feminine authority that co-exist/s with gendered Islamic hierarchy manifested through Muslim ethnoscapes in the world of form.

The Sasak Sufism I interpret here is the Sufism that Maulana Syeikh taught and is currently reproduced in Ummi Raehanun’s communities amongst advanced Sufi teachers called ahli wirid (an expert in the practice of ‘wirid’ or ‘dhikr’; one who is expert in traversing the ghaib; one who is able to call on and commune with the saints). By contrast, the original Nahdlatul Wathan community in Pancor, under the leadership of Ummi Raehanun’s nephew, Tuan Guru Bajang, represents a more ‘orthodox’ and ‘reformist’ Islam.
(Smith and Hamdi 2014). From 2008 to the present, I have at different times conducted long-term anthropological fieldwork in both Ummi Raehanun’s communities and those loyal to Tuan Guru Bajang. My data and interpretations therefore are formed through a range of informants’ understandings including from Ummi Raehanun, Muslim leaders, Sufi teachers, male and female Sufi practitioners, and women mystics who specialize in wirid.

4.2. A History of Female Leadership, a Murshida, and a Female Saint

Like in other Islamic cultures, the patriarchal aspects of Sasak culture place men’s authority over women in an Islamic gender hierarchy that affords men the role of leader. In normative Sufi practice, this is also the case, whereby there is a doxic orthodoxy that states women cannot become authorized leaders of Sufi orders. Despite this, history and ethnography alike reveal that Sufi women across the Muslim world have reached high stations and continue to do so as Sufi figures and leaders in their communities (Ali Khan 2018; Hill 2018; Neubauer 2016; Pemberton 2004; Schimmel 2003).

The Indonesian national body that oversees the authenticity of Sufi orders has a fatwa stating that women are banned from head leadership positions in mixed-gender Sufi orders, including the position of Murshid(a) (except for cases where a woman leads or guides only women). Scholars have shown, however, that Indonesian women can and do rise to positions of informal and formal authority in Sufi orders (Husin 2014; Muzayyin 2020; Srimulyani 2012; Smith and Woodward 2014; Smith 2012, 2014b; Widiyanto 2014), particularly through kinship systems that recognize the bilateral descent of spiritual power (Smith 2012, 2014b).

Many men and women loyal to Ummi Raehanun as the former leader of Nahdlatul Wathan and its tariqa, and in her perceived sainthood, continue to associate her with the role of a Murshida (see Muzayyin 2020). In the ways royalty, status and power descend within family lineages in a kingdom, the notion of sainthood is also understood to descend generationally and bilaterally in Nahdlatul Wathan. Maulana Syeikh, together with Ummi Raehanun, and her son, Tuan Guru Muhammad Zainuddin Atsani are considered to be saints of Allah and therefore the true leaders of the organization by sacred decree. This ‘sacred decree’ of sainthood is embedded in kinship with Saint Dewi Anjani and the station of ‘hakekat’ above Mount Rinjani.

It is by no coincidence for Nahdlatul Wathan supporters of Ummi Raehanun that the conflicts from 1997 to 2002 forced Ummi Raehanun and her community out of the Nahdlatul Wathan heart of the town of Pancor and into the village of Anjani where they purchased land and built a new Islamic educational complex (a pesantren). Informants explained that this educational complex in Anjani is located within one of the ‘mystical doors’ that leads to Dewi Anjani’s palace above Mount Rinjani (Smith and Hamdi 2014). Ummi Raehanun is thought to ‘embody’ or at least ‘represent’ Dewi Anjani and there are some Sufi teachers who describe this phenomenon in language that suggests Raehanun is Dewi Anjani and that Dewi Anjani is Maulana Syeikh’s daughter. By inscribing Ummi Raehanun with ‘Dewi Anjani’, Sufi leaders reinforce Nahdlatul Wathan’s hegemony and a direct claim to Saint Dewi Anjani’s power over Lombok. It was thus at this point with the establishment of a new pesantren complex in the village of Anjani, that the discourse about the ‘embodiment’ of Dewi Anjani in Ummi Raehanun, which some also read as ‘reincarnation,’ started to manifest outwardly in a public way.

According to ahli wirid, Ummi Raehanun ascended to sainthood in 2010. Through his ongoing role in the ghair, Maulana Syeikh informed his disciples that his daughter had ascended to sainthood and that she should be honored accordingly. In her role as head of the Sufi order, Tarekat Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan, this living female saint, also perceived to be a Murshida, acted as a spiritual head, rather than a ‘traditional’ Murshid or a Syeikh, by overseeing the network of male ahli wirid located across Lombok and other islands in Indonesia. In this role, she initiated new members (male and female) into the Sufi order and offered guidance. Her son is the current head Murshid and leader.
The sacred connection Ummi Raehanun is understood to share with Dewi Anjani underscores my earlier argument about complementarity and hierarchy co-existing in a cosmic interaction that shifts between shari’ah’s patriarchy and indigenous notions of feminine power in the unseen realms. The ‘indigenous feminine’ found in Ummi Raehanun bridges complementarity and patriarchy in a way that works to legitimize her spiritual authority. Maulana Syeikh did not problematize the issue of female leadership in Islam. Rather, we can see elements of gender complementarity and the ‘sacred couple’ at play in Nahdlatul Wathan. Maulana Syeikh’s Sufism incorporated the ‘indigenous feminine’ into a mystical praxis through a Sasak understanding of gender complementarity in Islam.

4.3. Gender Complementarity and the ‘Couple’ Theme in Nahdlatul Wathan

Reflective of Austronesian complementarity between male and female, Dewi Anjani’s pairing of forty royal jinn, together with her male–female chicken couple, we also find a maintenance of gender complementarity in the form of the Sasak Muslim couple in Nahdlatul Wathan praxis. There is, however, an Islamic gender hierarchy at play within this complementarity. Within this hierarchy, esteemed women may assume sainthood (as discussed earlier) and deceased female Sufi saints and Qur’anic figures are revered, especially the deceased female saint Rabia Al-Adawiyah, to whom I turn shortly.

The ‘couple’ theme is core to Nahdlatul Wathan’s education system. Maulana Syeikh expressed this in Sasak language as *Dwi Tunggal Punggal Satu*: Two Together in Unity Forever As One. This notion of the feminine and masculine in unity remains the motto of the first twin madrasah the Syeikh built (one for boys in 1937 and one for girls in 1943 which was the first Islamic girls’ school in East Lombok). Maulana Syeikh’s discourse regarding gender was revolutionary at the time he established the first Islamic girls’ school in East Lombok. He also appointed a woman as a village head and taught his two daughters how to deliver public speeches in their childhood. Nahdlatul Wathan’s Sufi order, Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan, also has this couple theme with separate orders for men and women reflective of the twin madrasah.

4.4. Tarekat Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan and Tarekat Hizib Nahdlatul Banat

Nahdlatul Wathan’s Sufi order is known as Tarekat Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan. Maulana Syeikh created this tariqa in 1964 after receiving divine instruction via the saint and prophet Khidir when he was on pilgrimage at Prophet Muhammad’s grave (Hadi 2010). Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan is referred to as the last tariqa in the world (*tarekat akhir zaman*) due to its claims to fit better with modern lifestyles in contrast to the heavy prayer and recitation practices of the traditional Sufi orders (Baharuddin and Rasmianto 2004; Hadi 2010). In particular, it has a flexible recruitment procedure and simple chanting practices that build on and combine teachings of preceding Sufi orders (Hadi 2010). The name of the tariqa is taken from the central text in the order, the *Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan*, a small book of prayers that Maulana Syeikh compiled from the Qur’an and Hadith, and the sayings and practices of 70 great Sufi masters (Hadi 2010; Hamdi 2019). There is a preference for Al-Ghazali’s Sufi teachings (Habib 2010).

Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan differs from traditional Sufi orders in many ways (see Habib 2010). First, the name of the order is not that of a male Murshid/Syeikh like those of the traditional orders; under certain circumstances, women are permitted to lead the order and facilitate the sacred act of swearing in new members with permission from the head Murshid (as did Ummi Raehanun for 21 years); the core book of prayers used in the order is gendered, in that there are two books within one (the first section of the book is for men and represents the boys’ madrasah, and the second section is for women and represents the girls’ madrasah. The contents of the actual *Hizib* are the same, but men are not allowed to read the prayer at the beginning of the women’s section because it addresses the girls’ madrasah specifically. The men’s *Hizib* may be read by anybody, including women; the order is communal in that it is fully socialized into village life in Nahdlatul Wathan schools, madrasahs and pesantren and associated women’s wings of the organization; and it
functions within strict Islamic shari’ah as well as having a wider cultural relevance specific to Lombok. The tariqa, then, can be described as a form of communal Sufism situated in a Sasak cultural context, which is the focus of this article.

Sufi masters and well-travelled Sufis in Nahdlatul Wathan are usually referred to as *ahli wirid*. Maulana Syeikh authorized a small number of *ahli wirid* without a hierarchy among them and it was/is their duty to develop the tariqa in their respective villages and hometowns (Hamdi and Smith 2012). Ummi Raehanun as a Saint of Allah is also considered to be an *ahli wirid* who has supreme knowledge. There are a number of women in Ummi Raehanun’s community with *ahli wirid* status who work within the confines of their husbands’ direction (see Smith 2014b). A woman who is skilled in *wirid* may serve the community by offering healing or retrieving information from saints in the *ghaib*.

Male *ahli wirid* may be placed in the category of Tuan Guru. A Tuan Guru is a title bestowed upon a learned Muslim male preacher and/or scholar who either inherits or acquires his title after completing lengthy study of Islam, usually at a university in Egypt or Saudi Arabia or elsewhere, and has made the hajj pilgrimage (Fahrurrozi 2018). The core text of the order, the *Hizib*, is recited communally at the homes of Tuan Guru, in the pesantren, and at religious sermons on special occasions and fixed nights of the week. There is an understanding that by reciting *Hizib*, devotees will enter heaven and meet with Maulana Syeikh, and this destination is thus prioritized among Nahdlatul Wathan practitioners.

*Ahli wirid* who worked closely with Maulana Syeikh while he was alive were those who the saint selected personally for the transmission of advanced Sufi techniques such as breathing, high-level mystical experiential training and special *wirid*. It is these *ahli wirid* and their students who continue to work with Maulana Syeikh in the *ghaib*. In Tarekat Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan, there is an understanding that Maulana Syeikh is the head of all Sufi saints in the *ghaib* in his position as a Qutb.

In Sufism, a Qutb is a Sufi Syeikh who has integrated the qualities of a perfected human and who holds the highest rank among Allah’s saints. Maulana Syeikh as a Qutb also bears the title of Sultan of the Saints. For some Sufi teachers in Lombok, Saint Dewi Anjani is also considered to be a Qutb. Men are generally ascribed the position of Qutb, and women are not. Because of Saint Dewi Anjani’s greatness and high rank, reflective of her ancient Creatrix position in the ancestral realm, she, too has kept her original authority over Lombok in her role as Qutb in the realm of Muslim jinn. Discourse on Dewi Anjani’s position as Qutb, however, does not merge with discourse on her ‘embodiment’ in Ummi Raehanun (in the Nahdlatul Wathan public, at least). Instead, the ways in which *ahli wirid* describe Ummi Raehanun as an embodiment of Dewi Anjani taps into a kind of ‘deification’ process that is tied in with notions of royalty and sainthood and former Hindu practices of deifying kings and queens, as I mentioned earlier, and points to the notion of ‘reincarnation.’ These transgressive notions place Ummi Raehanun in a ‘dangerous’ position because they interrupt orthodox Islam in their ‘power’ sourced from Dewi Anjani, as I touch on again shortly.

Ummi Raehanun’s spiritual authority is in part dependent on Dewi Anjani’s loyalty, and partly on her father’s name and sainthood from whom she derived her own sainthood. This sacred partnership, while patterning those of others in the Muslim ethnoscapes of the Indonesian archipelago, points to a different kind of indigenous feminine power, particularly because of its Islamic emphasis on sainthood and the containment of sexuality. These qualities are what connect Dewi Anjani to Rabia Al-Adawiyyah, and thus these two feminine figures are the most important in Nahdlatul Wathan’s Sufi cosmology. This differs quite markedly from other examples, such as Nyai Loro Kidul Queen of the South Sea in Central Java, whose serial sexual relationships with the Sultans of Central Java are a defining feature in the augmentation of male leaders’ power. While Saint Dewi Anjani does not exhibit her sexuality in relationships with humans, her power which women have access to through Maulana Syeikh’s *wirid*, does at certain times interact with forms of destructive power associated with the womb and female sexuality and reveals
characteristics of the Hindu Goddess Durga, as I explore below in relation to the role of the Selaparang kings’ graveyard in Nahdlatul Wathan’s Sufism more generally.

4.5. Sasak Sufism at the Selaparang Graveyard: Female Saints and Womb Power

I have demonstrated throughout this article that Sufi practitioners agentively interact with their cultural heritage in specific ways. I have argued that Nahdlatul Wathan’s Sufi order is embedded in Sasak indigeneity and ancestry, particularly that of the former Selaparang kingdom and Saint Dewi Anjani. Despite being known as a reformist Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Wathan’s reformism is not completely incompatible with Sasakness and is representative of the plurality of Muslim ethnoscapes that I have noted. I have argued that the organization reproduces its legitimacy by claiming its lineage to Dewi Anjani through Ummi Raehanun and thus the sacred mosque above Mount Rinjani.

The role of the Selaparang kings’ graveyard and the unseen Selaparang kingdom is important for Sufis who wish to gain wisdom and knowledge from Allah’s saints in the ghaib. The unseen realms at Selaparang thus play an integral role in the maintenance of Sasak Sufism. Maulana Syeikh’s Sufism concerned a council of saints (often also referred to as a ‘government’) consisting of the former Selaparang kings, and other Muslim figures in the ghaib who were considered to be loyal to the Nahdlatul Wathan mission and feature in Maulana Syeikh’s Wasiat (a book of poetry and predictions he authored in 1981). These saints include the main figures Dewi Anjani, Gaos Abdul Razaq, Rabia Al-Adawiyah, and Abdul Qadir Jaelani amongst other deceased Sufi saints and masters from around the world. Maulana Syeikh is considered to be the Qutb of this council or government and continues to guide Nahdlatul Wathan in earthly matters including politics and Ummi Raehanun’s role as Murshida.

Because there is a belief that Gaos Abdul Razak left behind a ‘maqam’ at Selaparang, Sufis like to practice wirid at this particular site that leads them to the holy mosque and station of ‘hakekat’ above Mount Rinjani. In this celestial mosque, Sufis believe that Allah’s saints gather and can be contacted by advanced Sufis who know the secrets embedded in the wirid. Upon graduating from study in Nahdlatul Wathan education institutions, students are required to make a pilgrimage to the sacred graves of the Selaparang kings and saints around Lombok as a gesture of ongoing loyalty to the sacred lineage.

Sufism in Nahdlatul Wathan, therefore, is anchored by Sasak indigeneity, which I have argued has a strong indigenous feminine dimension that complements and co-exists with Islamic gender hierarchy. Nahdlatul Wathan Sufis visit the Selaparang graveyard to commune with deceased Sufi saints for different reasons. Female mystics also use specific wirid or dhikr to empower themselves through the assistance of the saints. Some of these female mystics acquire identities as ahli wirid because of their skill in communicating with saints, including Dewi Anjani and Islam’s revered deceased female saint, Rabia Al-Adawiyah. Together with Dewi Anjani, Rabia Al-Adawiyah is believed to sit on the council of saints in the holy mosque on Mount Rinjani. My male and female informants explained that Dewi Anjani and Rabia Al-Adawiyah, like their male saint counterparts, are understood to assist Sufis in deepening their wirid practice in order to traverse the Sufi stations.

In Nahdlatul Wathan, Rabia Al-Adawiyah plays an important role alongside other deceased Sufi saints in a range of earthly matters, including healing and acquiring wealth.10 A leading Sufi teacher explained, “Rabia does not need to enter heaven because she is helping the Nahdlatul Wathan community.” This particular teacher suffered from illness as a child and he claims that the central tariqa figures Syeikh Abdul Qadir Jaelani, Rabia Al-Adawiyah and other deceased saints taught him how to heal himself with a special wirid. The wirid works specifically to ‘heal hearts.’ After receiving a deep healing from these Sufi saints in the spiritual realms he has strengthened his ability to heal others through intercession with these beings. Women mystics, in particular, turn to this Sufi healer to seek out Rabia for healing relationships or a broken heart.
Rabia Al-Adawiyah occupies a special place in Nahdatul Wathan for her desexualized, virginal power, much like Dewi Anjani’s ‘wholeness’ and lack of need for a male partner. Other prominent figures such as Mary and Fatima are for the most part absent in Nahdatul Wathan’s Sufism, possibly because of their respective dominant associations with Christianity and the Shia, which are contested topics in public Islamic discourses in Lombok and Indonesia. I must note, however, that in cultural practice across Indonesia more broadly, Mary is invoked during the 7th month of pregnancy ritual known in Java as Mitoni or Tingkeban, and in Lombok as Bretes (among other names).

There is further a local understanding that special kinds of wirid performed at the Selaparang graveyard have the potential to produce forms of power in women that relate to understandings about sakti (read as ‘spiritual power’ in the Indonesian Muslim context) located in a woman’s womb. This kind of ‘womb’ power has the potential for activation in women during times of conflict (see Smith 2012) or when a woman feels she has been wronged. In Lombok, the power associated with the female body can be located in female reproductive power derived from the Islamic and Sasak understanding that mothers deserve the utmost respect because they possess the power to give birth. The womb is what designates this special status to women.11

Despite cosmological associations of the womb with Mary in Sufism and Ibn Al-Arabi’s metaphysics of the womb, for example, the reference to sakti and women’s use of it are more reflective of Lombok’s Javanese Hindu past, particularly the Goddess Durga and her destructive powers. The ‘flaming womb’ or ‘glowing genitals’ is a theme found in chronicles from Java in relation to historical Hindu female figures considered to embody ‘magical’ power (Andaya-Watson 2006; Smith and Woodward 2016; Weiss 2006). References to power embedded in the womb are therefore both Hindu and Islamic.

Ummi Raehanun in her saintly ‘embodiment’ of the powerful Dewi Anjani, dangerously intersects with understandings about indigenous, Islamic and former Hindu notions of feminine power that concern ‘womb’ interactions with wirid and Dewi Anjani at the Selaparang graveyard. My earlier ethnographic work on Sasak female spiritual warriors (known as pepadu nina) during the Nahdatul Wathan conflicts from 1997 to 2002 was rooted in the local understanding that women mystics are more sakti (spiritually powerful) than men because of the power in their wombs. Such women are also referred to as nina sakti (a spiritually powerful or magical woman) because of their perceived strong and skillful wirid practice at the Selaparang graveyard. During the conflicts, Ummi Raehanun employed these women to guard her from attacks associated with the dangerous realm of ‘black magic’ (Smith 2012). Her glorified rank placed her in danger from those who oppose her power, such as her estranged family who have since established a new organization to counter her authority. Here, we see the notion of ‘royal power’ come through Ummi Raehanun in ‘her kingdom’s’ (Selaparang) graveyard and its doorways for intercession with Dewi Anjani. Her ‘royalty’ demanded protection during that turbulent and violent time in the aftermath of her rising to the position of leader, and so she relied on for protection, and continues to rely on, forms of feminine power from the ‘unseen’ realms (the ghaib) exercised through Maulana Syeikh’s wirid at the Selaparang kings’ graveyard.

Further to these magical attributes associated with the womb and indigenous forms of feminine power, there is a wider cultural practice that involves a woman exposing her vulva or breasts to ward off a thief face-to-face, or, to prevent him (thieves are usually male) entering her home, she may hang underwear in her front windows if sleeping alone at night. These practices are rooted in an understanding that if a woman exposes her underwear, vulva or bare breasts to a thief, his magic will be suspended causing him to flee (there are cultures of thieving in Lombok associated with the use of magic, see Telle 2002). It is also the case that in situations where a woman feels she has been wronged and cannot contain her anger, she may choose to display her frustration in public by parading the village streets for a brief moment during day time while exposing her underwear or breasts.

These momentary transgressions of normative Islamic gender expectations that regulate the female body have a ‘danger’ element that inscribes the body with ambiguity
between reproductive power, sexuality, and a dangerous possession of ‘spiritual power’ from Dewi Anjani accessed through the wirid. In Sufi metaphysics, we can identify Rabia Al-Adawiyah with a gender transgression rooted in her asceticism and apparent celibacy, yet the kind of subversion to which I refer here, can be located within the sexual power in a flaming womb such as those of Hindu figures or goddesses. Such gender imagery takes us back to the formerly ‘sacred’ status of mothers in Sasak culture due to their power to birth humans (Saharudin 2019) as well as the destructive powers of Dewi Anjani and the ancestors, and again, links in with former Javanese Hindu culture in Lombok through associations with Goddess Durga. Female mystics who embody the ‘heat’ of the wirid’s power are able to symbolically embrace the powers of Dewi Anjani for either good or bad purposes. In these moments, they shift out of the formal shari’ah and Al-Ghazalian gender constructs that frame their orthodox Sufism in the mosques and study groups, and into their indigeneity in the unseen realms of praxis where feminine power can be accessed mystically without constraint. The kind of Sufism they bring to the field of indigeneity cannot be separated from the ancestors who dwell above Mount Rinjani and shows us that Dewi Anjani’s power is also available to women mystics more broadly, especially those loyal to Ummi Raehanun and Maulana Syeikh.

5. Conclusions: A Variety of Sufi Feminism

Through carving a feminist notion of what I call an ‘indigenous feminine’, I have engaged a decolonial ethnographic reading of Sufism and the sacred (divine) feminine. I have done so by suggesting that indigeneity absorbs Sufism in a gendered praxis in ways that are both hierarchical and complementary. My proposed notion of Muslim ethnoscapes holds space for the co-relating of gendered Islamic hierarchy and the gender complementarity found in indigeneity, and the mystical possibilities for the indigenous feminine’s prominent position in a Sasak Sufi cosmology. In Nahdlatul Wathan, Sufis are able to fuse male-centric shari’ah with sacred feminine and indigenous elements into an understanding that does not compromise the patriarchy of their order or dominant Islamic gender constructs.

I have shown how ‘She’, in her indigenous form as Spirit Queen Dewi Anjani—ancestral Creatrix, goddess, saint and Qutb—has been kept alive throughout the Islamization process, especially through her kinship with the Sufi saints and leaders Maulana Syeikh and his daughter Ummi Raehanun, and has retained a centrality in a mystical practice with deep, ancient roots in mythology, similar to other dynastic relationships between female deities and (male) royal leaders in Indonesia. The Sasak myth, Doyan Neda, is a rare example of a female-centered origin myth in Indonesia that demonstrates feminine agentic power through the role of Creatrix. By drawing on the gendered symbolic meanings in a number of (reconstructed) myths about Dewi Anjani, I have explored through a feminist ethnographic journey, the sacred realms of her indigeneity and sainthood in the Nahdlatul Wathan Sufi order, Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan.

Co-situated in a complementarity and hierarchy in shifting contexts in between the formal shari’ah, the ancestral spirit realm and the holy mosque above Mount Rinjani, in their indigenous and Muslim forms as the saints Dewi Anjani and revered Murshida Ummi Raehanun, the ‘sacred feminine’ reproduces, is ascribed and inscribes power across mystical, political and indigenous realms. My arguments indicate that the perceived power associated with the leadership and sainthood ascribed to Ummi Raehanun and the reconstruction of the idea of Dewi Anjani inscribed on her human person, support and legitimize Nahdlatul Wathan’s claims to political dominance as Lombok’s largest most influential Islamic organization.

My arguments about Dewi Anjani as Queen of Jinn and Saint of Allah and her relationship with Nahdlatul Wathan further suggest that an anthropology of female deities in contemporary Sufi patriarchal complexes sheds light on ideas about the sacred feminine in female-oriented aspects of life. I posit that feminist anthropological work on the maintenance of female deities and saints thus offers feminists of Sufism innovative ways
to theorize the sacred feminine in Islam from the fields of indigeneity and praxis rather than solely from texts or dominant Sufi ways of knowing derived from male mystical experience. My arguments therefore present decolonial ways to read gender and power in a Sufi context through direct mystical immersion firmly located within indigenous ways of knowing that are etic to the textual authorities of Islamic and Sufi scholarship.

The Islamic construction of hierarchy shifts gender into a patriarchal container that is shaped by the laws laid out in religious texts, but the Sufi focus on fields (unseen realms/ghaib) outside of the texts and their gender hierarchies—in the stations within the ghaib—however, opens up a realm of possibility for women and men that challenges male claims to authority by transcending it and retrieving knowledge from saints in high Sufi realms it cannot control. I demonstrated this point further through those moments where female mystics had access to ‘indigenous feminine power’ outside normative gender constructs in the magical fields of the wirid and at the intersecting sites of sexuality, womb power and Dewi Anjani. The orthopraxic interactions with the sacred indigenous feminine discussed in this article are doxic in the sense that they are practiced and experienced experientially through dhikr or wirid, without necessarily being studied or taught. It is within this mystical container and the Muslim ethnoscapes that hold it, that I suggest a variety of Sufi feminism can be formulated ethnographically through the fields of indigeneity, the feminine and the ghaib, primarily because those realms cannot be easily contained, controlled or dismissed emically, and it is for those reasons that they continue to be reproduced, re-experienced and re-lived by those who know how to skillfully immerse in such realms.

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**Notes**

1. The tarekat consists of twin male–female sections. Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan is for men and the general population and Hizib Nahdlatul Banat is specifically for women. There is no difference in teachings or practices between the two tarekat other than the opening prayers, which refer to male and female schools, respectively, but only women are allowed to read the prayer intended for the girls’ school. I discuss this further later in the article.

2. Jam’iyah Ahli al-Thariqah al-Mu’tabarah an-Nahdliyah (JATMAN) is an executive committee of Muslim experts and Sufi leaders that is responsible for monitoring and authorizing the correctness of tarekat in Indonesia.

3. Some Boda communities officially converted to Buddhism to conform to the former Suharto regime’s requirements for religious affiliation in line with state-defined religion (see MacDougall 2005).

4. For more on Sufism and indigeneity in the Muslim world, see (Milani 2016).

5. Sasak language and culture belong to a wider Austronesian indigeneity. Sasak cultural lineages can be traced to Javanese, and later Balinese, and Bugis and Malay (Mahyuni 2007).

6. Kahyangan is the abode of the gods, goddesses and ancestors, in Java and Bali known as Hyang, who may be accessed through sacred sites such as human-made shrines and natural forming places in nature like trees groves, old trees, stones and rocks, water springs, wells, and waterfalls, amongst others.

7. These include legends about Cilinaya, Mandalika, Dewi Anjani, and Dewi Singkarwati, amongst others.

8. Examples include: the Sasak of Bayan in North Lombok have a creation myth that relates how the God Batara Indra from Mount Rinjani had two children (representing the Earth and the Sky) who are considered to be the first ancestors from the Bayan lineage and in their spirit form they function to protect and fertilize the earth (Adonis 1989; Cederroth 1975). In Javanese creation mythology, Batara Guru (Siva) is the ruler of the Kahyangan and he ordered Brahma and Vishnu to fill the island of Java with humans.

9. There is a ‘maqam’ representing Gajah Mada’s visit in the Selaparang graveyard.

10. During Maulana Syeikh’s era there was a strong sub-culture within Nahdlatul Wathan concerned with the accumulation of wealth with assistance from jinn and saints in the ghaib. This sub-culture still exists but is not as strong as it previously was.

11. In Arabic, rahm means womb, and one of Allah’s divine names is Ar-rahim, the Merciful.
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