



Javanese Sufism: A Semiotic Analysis of Sunan Kalijaga's *Suluk Linglung*

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Abstract: Classical Javanese literature covers a wide range of traditional folklore and oral traditions, including Sufism and Islamic mysticism. Among these mystical literary works is *Suluk Linglung*, which portrays the spiritual journey of Kanjeng Sunan Kalijaga, one of the Nine Saints (Walisongo) of Java. Written in the form of a poem, *Suluk Linglung* describes the spiritual journey through symbolic narratives. It explores existential confusion and stages of spiritual development, using Javanese culture and art as a vehicle for Islamic teachings that emphasize tolerance and peace. This article examines the phases of Sunan Kalijaga's spiritual journey as described in *Suluk Linglung*. Applying semiotics theory to reveal the spiritual meanings of symbolic narratives, some distinct phases are identified: the encounter with Sunan Bonang, ascetic practice on the riverbank, *laku ngidang* (behaving like a deer), the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, and the meeting with Prophet Khidr. These phases represent the saint's spiritual journey toward the True Reality.

Contribution: This study contributes to the semiotics framework in interpreting *Suluk Linglung*, focusing on the state of being lost and confused as a spiritual-existential condition for the seeker. The phases of the spiritual journey localize the universal Sufi concepts in symbolic expressions and Javanese traditions.

Keywords: Javanese Sufism; Sunan Kalijaga; *Suluk Linglung*; semiotics

Introduction

The title of the classical Javanese literary work *Suluk Linglung* [The Sufi Aphorisms of Sunan Kalijaga] is fraught with meaning. *Suluk* is an Indonesian word derived from the Arabic *sulūk*, which can be translated as ‘walking a path’ and ‘comportment’. In the context of Islamic spirituality, it means a path or journey toward inner perfection. In the terminology of the Qur’an, *sulūk* can be traced back to QS. al-Nahl (16): 69, [...] *faslukī subula rabbiki dhululan* [...], which means, “[...] and find with skill the spacious paths of your Lord [...].” In Javanese literature, *suluk* denotes the body of teachings leading a seeker towards closeness with God and self-realization.¹ Meanwhile, the Javanese word *linglung* implies confusion, indecision, a state of doubt, or a loss of direction and certainty.² In the narration, Sunan Kalijaga was forced to reconcile two contradicting identities: that of a nobleman’s son and an outlaw. He was the son of a high-ranking court official, but he also stole from the rich to help the poor. This situation represented a moral dilemma and caused him existential confusion.³

Suluk Linglung is a Sufi teaching attributed to Sunan Kalijaga (1450–1592), one of the Nine Muslim Saints (Walisongo) who spread Islam in Java. It describes the phases of the spiritual journey, discovering the meaning of perfect knowledge and human perfection.⁴ The original mystical teachings of Sunan Kalijaga were transliterated into modern Javanese by the 19th-century poet Imam Anom, himself a descendant of Sunan Kalijaga. The *Kitab Duryat* is an ancient Javanese manuscript often linked to Sunan Kalijaga, containing spiritual teachings, gnosis, healing recipes, and charms. It served as a source for later works like *Suluk Linglung*, blending indigenous Javanese mysticism with Islamic concepts. The *Suluk Linglung* details the journey of Sunan Kalijaga on his quest for enlightenment, aided by spiritual guides and teachers, such as Kanjeng Sunan Bonang and Prophet Khidr. In the Sufi tradition, Prophet Khidr plays a major role as the archetypal spiritual guide embodying Divine knowledge, immortality, inner wisdom, and direct connection with God.⁵

¹ Andrea Acri, Verena H Meyer, and Zakariya P Aminullah, “Antinomianism as a Way to God in Nineteenth-Century Java: The Suluk Lonhang between Islamic and Pre-Islamic Religious Discourse,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 34, no. 4 (2024): 629–53, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186323000652>.

² kamusjawa, “Linglung,” kamusjawa.net, 2021, <https://www.kamusjawa.net/arti/kata/linglung.html>.

³ Imam Anom, *Suluk Linglung Sunan Kalijaga*, trans. Muhammad Khafid Kasri (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1993), 22–24.

⁴ Ismail Fajrie Alatas, “Dreaming Saints: Exploratory Authority and Islamic Praxes of History in Central Java,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 26, no. 1 (2020): 67–85, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.13177>.

⁵ Mochammad Nginwanun Leil Mahamid and Hanip Hidayatulloh, “Wahdatul Wujud Dalam

As a classical work of Javanese Islam, where Islam is deeply embedded in Javanese culture, *Suluk Linglung* has been studied widely, focusing on the relevance of the teachings of Sunan Kalijaga in modern Indonesian society. For instance, Edris Zamroni et al. investigated the values of seeking perfection (*ngudi kasampurnan*) as a basis for promoting religious moderation in Islamic education.⁶ Further, Umi Maulidatus Sa'adah et al. examined the moral principles embedded in *Suluk Linglung* and their correlation with moral development theory developed by the renowned American psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg (1927–1987). This study contributes to a comprehensive understanding of moral development across diverse cultural and philosophical contexts.⁷ In addition, Mohammad Muslih et al. studied Sunan Kalijaga's role as a creative *dā'ī* (promoter of Islam) who employed two important *da'wa* strategies: Sufistic and multicultural. In the modern context, these two strategies have implications for preventing religious extremism by focusing on social harmony and tolerance.⁸ Focusing on the aspect of moral education, Fatchullah Zarkasi analyzed the teachings of Sunan Kalijaga in *Suluk Linglung*. He found that high moral ethics serve as a medium to receive Divine guidance, benefit from Divine knowledge, and cultivate deep spirituality.⁹

Other studies focused on examining the text of *Suluk Linglung*, such as those done by Muhammad Safii, who prepared a critical edition of *Suluk Linglung Seh Malaya*. He identified three complete versions of the manuscript in the R. Ay. Supratini-Mursyidi Collection, Uijgerverij en Boekhaldel Surakarta-University of Indonesia, and Yogyakarta Sanabudaya Museum. The *Suluk Linglung Seh Malaya* manuscript is classified as a Jamak manuscript.¹⁰ Further, Aris Setiawan examined the use of *wayang kulit* (shadow puppetry) and Gamelan music as tools of Islamic *da'wa* after the

Naskah Keraton Jawa: Studi Komparatif Pada Serat Menak Dan Serat Wedhatama,” *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 22, no. 1 (2024): 287–316, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlka.v22i1.1150>.

- ⁶ Edris Zamroni et al., “Values Ngudi Kasampurnan Sunan Kalijaga As A Basis of Religious Moderation Education,” *Edukasi Islam* 12, no. 4 (2023): 3247–60, <https://doi.org/10.30868/ci.v12i04.5359>.
- ⁷ Umi Maulidatus Sa'adah and Isa Anshori, “Konsep Moral Dalam Suluk Linglung Perspektif Lawrence Kohlberg,” *Journal of Ushuluddin and Islamic Thought* 1, no. 2 (2023): 168–77, <https://doi.org/10.15642/juit.2023.1.2.168-177>.
- ⁸ Mohammad Muslih et al., “Sunan Kalijaga's Da'wah Strategy In Suluk Linglung and Its Implication to Indonesian Radicalism Movement,” *El-Harakah* 23, no. 1 (2021): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.18860/ch.v23i1.11672>.
- ⁹ Fatchullah Zarkasi, “Tasawuf And Millennial Youth (In the Perspective Suluk Linglung Sunan Kalijaga),” in *PROCEEDINGS: Dirundeng International Conference on Islamic Studies, 2022*, 57–74, <https://doi.org/10.47498/dicis.v1i1.1023>.
- ¹⁰ Muhammad Safii, “Suntingan Teks Suluk Linglung Seh Malaya Karya Sunan Kalijaga,” *Jurnal Haluan Sastra Budaya* 6, no. 2 (2022): 232–48, <https://doi.org/10.20961/hsb.v6i2.59875>.

Walisongo era. He found that the use of performance art is considered controversial in orthodox Islam, but it is highly effective in spreading Islamic teachings to grassroots communities.¹¹ Similarly, Akbar Bagaskara et al. examined the significance of Sunan Kalijaga's spiritual values on artistic practice in Demak Regency. The study found that the Gamelan compositions of Yusuf Sofyan, the director of the Mulyo Sari Raras Art Studio, were inspired by the life stories of the Walisongo, especially that of Sunan Kalijaga. Also, Sunan Kalijaga's unique approach was informed by his living descendants.¹²

In summary, most studies on *Suluk Linglung* focused on its content, utilizing philosophical, hermeneutical, and phenomenological approaches; however, none employed the semiotic method. This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on the rich symbolism contained in Sunan Kalijaga's narrative, denoting the phases of the spiritual journey.

Literature Review

Javanese Sufism and Its Historical Landscape

In the context of Javanese Islam, Islamic teachings are primarily promoted through the Sufi teachings of the Walisongo. Sunan Kalijaga, whose actual name was Raden Said,¹³ propagated Islam in Demak, Central Java. His exact birth date and origins are uncertain; however, he is believed to have lived between 1450 and 1513, was born into a noble family in Tuban, East Java, and witnessed the downfall of Majapahit, the kingdoms of Demak, Cirebon, Banten, and Pajang in 1546. His involvement in building the Great Mosque of Demak and his significant influence within the Islamic Sultanate of Demak highlight his eminent role in spreading Islam in Java.¹⁴

Regarding his name 'Kalijaga,' some believe it originates from a village in Cirebon, thought to be the birthplace of Sunan Kalijaga. Another explanation is that 'Kalijaga' reflects the local pronunciation of 'Qāḍī Joko,' referring to his position as the religious judge in Demak. However, his name may also have been given by his teacher,

¹¹ Aris Setiawan, "Polemic and Reasons for Reusing Wayang and Gamelan as A Medium for Contemporary Preaching Islam Religion in Central Java, Indonesia," *Harmonia Journal of Arts Research and Education* 22, no. 2 (2022): 254–267, <https://doi.org/10.15294/harmonia.v22i2.37525>.

¹² Akbar Bagaskara, Umilia Rokhani, and Ans Prawati Yuliantari, "Ketokohan Dan Nilai-Nilai Spritualitas Ajaran Sunan Kalijaga Dalam Praktik Kesenian Karawitan Di Kabupaten Demak," *Resital Jurnal Seni Pertunjukan* 24, no. 3 (2023): 209–230, <https://doi.org/10.24821/resital.v24i3.10947>.

¹³ Umar Hasyim, *Sunan Kalijaga* (Kudus: Penerbit Menara Kudus, 1974), 1–2.

¹⁴ Agus Sunyoto, *Atlas Wali Songo* (Tangerang: Pustaka Ilman dan LESBUMI, 2017), 256–79; Abdul Wahid Hasyim, "Demak Sultanate: The Fortress of Islamic Greatness in the Middle Ages Java Island," *Buletin Al-Turas* 27, no. 1 (2021): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.15408/bat.v27i1.16400>.

Sunan Bonang, who placed his staff on the riverbank (*kali*) and asked Raden Said to watch over it (*jogo*), thus earning him the name Kali Jogo, later evolving into Kalijaga.¹⁵

The Walisongo are a diverse group of Muslim saints, each figure characterized by his individual background and *da'wa* approach. Nonetheless, the Walisongo generally fall into two main categories: the *Putihan* and *Abangan*.¹⁶ The *Putihan* group taught Islam based on the Qur'an and Hadith, strictly adhering to Islamic law, thus setting their beliefs and practices far apart from the local culture. This approach was exemplified by Sunan Giri.¹⁷ In contrast, the *Abangan* group included the sons of local nobles, who maintained a strong connection to Javanese culture, which was deeply intertwined with Hinduism and Buddhism.¹⁸ This approach aligns more with Javanese mystical practices, where the Islamic teachings blended with old and new beliefs, as reflected in their rituals and practices. The *Abangan* group includes Sunan Kalijaga,¹⁹ characterized by his striped *surjan* shirt and *blangkon* headdress made from batik fabric. The *surjan* pattern symbolizes the separation between good and evil.

Before the advent of Islam, local religious culture was deeply rooted in mysticism.²⁰ Therefore, the shape Islam would take in Indonesia, especially in Java, also reflected the same emphasis on mysticism.²¹ Among the Walisongo, it was Sunan Kalijaga who taught Islam following a decidedly cultural approach. He utilized local culture as a medium for his *da'wa*, incorporating Islamic teachings into traditional Javanese shadow puppetry (*wayang*).²² In addition, he composed many *serat* (books

¹⁵ Sunyoto, *Atlas Wali Songo*, 256–79; Bagus Purnomo and Afifah Dinar, “Islam Di Pesisir Utara Jawa Dalam Simbol Sufistik Naskah Sejatine Manusa,” *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 21, no. 1 (2023): 157–88, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlka.v21i1.1080>.

¹⁶ M.C. Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nine-Teenth Centuries* (Novalk: East Bridge, 2006), 8.

¹⁷ M.M. Solichin, *Walisongo: Rekonstruksi Sejarah Dan Dakwah Islam Di Jawa* (Jakarta: Pustaka al-Kautsar, 2010), 80.

¹⁸ Zulfan Taufik and Syafwan Rozi, “Perennialism and the Religious Common Platform of Mystical Tradition in Java,” *Teosofia: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Mysticism* 10, no. 2 (December 23, 2021): 193–208, <https://doi.org/10.21580/tos.v10i2.8439>.

¹⁹ Hasanu Simon, *Misteri Syekh Siti Jenar* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2005), 65; Amanah Nurish, “Santri and Abangan After Half A Century of Clifford Geertz,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 21, no. 2 (2021): 226–39, <https://doi.org/10.22373/Jiif.V21i2.5829>.

²⁰ Simuh, *Sufisme Jawa: Transformasi Tasawuf Islam Ke Mistik Jawa* (Yogyakarta: Bentang Budaya, 2018), 138.

²¹ Nurcholis Madjid, *Bilik-Bilik Pesantren: Sebuah Potret Perjalanan* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1998), 23; Alexander Wain, “The Kubrawi and Early Javanese Islam: Re-Assessing the Significance of a 16th-Century Kubrawi Silsila in the Sejarah Banten Ranté-Ranté,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 49, no. 143 (2021): 42–62, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2021.1875658>.

²² Abdul Munir Mulkan, *Islam Jawa: Mistik, Etika, Dan Politik Santri* (Yogyakarta: Kreasi Wacana, 2000), 48; Agus Salim, “Javanese Religion, Islam or Syncretism: Comparing Woodward's Islam in Java and Beatty's Varieties of Javanese Religion,” *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim*

containing philosophical teachings), *suluk* (poems with spiritual teachings), *kidung* (songs seeking protection or safety), and *tembang* (songs in the *macapat* style) as a medium for preaching Islam.²³

Sunan Kalijaga is known for two works that contain mystical experiences: *Serat Dewaruci* and *Suluk Linglung*. He wrote *Serat Dewaruci* as a young man and *Suluk Linglung* at a more mature age, once he had achieved *kasampurna* (perfection) in knowledge.²⁴ *Suluk Linglung* becomes an important work of Sunan Kalijaga as it contains Javanese mystical teachings embedded within Sufi teachings.

Semiotics and Interpretation of Symbols

Semiotics was developed as an independent field of study by Charles Saunders Pierce (1839–1914), who was interested in symbology. Pierce was interested in investigating how people think, leading him to conclude that semiotics is closely related to logic.²⁵ The Italian medievalist and philosopher Umberto Eco (1932–2016) explained that a sign is anything that represents something else. Thus, language itself is also a system of signs. Text, as a medium of language, is also a structure of signs, while a sign consists of three components: signifier, signified, and referent.²⁶ Here, the signifier is the form, the signified is the meaning, and the referent is the thought or concept. In its application, each word is a signifier or form, while the word's meaning is the signified, which is highly dependent on the referent, or the thought that connects the signifier with the signified.²⁷

In Pierce's terminology, this interrelationship is referred to as the sign triangle: the word is the form or representation,²⁸ while the meaning is the object being represented. Meanwhile, the idea or thought that connects the word with its meaning, the signifier with the signified, and the representation with its object, is called the

Societies 3, no. 2 (2013): 223–266, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v3i2.223-266>.

²³ Els Bogaerts, "Words of Power and Wisdom: Credible Authorities and Reliable Sources in the *Serat Nitik Sultan Agung*," in *Storied Island* (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 201–34, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004678897_010; Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama: Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII & XVIII* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2013), 55.

²⁴ M. Hariwijaya, *Islam Kejawaen* (Yogyakarta: Gelombang Pasang, 2006), 282.

²⁵ Abdul Basit, "Health Communication in The Quran: Charles Saunders Pierce's Semiotic Analysis," *Jurnal Komunikasi, Malaysian Journal of Communication* 33, no. 4 (December 20, 2017): 76–88, <https://doi.org/10.17576/JKMJC-2017-3304-05>.

²⁶ Wildan Taufiq, *Semiotika Untuk Kajian Sastra Dan Al-Qur'an* (Bandung: Yrama Widya, 2016), 29; Annisa Nurul Fadhilla and Ismandianto, "Semiotika Umberto Eco Dalam Representasi Perempuan Film Animasi Disney Raya and the Last Dragon," *Medium* 11, no. 1 (2023): 124–140, [https://doi.org/10.25299/medium.2023.vol11\(01\).9673](https://doi.org/10.25299/medium.2023.vol11(01).9673).

²⁷ Umberto Eco, "The Theory of Signs and the Role of the Reader," *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 14, no. 1 (1981): 35–45, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1314865>.

²⁸ Taufiq, *Semiotika Untuk Kajian Sastra Dan Al-Qur'an*, 32.

interpretant.²⁹ Therefore, *Suluk Linglung* can be examined using semiotic analysis because the object of study is a text and because many symbolizations can be treated as signs that require interpretation. This study limits itself to broadly defined symbols rather than technical terms, which would require a more detailed approach and wider analysis. Additionally, the scope and content of the teachings contained in *Suluk Linglung* are vast, profound, and rich.

Method

This article presents a qualitative study that employs semiotics as a framework for analyzing the data in *Suluk Linglung*, which serves as the primary source of data. Many symbols in the manuscript are treated as signs that require interpretation to reveal their meaning. Ten signifiers in *Suluk Linglung* related to Sunan Kalijaga's spiritual journey were selected, analyzed, and interpreted. Secondary data were collected by exploring the literature related to the discussion, either in print form or online. To verify and strengthen the research results, the researcher used data triangulation techniques³⁰ before comparing the data from various sources, methods, or theories to gain a more comprehensive understanding and lessen subjectivity bias.

Results and Discussion

The *Suluk Linglung* Manuscript

Suluk Linglung is composed of two words: *suluk* and *linglung*. *Suluk* is derived from the Arabic verb *salaka*, meaning 'to take the path or journey.' Another derivative is *sālik*, denoting a spiritual traveller in Sufism. In the cultural context of Java, *suluk* refers to a genre of classical Javanese literature consisting of narrative poems that contain philosophical, theological, or spiritual doctrines, often using symbolic language. Meanwhile, *linglung* in Javanese implies confusion, indecision, or a state of doubt.³¹

The *Suluk Linglung* manuscript examined in this study is a copy of the original manuscript written by Iman Anom (1806–1884), a direct descendant of Sunan Kalijaga, published by Balai Pustaka in 1993. The manuscript has been transliterated by Muhammad Khafid Kasri, who was entrusted by R. Ay. Supratini Mursidi, the 14th descendant of Sunan Kalijaga, to undertake the translation. *Suluk Linglung* is part of the *Kitab Duryat*, an ancient manuscript written in Javanese Pegon script. The folios

²⁹ Halina Sendera Mohd. Yakin and Andreas Totu, "The Semiotic Perspectives of Peirce and Saussure: A Brief Comparative Study," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 155 (2014): 4–8, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.10.247>.

³⁰ Nancy Carter et al., "The Use of Triangulation in Qualitative Research.," *Oncology Nursing Forum* 41, no. 5 (2014): 545–47, <https://doi.org/10.1188/14.ONF.545-547>.

³¹ Edris Zamroni, "Kajian Hermeneutika Nilai-Nilai Suluk Linglung Sunan Kalijaga Sebagai Salah Satu Landasan Filosofis Konseling Indonesia" (Universitas Negeri Malang, 2022).

are made from wood fiber treated with traditional herb leaves and contain an *azimat* charm³² in the form of a sacred, talismanic inscription (*rajab*) in Arabic letters. It also contains prayers in Javanese and Arabic, in addition to predictions based on *pasaran* days.³³ The final chapter includes the life story of Sunan Kalijaga presented in *macapat* songs.³⁴ These songs were then transliterated into Latin by Muhammad Khafid Kasri and translated into Indonesian.³⁵

R. Ay. Supratini was guarding the original manuscript, considering it a sacred artefact, which only a select few were allowed to touch and see. Similar literary works like *Wawacan Sunan Gunung Jati* are also jealously guarded by their owners, considering them as sacred objects and heirlooms, which must not be touched by those deemed unworthy, lest they be inflicted with a spiritual illness (*kabadi*) for their transgression.³⁶ The reverence in which these manuscripts are held by the descendants, who solemnly take on their guardianship, makes access to the manuscripts extremely difficult.

Semiotics of *Suluk Linglung*

In this semiotic study of the *Suluk Linglung*, ten significant signifiers in Sunan Kalijaga's spiritual journey were selected, analyzed, and interpreted. In semiotic theory, signifiers are chosen subjectively and depend on the researcher. The ten selected signifiers are as follows:

1. Brandal Lokajaya (aka Raden Said)
2. Sunan Bonang
3. Meditating by the River
4. Guarding the Staff
5. *Laku Ngidang* (Behaving Like a Deer)
6. Pilgrimage to Mecca
7. Crossing the Ocean
8. Prophet Khiḍr
9. Entering through the Ear
10. The Entire Universe is Contained within the Body of Prophet Khiḍr

³² Magical formula to ward off evil.

³³ Native Javanese dating system of five days per week

³⁴ Tradition of Javanese poetry and music, using specific metric and melodic forms to convey wisdom, moral lessons, love stories, and life's journey, often set to Gamelan music.

³⁵ Anom, *Suluk Linglung Sunan Kalijaga*, vii.

³⁶ Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, *Wawacan Sunan Gunung Jati* (Jakarta, 1994), 1; Abdullah Maulani and Munawar Holil, "Malay Text Reception among Sufi Orders in West Java: A Study on Wawacan Layang Siti Hasanah," *KEMANUSIAAN The Asian Journal of Humanities* 29, no. 2 (2022): 99–120, <https://doi.org/10.21315/kajh2022.29.2.5>.

The signifiers are referred to as representations or forms, which produce the signified or the object of representation. The represented objects are listed in the table below:

Table 1: Ten Signifiers and Their Signified Objects in *Suluk Linglung*

| Representation (signifiers) | Object Represented (signified) |
|---|---|
| Brandal Lokajaya | Negative existential role. |
| Sunan Bonang | Gateway of guidance, introduction, key to escape confusion (<i>linglung</i>). |
| Meditating by the River | Sincerity in following guidance; the river symbolizes the course of life. |
| Guarding the Staff | Firmness of heart in adhering to principles or guidance. |
| <i>Laku Ngidang</i> (Behaving Like a Deer) | Complete elimination of the human ego (<i>akukamanungsan</i>) by merging with nature, imitating the natural way of life. |
| Pilgrimage to Mecca | Completing the highest ritual, the fifth pillar of Islam, the spiritual center that exists within the heart of a believer (mu'min), the true throne of God. |
| Crossing the Ocean | Exploring all knowledge of reality; complete surrender. |
| Prophet Khidr | True teacher as a source of perfect knowledge; a teacher of those deemed worthy. |
| Entering through the Ear | Readiness and acceptance to listen and understand. |
| The Entire Universe is contained in Prophet Khidr | Manifestation of humankind as macrocosm. |

After generating these ten signifieds, the idea of connecting the signifier with the signified is sought. The connector between the signifier and the signified is referred to as a referent or interpretant. The ten interpretants that connect the representations with their objects are shown in the table below:

Table 2: Ten Interpretants of Signified Objects in *Suluk Linglung*

| Representation (signifier) | Object Represented (signified) | Interpretant |
|-------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| Brandal Lokajaya | Negative existential role | In confusion (<i>linglung</i>). |
| Sunan Bonang | Gateway of guidance; introduction; key to escape confusion (<i>linglung</i>). | First teacher. |
| Meditating by the River | Sincerity in following guidance; the river symbolizes the course of life. | First asceticism; self-reflection. |
| Guarding the Staff | Firmness of heart in adhering to principles or guidance. | Obedience. |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <i>Laku Ngidang</i> (Behaving Like a Deer) | Complete elimination of the human ego (<i>aku-kamanungsan</i>) by merging with nature, imitating the natural way of life. | Second asceticism; self-surrender. |
| Pilgrimage to Mecca | Completing the highest ritual, the fifth pillar of Islam, the spiritual center that exists within the heart of a believer (mu'min), the true throne of God. | Heading towards the spiritual center. |
| Crossing the Ocean | Exploring all knowledge of reality; complete surrender. | Total commitment to Divine knowledge. |
| Prophet Khidr | True teacher as a source of perfect knowledge; a teacher of those deemed worthy. | True knowledge eliminating all confusion (<i>linglung</i>). |
| Entering through the Ear | Readiness and acceptance to listen and understand. | There is no inner wavering, objection, or debate. |
| Entire Universe Contained within Prophet Khidr | Manifestation of humankind as macrocosm. | Union of macrocosm and microcosm. |

The semiotic meanings are produced after obtaining the interpretants from these ten signifiers, resulting from the elaboration between the signifier, the signified, and the interpretant. The semiotic meanings are explained in the phase of Sunan Kalijaga's spiritual journey.

Phases of the Spiritual Journey

1) Phase One: Becoming *Brandal Lokajaya*

The first phase is confusion or *linglung*. Raden Mas Said decided to become a robber (*brandal*) under the name Brandal Lokajaya. He took this role as a form of protest against the oppressive economic policies enacted by his father, the regent (*adipati*) of Tuban. Raden Said saw many of his people living in extreme poverty, yet they were forced to pay heavy taxes. He realized that his father was not to blame for this injustice, because all regencies were obliged to pay a heavy tribute to the Kingdom of Majapahit.³⁷ As a regent subordinate to the king, his father was powerless. Raden Said took the initiative to rob the treasury and distribute it back to the people. In other words, his

³⁷ Sukarjo Waluyo, Redyanto Noor, and Ratna Asmarani, "The Royal Descent and the Past Glory of the Demak Sultanate as the Builders of Coastal Javanese Resistance in the Novel *Penangsang* (Tembang Rindu Dendam)," *E3S Web Conf.* 317 (2021): 04022, <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202131704022>; Siti Rukayah, Fariz Addo Giovano, and Muhammad Abdullah, "The Lost of Old Demak Sultanate City Pattern," *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism* 47, no. 2 (2023): 146–162, <https://doi.org/10.3846/jau.2023.17855>.

motive for becoming a robber was driven by his determination to stop the oppression of his people and his compassion for them.³⁸ However, robbing the treasury was not a long-term solution, which made him increasingly restless and morally conflicted. Raden Said wanted to do the right thing the right way, not the wrong way. He also wanted to learn about the true meaning of human life and become truly righteous. *Suluk Linglung* canto I, stanza 3:³⁹

The heart is doubtful, the mind is confused, still serving, even without any help. It is forevermore tempted by desire, yet unable to overcome it. It strives to seek meaning in this life, to overcome and cure itself from all desire, lest it be too late. If it is satisfied with eating and sleeping, the heart will lose its war against desire. Allah is the true place of surrender.⁴⁰

2) Phase Two: Becoming a Disciple of Sunan Bonang

Raden Said's encounter with Sunan Bonang marked the gateway of guidance that marked the beginning of his spiritual journey. His life's course was altered when he met his first spiritual teacher, ultimately leading him to enlightenment and sainthood. As stated in Canto I, stanza 7:⁴¹

In a state of confusion, asking for wages without results, relentlessly demanding without a debt, the one demanded remains silent, for in truth there is no debt, and the one who demands comes and goes. All of this is no different from Syeh Melaya himself, when he began to study and meditate, ordered by Kanjeng Sunan Bonang to guard the staff and not to leave the spot.⁴²

First, Sunan Bonang instructed Raden Said to stay by the riverbank, holding his master's staff. Canto II, stanza 4 reads:⁴³

Then he was ordered to move, to reflect by the riverbank, which would become his new name [Kalijaga = guarding the riverbank]. For one year, he was not allowed to sleep or eat while Sunan Bonang was away in Mecca.⁴⁴

Raden Said was forced to stay put and meditate until Sunan Bonang had returned

³⁸ Hasyim, *Sunan Kalijaga*, 1–2.

³⁹ Anom, *Suluk Linglung Sunan Kalijaga*, 2–3.

⁴⁰ “*Ling lang ling lung sinambi angabdi, saking datan amawi sabala, kabeka dene nepsune, marmannya datan kerup, denya amrih wekasih urip, dadya napsu ingobat, kabanjur kalantur, cca dhahar lawan nedra, saking tyas awon perang lan nepsu neki, sumendhe kersaning Hyang.*”

⁴¹ Anom, *Suluk Linglung Sunan Kalijaga*, 4.

⁴² “*Ling lang ling lung anagih tan olih, anenagih ngrejeg tanpa potang, kang tinagih meneng bac, pan nyata nora nyambut, kang anagih awira-wiri, tan ana beda nira, Syeh Melaya iku, wit pahurita atapa, mring Jeng Sunan Bonang kinen tengga kang cis, tan Kenya yen kesana.*”

⁴³ Anom, *Suluk Linglung Sunan Kalijaga*, 6.

⁴⁴ “*Anulya kinen angalih, pitekur ing kali jaga, malih karan jejuluke, sawarsa tan kena nedra, utawi yen dahara, tinalar mring Mekah sampun, dhumateng Sinuhun Benang.*”

from Mecca. Meditating by the river symbolizes a sincere commitment to following Divine guidance without questioning. Just as the river flows into the estuary, an effort to contemplate life's journey as the river runs its predetermined course, flowing towards the estuary, so does the seeker have to trust the course of his spiritual path as instructed by his guide. He had to sit quietly by the river, watching the river flow by, while refraining from eating and drinking.⁴⁵

Sunan Bonang had also entrusted Raden Said with his staff, which he left firmly planted in the ground. The staff represents the firmness of heart in adhering to the principles of spiritual truth he was undertaking. In Sufism, the staff is a symbol of the guidance of the *ṭaīqā* (Sufi order). Someone who has sworn allegiance to a *ṭaīqā* means they have decided to hold on to the staff. Sufi Sheikhs often use a wooden staff as a symbol of their authority, along with a robe and turban, thus symbolizing their embarkation on their spiritual journey. Using a staff also follows the examples of the prophets and saints.⁴⁶ It is a universal symbol for the shepherd guiding and protecting his flock, as well as for the restless traveler who is never truly at home anywhere in this world. Utilizing a staff serves as a reminder that life in this world is akin to a journey toward the true home of the believer in the Hereafter. The staff of Prophet Moses has special significance and is connected with his miracles.⁴⁷

3) Phase Three: *Laku Ngidang* (Behaving Like a Deer)

The third phase of the spiritual journey commenced after Raden Said completed his meditation by the riverbank, which lasted for a year. Upon his return, Sunan Bonang awakened his pupil and ordered him to enter the forest to 'meditate like a deer,' as stated in canto II, stanza 17:⁴⁸

To behave like a deer, mingle with the deer. He went to sleep with the deer, following the way they slept, upside down. Searching for food, he followed the way of a young deer. When there were people nearby, the deer ran helter-skelter [into the thicket],

⁴⁵ Hasyim, *Sunan Kalijaga*, 1–2; Khairul Azhar Mccrangani, "Peranan Ulama Dalam Penyebaran Ajaran Islam Di Pulau Besar, Melaka (The Role Of Muslim Scholars In Spreading The Teaching Of Islam In Pulau Besar, Melaka)," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 14, no. 2 (2019): 65–74, <https://doi.org/10.22452/Jat.Vol14no2.6>.

⁴⁶ Muhammad Faizin, "Kenapa Para Nabi Dan Wali Identik Dengan Tongkat?," nu.or.id, 2019, <https://nu.or.id/nasional/kenapa-para-nabi-dan-wali-identik-dengan-tongkat-RPXqv>.

⁴⁷ Najihatul Abadiyah Mannan, "Studi Stilistika Terhadap Tongkat Nabi Musa Di Dalam Al-Qur'an," *REVELATIA: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 1, no. 1 (May 27, 2020): 51–68, <https://doi.org/10.19105/revelatia.v1i1.3169>; Syukron Affani, "Rekonstruksi Kisah Nabi Musa Dalam Al-Quran: Studi Perbandingan Dengan Perjanjian Lama," *Al-Ihkam* 12, no. 1 (2017): 170–196, <https://doi.org/10.19105/al-ihkam.v12i1.1259>.

⁴⁸ Anom, *Suluk Linglung Sunan Kalijaga*, 10.

and Kanjeng Sunan Kalijaga also ran swiftly, on all fours, like a deer, panting and struggling not to fall behind, keeping up the pace.⁴⁹

Spiritual practitioners following Sunan Kalijaga commonly perform *laku ngidang*, which may take various forms. This meditation practice requires the seeker to become one with nature, living naturally like an animal, and eliminating the ego. For obvious reasons, this practice may be considered strange and eccentric; however, it has the desired effect on the soul and must not be disregarded.⁵⁰

4) Phase Four: Embark on the Pilgrimage to Mecca

The fourth phase involves the directive to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca. Intriguingly, this phase is composed entirely of rituals anchored in the Sharī'a, thus affirming the sound legal basis of Sufi practices, which do not veer from the orthodox path.⁵¹ The question that arises is whether it implies that Sunan Kalijaga had acquired sufficient knowledge in *fiqh* to perform the hajj and complete his ritual obligations. Indeed, his being ordered to perform the hajj is a strong indicator that Sunan Bonang deemed his pupil ready for this task, having gathered enough knowledge of Islamic principles and practices to complete it successfully.

There is a common presumption that ascetic practices are incompatible with the Sharī'a. Similarly, how could Raden Said perform all his religious obligations while safeguarding his master's staff on the riverbank? For instance, how could he attend his Friday prayers? It seems that withdrawing from the world and other such ascetic practices reflect the Javanese approach to conditioning the heart to accept Sharī'a. His master's directive to go to Mecca and perform the hajj ultimately led Raden Said to an encounter with the mystical figure Khidr, believed to be eternally alive and serving as a spiritual guide for prospective saints and friends of God (*awliyā* ʾ). It is, therefore, astonishing to learn that he never went to Mecca to perform the hajj in his lifetime, according to the historical records.⁵²

However, in the account given in *Suluk Linglung*, Sunan Kalijaga completes his voyage across the ocean, symbolizing his journey towards the Divine truth. He has an encounter with Prophet Khidr, who bestows upon him profound spiritual wisdom,

⁴⁹ “*Pan angidang lampah neki, awor lan kidang manjangan, atenapi yen asare, pan aturu tumut nangsang, kadi turning kidang, yen asaba mapan tumut, lir kadya sutailing kidang, yen ana jamla udani, kang kidang lumayu gebras, Jeng Sunan amelu gebres, pan lumayu berangkangan. Kadi playunc kidang, wayang-wuyung datan kantun, anu ting solahc kidang.*”

⁵⁰ Achmad Chodjim, *Mistik Dan Makrifat Sunan Kalijaga* (Jakarta: Serambi, 2011), 165.

⁵¹ Syamsun Ni'am, “The Debate of Orthodox Sufism and Philosophical Sufism: The Study of Maqāmāt in the Sirāj Al-Ṭālibīn of Shaykh Iḥsān Jampes,” *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* - 58, no. 1 (2020): 1–34, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2020.581.1-34>.

⁵² Hasyim, *Sunan Kalijaga*, 1–2.

imparted to Sunan Kalijaga when Prophet Khidr enters his body through the ear. This event reflects his mental readiness to accept all the teachings readily and unquestioningly. A significant portion of the core teachings imparted by Prophet Khidr is related to Sunan Kalijaga's intention to perform the hajj. As stated in canto IV, stanza 1–2:⁵³

If you intend to make the hajj to Mecca, you must comprehend the true intent of this journey. Understand that Mecca is but a symbol! The former dwelling of Prophet Abraham is believed to be the site of the Ka'ba in the Sacred Mosque, embellished with a black stone affixed to its wall. Is it the Ka'ba that you worship? If so, your actions are but idol worship.⁵⁴

You think like non-believers, who create conjectures about the nature of Allah, always focusing on their idol. If you complete the hajj without understanding its true purpose, you will lose more than you gain. Understand that your destination, the Ka'ba, is not made of earth, wood, or stone but is the Ka'ba of Allah. This is the truly guided faith you must affirm in your heart.⁵⁵

Presumably, this was the essence of Sunan Bonang's advice through which Sunan Kalijaga gained a deep understanding of the meaning and essence of the hajj. Furthermore, Sunan Kalijaga's spiritual journey led him to the station of perfection (*maqām al-iḥsān*), attaining the status of *Walī Allāh*, the Friend of God.⁵⁶

Enlightened Wisdom: *Iman Hidayat*

The juncture of Sunan Kalijaga's spiritual quest, where he meets Prophet Khidr, is a significant turning point in the narrative, as it unravels the esoteric teachings of spiritual stewardship. This pivotal episode can be seen as the apotheosis of Sunan Kalijaga's spiritual journey. The dialogue between Prophet Khidr and Sunan Kalijaga contains the core teachings of *Suluk Linglung*, in parallel with Prophet Moses.⁵⁷ Both narratives involve a journey, a quest, and an enlightening encounter with Khidr. However, the teachings imparted to Prophet Moses are conveyed through symbolic events (the leaking boat, the slaying of a boy, and the restoration of a crumbling house), whereas Sunan Kalijaga's instructions are presented in a more straightforward

⁵³ Anom, *Suluk Linglung Sunan Kalijaga*, 19.

⁵⁴ “*Lamun arsa sira munggah kaji, maring Mekah thuke ana apa, hya Mekah pan tilas bae, Nabi Ibrahim kruhun, ingkang yasa kang ponang masjid, miwah tilase ka'bah, kang arupa watu, gumanthung tanpa centhelan, apa iku kang sedya sira bekteni, dadi mangan brahala.*”

⁵⁵ “*Iya kaya idhepe wong kapis, dene iya esmu ngangka-angka, trus madhep ming brahalanc, nadyan wus haji iku, yen tan weruh paraning kaji, ka'bah pan dudu lemah, kayu watu dudu, margone tan kanggo lunga, mring ka'bah yen arsa wruh ing ka'bah jati, jali iman hidayat.*”

⁵⁶ Chodjim, *Mistik Dan Makrifat Sunan Kalijaga*, 165.

⁵⁷ Aminah, “Konsep Ilmu Ladunni Dalam Kisah Nabi Musa AS Dan Nabi Khidhr AS,” *Al-Fath* 14, no. 2 (2020): 131–58, <https://doi.org/10.32678/alfath.v14i2.3674>.

manner.⁵⁸

The intent here is not to draw comparisons but to underscore the distinct pedagogical approach employed by Prophet Khidr. Regardless of whether *Suluk Linglung* is a didactic narrative cloaked in fiction, a common technique employed in Eastern literature, the focus should be on the conveyed message rather than the factual accuracy of the events. Therefore, to decipher the core teachings of *Suluk Linglung*, a focused examination of the dialogue between Sunan Kalijaga and Prophet Khidr can offer more insight. This study seeks to dissect the phases of the narrative, which are fraught with symbolism. Additionally, there is the aspect of faith of guidance (*iman hidayat*), which can be considered as a valuable supplement to this analysis.⁵⁹

The concept of *iman hidayat* was first introduced as a query by Kanjeng Sunan Kalijaga, after undergoing various spiritual disciplines under the tutelage of Sunan Bonang. After a year of secluded meditation by the river, Sunan Bonang instructed his pupil to perfect his contemplative practice and assume his role as a spiritual guide himself: "Son, draw your meditation close. You are now a *wali*, a herald of the faith."⁶⁰ He continues,

Rectify the prevailing chaos. Religion is a code of conduct that manifests reverence towards the Omniscient God. Adherence to the law and the tenets of the faith of guidance will lead you to divine guidance from the Almighty God, whose blessings are boundless.⁶¹

In response, Sunan Kalijaga asks, "Sheikh Malaya, please elucidate slowly. I am deeply grateful and will highly regard all advice. However, I beseech you, master, to expound on the true significance of the noble soul, or faith of guidance."⁶²

Sunan Bonang describes *iman hidayat* as a state of complete surrender and constant mindfulness, which resembles the original state after creation. To perfect his pupil's understanding of its true essence, he directs him to journey to Mecca. When Sunan Kalijaga encounters Prophet Khidr on his way, he receives this knowledge, thus completing his mission.

The discourse on *iman hidayat* is complemented by an exploration of specialized terminologies and metaphors. Prophet Khidr states in canto V, stanzas 13 and 15:

Your existence stems from the desire of God's will; your presence signifies the authentic presence of God; God cannot be fragmented into two or three entities.

⁵⁸ Ahmad Ramadhani, "Teacher and Student Relationship in the Story of Moses and Khidir," *Sunan Kalijaga: International Journal on Islamic Educational Research* 5, no. 2 (2021): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.14421/skijier.2021.52.01>.

⁵⁹ Safii, "Suntingan Teks Suluk Linglung Seh Malaya Karya Sunan Kalijaga," 232–48.

⁶⁰ Anom, *Suluk Linglung Sunan Kalijaga*, 6.

⁶¹ Anom, 6.

⁶² Anom, 8.

Surely, whoever discerns the origin of their existence will abstain from self-glorification.⁶³

Had you not existed, I, Allah, would remain unknown and unmentioned; it is through you that my existence is acknowledged; hence, it appears as if I am unified with you. Your existence sprang from Me, Allah, and mirrors My presence.⁶⁴

This explication harbors a profound secret of reality, an understanding that may elude many. It could be prone to misconceptions by the uninitiated. Therefore, such teachings are judiciously reserved for those who are spiritually and intellectually prepared.

Conclusion

Suluk Linglung depicts a distinctive spiritual journey blending Sufism with Javanese culture, as practiced by Sunan Kalijaga, a native Javanese and member of the Walisongo. His journey begins with a negative existential phase, where he is forced to become an outlaw to fight injustice, thus symbolizing inner confusion and loss of direction. Seeking Divine guidance to escape his confusion, he enters the phase of guidance in the person of Sunan Bonang. He undergoes spiritual training through seclusion and meditation, retreating from worldly life. In the next phase, he learns to emulate the deer to eliminate his ego. His master's directive to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca signals his spiritual progress. Having purified his heart from desire, he is ready to receive Divine knowledge.

This study suggests that classical literary works, such as *Suluk Linglung*, combine Sufism with Javanese culture. Semiotically, this study does not offer a detailed analysis of the teachings contained in *Suluk Linglung*; rather, it outlines the markers passed and interpreted in constructing a spiritual journey. Future studies can examine the intertextuality between *Suluk Linglung* and classical Sufi works, such as examining how the concept of spiritual stations is transformed into Javanese spiritual symbols.

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⁶³ Anom, 30. "Birahi ananireku, aranira Allah jati, tanana kalih tetiga, sapa wruha yen wus dadi, insung weruh pesti nora, ngarani namanireki."

⁶⁴ Anom, *Suluk Linglung*, 30: "Yen tanana sira iku, insun tanana ngarani, mung sira ngarani ing wang, dene Tunggal lan sireki iya Ingsun iya sira, aranira aran mami."

Author Contributions

N. contributed to the research design, problem formulation, analyzing Suluk Linglung manuscripts, designing and writing in-depth theoretical studies. A.B. contributed to the research method and sourcing secondary sources, drafting the discussion and conclusion of the research report.

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