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Epistemic Multiplicity and Semantic Warfare: *Kidung Rumecko Ing Wengi* as Heterotopic Text in Contemporary Javanese-Islamic Practice

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ABSTRACT

This study examines *Kidung Rumecko Ing Wengi* [Song of Protection for the Night] as a “heterotopic text”—a discursive space where competing epistemologies coexist without synthesis, challenging dominant paradigms in religious studies. Employing integrated deconstructive analysis, critical discourse analysis, and phenomenological ethnography across three interpretive communities in contemporary Indonesia, this research demonstrates how the *kidung* operates through “epistemic multiplicity”—generating irreducible semantic contradictions while maintaining operative efficacy through logical incoherence. Textual analysis reveals “escalating impossibility” in protective claims that exceed empirical verification yet remain collectively meaningful. Discourse analysis exposes “semantic warfare” where pesantren authorities accomplish “theological colonization,” rural practitioners maintain “semantic insurgency,” and urban communities employ “therapeutic appropriation” to advance exclusive authority claims. Despite interpretive violence, phenomenological investigation reveals remarkable consistency in embodied spiritual effects across communities (92% temporal distortion, 96% respiratory modification, 78% somatic energy sensations), indicating “embodied universality within interpretive particularity.” Statistical analysis of 89 interviews documents how spiritual meaning emerges through “agonistic hermeneutics” where authority develops through conflict rather than consensus, challenging hermeneutical approaches that assume

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religious communities achieve mutual understanding through dialogue. This investigation contributes to postcolonial Islamic studies by demonstrating how local spiritual languages function as contested sites where normative Islam negotiates with indigenous expressions, while advancing “postdisciplinary” religious studies methodology that operates through productive tensions between analytical approaches. The findings reveal *Kidung Rumecko Ing Wengi* as exemplifying contemporary spiritual authority that transcends conventional binaries between orthodox and popular Islam.

Keywords: *Kidung Rumecko Ing Wengi*; Heterotopic Text; Epistemic Multiplicity; Agonistic Hermeneutics; Postcolonial Islamic Studies; Semantic Warfare

1. Introduction

Sacred texts in postcolonial contexts operate as contested sites where competing knowledge systems negotiate authority without achieving stable synthesis, exemplifying what Foucault terms “heterotopias”—discursive spaces where incompatible epistemologies coexist in productive tension^[1,2]. This phenomenon proves particularly pronounced in contemporary Indonesian Islam, where indigenous Javanese spiritual traditions encounter orthodox Islamic discourse within broader contexts of religious commodification and postcolonial identity formation^[3–5]. *Kidung Rumecko Ing Wengi* [Song of Protection for the Night], attributed to the sixteenth-century Sufi saint Sunan Kalijaga, exemplifies these complex dynamics as a text that resists reduction to either Islamic orthodoxy or Javanese traditionalism while remaining operationally effective across radically different interpretive communities. Rather than functioning as a repository of fixed spiritual truth, this sacred chant operates as what we term a “heterotopic text” that enables competing religious communities to advance mutually exclusive truth claims while maintaining collective operative efficacy.

Contemporary scholarship on Javanese-Islamic texts has predominantly approached such materials through frameworks that assume either successful religious synthesis or problematic cultural contradiction^[6–9]. These approaches, while valuable, have failed to examine how sacred texts function as active instruments of power that construct rather than merely express spiritual authority, and how interpretive strategies serve as mechanisms through which competing religious communities advance exclusive truth claims while systematically excluding alternative possibilities. Recent developments in postcolonial religious studies have challenged such conventional approaches, with scholars like Talal Asad^[3,10], demonstrating how colonial contexts gen-

erate forms of religious authority that operate through productive tensions between competing epistemologies rather than their resolution into coherent systems. This scholarship suggests that meaning in religious discourse may be fundamentally agonistic—emerging through conflict rather than consensus—while maintaining operative efficacy precisely through resistance to interpretive closure^[11–13].

Building on these theoretical developments, this study examines *Kidung Rumecko Ing Wengi* [Song of Protection for the Night] as a “heterotopic text” that generates what we term “epistemic multiplicity”—the simultaneous production of contradictory truth claims that resist synthesis yet remain collectively operative within contemporary Javanese-Islamic practice. This approach requires moving beyond hermeneutical frameworks that seek unified textual meaning toward what we identify as “agonistic hermeneutics”—interpretive strategies that acknowledge irreducible differences between meaning systems while examining how such differences serve particular power arrangements^[14–16]. Our analysis reveals how interpretive communities engage in “semantic warfare”—systematic appropriation of shared vocabulary to advance exclusive authority claims—while practitioners experience remarkably consistent embodied spiritual effects across interpretive difference, suggesting forms of religious knowledge that resist both social constructionist and essentialist explanations^[6,17].

The central research question asks: How does *Kidung Rumecko Ing Wengi* [Song of Protection for the Night] operate as a heterotopic text that generates “epistemic multiplicity,” enabling competing religious communities to advance mutually exclusive truth claims while maintaining collective operative efficacy through productive semantic tensions? To address this question, we employ a “postdisciplinary” methodological approach integrating deconstructive textual analysis, critical discourse analysis, and phenomenological

ethnography—necessary because the *kidung* operates simultaneously as linguistic artifact, social practice, and site of embodied experience. This investigation contributes to post-colonial Islamic studies by demonstrating how local spiritual languages function as contested sites where normative Islam negotiates with indigenous expressions through productive antagonisms rather than synthetic accommodation, while advancing religious studies methodology capable of addressing complex phenomena that resist conventional academic categorization without reproducing colonial knowledge hierarchies.

2. Materials and Methods

This study examines *Kidung Rumecko Ing Wengi* [Song of Protection for the Night] through an integrated approach that treats sacred texts as simultaneously linguistic artifacts, social practices, and sites of embodied experience. We argue that existing scholarship has artificially separated textual analysis from the lived contexts through which spiritual meaning emerges, requiring methodological integration across traditionally distinct analytical domains.

2.1. Research Design

The methodology combines deconstructive textual analysis, critical discourse analysis, and phenomenological ethnography to address how spiritual authority is constructed, contested, and embodied within contemporary Javanese-Islamic practice. This integration proves necessary because the *kidung* operates simultaneously as written tradition, oral performance, and somatic experience—dimensions that cannot be adequately analyzed in isolation.

Data collection occurred across three interpretive contexts representing different modes of textual transmission: traditional Islamic scholarship (*pesantren* in Banyumas), indigenous Javanese practice (rural communities in Purworejo), and urban syncretic spirituality (Semarang circles). This multi-sited approach enables analysis of how identical textual materials generate divergent spiritual meanings across different social configurations.

2.2. Materials and Procedures

Textual Analysis focuses on manuscript variants from institutional archives (Radya Pustaka Library) and private collections, examining semantic variations in key terms (*sirno*, *luput*, *makrifat*) that carry different theological implications across interpretive communities. Following Derida's deconstructive methodology^[18–20], analysis identifies moments where the text's metaphysical claims depend upon exclusions that destabilize their apparent coherence.

Discourse Analysis employs Fairclough's framework to examine how vocabulary choices and rhetorical strategies position subjects within hierarchies of spiritual authority^[21,22], how texts circulate between communities, and how interpretation serves broader projects of religious legitimation^[23–25].

Ethnographic Observation documents the embodied dimensions of *kidung* practice—vocal techniques, bodily postures, temporal rhythms—that prove essential to practitioners' experiences of spiritual efficacy. Semi-structured interviews with religious authorities, spiritual practitioners, and community members (n=32) explored the relationship between textual understanding and experiential knowledge.

Phenomenological Analysis treats practitioners' reports of transformed consciousness and bodily sensation as irreducible data revealing how textual meaning becomes lived reality^[26,27]. This approach acknowledges that spiritual experience cannot be fully captured through either textual interpretation or social analysis alone.

2.3. Analytical Integration

Rather than applying these approaches sequentially, analysis proceeds through systematic attention to their productive tensions: how textual instabilities create interpretive possibilities that are socially actualized within power relations and individually lived through embodied practice. This methodological integration avoids reducing spiritual phenomena to either textual effects or social constructions while remaining analytically rigorous. All procedures received institutional ethical approval (Diponegoro University Committee, 074/UN7.5.8/PP/2024) and followed protocols ensuring participant confidentiality and community consent. The research implements collaborative principles that recognize local knowledge systems as epistemically valid rather

than objects of academic appropriation.

3. Results and Discussion

This analysis demonstrates that *Kidung Rumekso Ing Wengi* [Song of Protection for the Night] operates as what we term a “heterotopic text”—following Foucault’s concept of heterotopia as spaces where “several sites that are in themselves incompatible” coexist without synthesis^[28]. Our findings challenge three dominant paradigms in religious studies: hermeneutical approaches that seek unified textual meaning^[14,15], sociological approaches that reduce religious phenomena to social construction^[29,30], and phenomenological approaches that treat spiritual experience as culturally transcendent^[31,32]. This intervention contributes to emerging postcolonial critiques of religious studies methodology while advancing theoretical understanding of interpretive authority in contemporary Islamic contexts^[3,33,34].

3.1. The Impossibility of Coherent Protection: Deconstructing Metaphysical Claims

Our textual analysis reveals a systematically unstable hierarchy of protective claims that simultaneously establish and undermine their own metaphysical foundations (Table 1). This instability proves constitutive rather than accidental, enabling the text’s deployment across radically incompatible interpretive communities. These inherent contradictions not only expose latent tensions within the text but also foster a multiplicity of interpretative possibilities that defy simplistic categorization. By rejecting a unified symbolic framework, the text creates a dynamic space where diverse and often conflicting meanings continuously negotiate their boundaries. This finding challenges Mircea Eliade’s influential argument that sacred texts operate through coherent symbolic systems^[35], while supporting Jacques Derrida’s contention that meaning in religious discourse depends upon “constitutive exclusions” that cannot be resolved through hermeneutical synthesis^[36,37].

Table 1. Ontological Stratification and Epistemic Contradictions in Protective Discourse.

Verse	Protection Claim	Ontological Commitment	Epistemic Requirement	Internal Contradiction
<i>Ana kidung rumekso ing wengi</i> [There is a song protecting the night]	Temporal sovereignty	Spatio-temporal control	Ritual competence	Requires the night it claims to control
<i>Teguh hayu luputa ing lara</i> [Be strong and avoid illness]	Biological immunity	Somatic determination	Medical inefficacy	Presupposes illness it negates
<i>Luputa bilahi kabeh</i> [avoid all disasters]	Causal exemption	Natural law suspension	Cosmological knowledge	Depends on laws it transcends
<i>Jin setan datan purun</i> [the devil doesn’t want to]	Ontological hierarchy	Supernatural sovereignty	Esoteric initiation	Validates entities it rejects
<i>Paneluhan tan ana wani</i> [magic does not dare]	Epistemic negation	Occult nullification	Counter-magical mastery	Requires magic it destroys
<i>Gunaning wong luput</i> [protected from other people’s magic]	Social reality control	Intersubjective manipulation	Psychological dominance	Needs social recognition to deny society
<i>Geni atemahan tirta</i> [fire exposed to water]	Natural law transcendence	Elemental transmutation	Absolute spiritual realization	Maintains elemental distinction it overcomes
<i>Maling adoh tan ana ngarah ing mami</i> [the thief moved away and didn’t dare to approach me]	Behavioral modification	Moral causation	Ethical perfection	Presupposes theft it prevents
<i>Guna duduk pan sirna</i> [magic and stabbing will disappear]	Absolute epistemic authority	Total reality control	Unmediated gnosis	Claims knowledge to negate knowledge

3.1.1. Critical Analysis: The Logic of Constitutive Contradiction

This progression reveals what we identify as “escalating impossibility”—each level makes increasingly radical

claims about reality manipulation that exceed not only empirical verification but logical coherence. The verse *geni atemahan tirta* (fire transforms into water) exemplifies this dynamic: while asserting ontological transformation that

transcends natural causality, the text requires the very binary opposition (fire/water) it claims to overcome. This demonstrates what Derrida terms “différance”—the systematic deferral of meaning that prevents textual closure while enabling ongoing interpretation^[18,20].

However, our analysis reveals a more complex structure than Derrida’s framework typically acknowledges. The *kidung*’s protective claims do not simply defer meaning but actively generate what we term “productive impossibility”—assertions that maintain operative efficacy precisely through their logical incoherence. This challenges both rationalist approaches that dismiss such claims as primitive superstition and postmodern approaches that celebrate interpretive multiplicity without examining power effects^[38–40].

This productive impossibility functions not merely as a semantic paradox, but as a performative mechanism that enacts power through contradiction. For instance, the simultaneous invocation and negation of harm within the same verse compels belief not despite incoherence, but because of it—demanding submission to a logic beyond logic. Such formulations allow the *kidung* to assert ritual potency in contexts where empirical justification is irrelevant, and where spiritual efficacy must bypass the constraints of conventional reason. In this way, the text mobilizes incoherence as a deliberate epistemological strategy.

The final verse’s assertion of absolute epistemic authority (*guna duduk pan sirno*—all black magic completely disappears) represents what we identify as “totalitarian gnos” —the claim that authentic spiritual knowledge requires the complete elimination of alternative epistemologies. This functions as what Giorgio Agamben calls a “state of exception” within the text, suspending normal conditions of verification while claiming absolute validity^[41]. Such claims prove particularly significant in postcolonial contexts where indigenous knowledge systems resist incorporation into hegemonic religious frameworks^[42–44].

3.1.2. Methodological Reflexivity: The Violence of Analysis

Our deconstructive reading necessarily participates in the interpretive violence it analyzes. By exposing the *kidung*’s internal contradictions, we risk reproducing what Gayatri Spivak terms “epistemic violence”—the systematic devaluation of non-Western knowledge systems through Western analytical frameworks^[11]. This method-

ological predicament reflects broader tensions within postcolonial scholarship between critical analysis and cultural respect^[45,46]. However, our analysis suggests that acknowledging such violence may prove more productive than attempting to avoid it through methodological neutrality—a stance that often conceals rather than eliminates colonial assumptions^[10,47]. The *kidung*’s own operation through constitutive exclusions indicates that interpretive violence may be endemic to meaning-making processes rather than an unfortunate byproduct of academic analysis.

3.2. Semantic Warfare and the Micropolitics of Interpretive Authority

Our discourse analysis exposes how interpretive communities deploy shared vocabulary to advance mutually exclusive truth claims, revealing spiritual authority as fundamentally agonistic rather than consensual (**Table 2**). This finding challenges both liberal pluralist assumptions about religious tolerance and postmodern celebrations of interpretive multiplicity that ignore power relations^[48–50]. Our analysis builds on Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of “symbolic violence” while extending it to examine how religious communities compete for “spiritual capital” through interpretive strategies^[51,52].

3.2.1. Interpretive Violence and Epistemic Colonization

Each interpretive strategy involves what we identify as “semantic imperialism”—the systematic appropriation of shared vocabulary to advance exclusive authority claims while eliminating alternative possibilities. Pesantren readings exemplify what Antonio Gramsci terms “cultural hegemony”—the achievement of dominance through intellectual rather than coercive means^[53]. By translating Javanese spiritual concepts into Islamic theological vocabulary, pesantren authorities accomplish what we term “theological colonization”—the subordination of indigenous cosmology to external religious frameworks.

Rural Javanese practitioners resist this colonization through what we analyze as “semantic insurgency”—maintaining alternative meanings for shared vocabulary that preserve non-Islamic cosmological commitments. The insistence that *atemahan* refers to literal elemental manipulation rather than symbolic transformation represents

what James C. Scott calls “everyday resistance”—forms of opposition that avoid direct confrontation while maintaining cultural autonomy^[54,55]. This strategy aligns with what

Walter Mignolo identifies as “decolonial epistemic disobedience”—the refusal to accept hegemonic knowledge frameworks as universal or neutral^[56].

Table 2. Semantic Contestation and Strategic Exclusions in *Makrifat* Discourse.

Term	Pesantren Strategy	Javanese Counter-Strategy	Urban Neutralization	Excluded Possibilities
<i>Sirna</i> [is lost]	Theological subordination: elimination of <i>shirk</i> through orthodox submission	Cosmological assertion: destruction of hostile forces through spiritual mastery	Therapeutic reduction: psychological clearing through mindfulness practice	Ontological annihilation, shamanic dissolution, anarchist negation
<i>Atemahan</i> [exposed]	Symbolic containment: metaphorical transformation within divine decree	Literalist resistance: actual reality manipulation through personal achievement	Metaphorical domestication: personal change through therapeutic insight	Alchemical transmutation, technological enhancement, revolutionary transformation
<i>Luput</i> [spared]	Institutional mediation: divine protection through ritual compliance	Personal sovereignty: invulnerability through esoteric accomplishment	Individual resilience: emotional strength through self-care practices	Collective immunity, political exemption, temporal escape
<i>Makrifat</i> [enlightenment]	Hierarchical integration: mystical knowledge subordinated to jurisprudence (<i>fiqh</i>)	Autonomous realization: direct spiritual knowledge transcending institutional authority	Privatized spirituality: psychological insight through contemplative techniques	Prophetic authority, revolutionary consciousness, cosmic gnosis

Urban syncretic communities employ what we term “therapeutic appropriation”—reducing both Islamic and Javanese metaphysical claims to psychological benefits that avoid doctrinal commitment. This strategy reflects analyzes as “therapeutic culture”—the transformation of traditional religious practices into consumer products oriented toward individual wellness rather than collective meaning or cosmological commitment^[57,58]. Such appropriation enables market participation while evacuating spiritual content that might challenge secular rationality.

At the same time, this strategy does not entirely erase the spiritual; rather, it reframes it within affective idioms compatible with neoliberal subjectivity—emphasizing self-healing, personal resilience, and emotional balance. Rituals once embedded in communal ontologies are recontextualized as tools for managing anxiety or trauma, enabling selective retrieval of tradition without confronting its metaphysical demands. This fragmentation of belief allows urban actors to simultaneously inhabit spiritual and secular domains, negotiating plural affiliations without epistemological rupture.

3.2.2. The Impossibility of Neutral Interpretation

Our analysis reveals that no interpretive strategy preserves the *kidung*’s full semantic range. Each reading nec-

essarily suppresses possibilities that would undermine its authority claims, confirming what Hans-Georg Gadamer identifies as the “hermeneutical situation”—the impossibility of interpretation without prejudice^[14]. However, our findings suggest a more radical conclusion: meaning in sacred discourse may emerge through exclusion rather than inclusion, making hermeneutical synthesis not merely difficult but structurally impossible.

This challenges influential approaches within religious studies that assume interpretive communities can achieve mutual understanding through dialogue^[34,59]. The *kidung* case suggests that religious meaning may be fundamentally conflictual, requiring what we term “agonistic hermeneutics”—interpretive approaches that acknowledge rather than attempt to resolve irreducible differences between meaning systems.

Such a framework reframes interpretive failure not as a problem to be solved, but as a constitutive condition of cross-cosmological encounter. Rather than seeking consensus, agonistic hermeneutics embraces dissonance as a space of ethical engagement, where the goal is not mutual agreement but mutual exposure. In this sense, the *kidung* invites not only analysis but confrontation, forcing readers to reckon with the limits of translation, empathy, and interpretive hospitality.

3.3. The Phenomenology of Embodied Authority: Between Construction and Experience

Our phenomenological investigation reveals dimensions of religious experience that resist both social constructionist explanations and essentialist claims, contributing to ongoing debates about embodied spirituality in religious studies^[60,61]. Statistical analysis of interview data reveals remarkable consistency in reported somatic effects across interpretively incompatible communities, challenging conventional approaches to religious experience within both anthropological and phenomenological traditions.

3.3.1. Phenomenological Convergence: Statistical Evidence

Despite the semantic warfare documented above, practitioners from all three communities report similar embodied experiences during *kidung* recitation. Systematic coding of 89 interviews reveals consistent patterns: temporal distortion (reported by 92% of informants), respiratory modification (96%), somatic energy sensations (78%), altered spatial awareness (71%), and what informants describe as “protective embodiment” (85%)—a sense of spiritual shielding that operates independently of cognitive understanding.

3.3.2. Representative Testimonial Evidence

Pesantren Authority: Kyai Hasan (Banyumas): “*Ketika membaca kidung, tubuh terasa ringan seperti tidak memiliki berat. Napas menjadi sangat dalam tanpa usaha sadar. Waktu seperti melambat atau mungkin berhenti—sulit dijelaskan dengan kata-kata biasa*” [When reading the *kidung*, the body feels light as if weightless. Breathing becomes very deep without conscious effort. Time seems to slow or perhaps stop—difficult to explain in ordinary words].

Rural Practitioner: Mbah Karto (Purworejo): “*Ada kekuatan yang mengalir dari pusar naik ke ubun-ubun, seperti air hangat yang bergerak pelan. Kadang-kadang sampai lupa di mana berada, seolah-olah berada di tempat lain yang tidak bisa dilihat mata*” [There’s a force flowing from navel to crown, like warm water moving slowly. Sometimes I forget where I am, as if being in another place invisible to the eye].

Urban Participant: Dr. Maya (Semarang): “*Meskipun saya tidak memahami makna kata-katanya, ada sensasi fisik yang jelas—seperti gelombang energi yang menenangkan di seluruh tubuh. Ini bukan sugesti karena efeknya konsisten*

bahkan ketika saya skeptis” [Although I don’t understand the word meanings, there are clear physical sensations—like calming energy waves throughout the body. This isn’t suggestion because the effects are consistent even when I’m skeptical].

These experiential accounts suggest that the *kidung*’s efficacy cannot be reduced to semantic comprehension alone. Across divergent contexts—religious, rural, and urban—participants report embodied responses that operate independently of doctrinal knowledge or interpretive certainty. This challenges representational models of meaning that privilege linguistic transparency, indicating instead a poetics of resonance in which sonic and energetic dimensions play an operative role. Rather than conveying information, the *kidung* appears to enact transformation, producing altered states of perception that resist symbolic containment.

3.3.3. Critical Assessment: Beyond Construction and Essence

This phenomenological convergence poses serious challenges to dominant theoretical frameworks within religious studies. Social constructionist approaches that treat religious experience as culturally determined cannot adequately explain why practitioners with radically different interpretive frameworks report virtually identical somatic effects^[3,17]. Conversely, phenomenological approaches that treat religious experience as evidence of transcultural spiritual realities fail to account for how these experiences become socially meaningful only through culturally specific interpretive frameworks^[62–64].

Our findings indicate what we term “embodied universality within interpretive particularity”—consistent somatic processes that generate divergent meanings through community-specific hermeneutical frameworks. *Pesantren* practitioners interpret temporal distortion as evidence of divine blessing (*barakah*); rural practitioners understand it as proof of spiritual power (*kasekten*); urban participants explain it through therapeutic discourse emphasizing stress reduction and psychological well-being.

This suggests a more complex relationship between embodied experience and cultural interpretation than either constructionist or phenomenological approaches typically acknowledge. Rather than experience determining interpretation or interpretation constructing experience, our findings indicate ongoing negotiation between somatic processes and

cultural frameworks that resist reduction to either pole. This supports emerging work in religious studies that emphasizes the irreducibility of embodied spiritual knowledge while acknowledging its cultural mediation^[65,66].

3.3.4. Methodological Implications: The Limits of Academic Analysis

Our phenomenological findings expose limitations within academic approaches to religious experience that privilege cognitive over somatic dimensions of meaning. The consistency of embodied effects across interpretive difference suggests forms of spiritual knowledge that operate below the threshold of conceptual analysis—what Michael Polanyi (1966) terms “tacit knowledge” and what Maurice Merleau-Ponty identifies as “motor intentionality”^[27,67].

However, acknowledging such embodied knowledge raises methodological questions about academic authority to interpret religious phenomena. If spiritual meaning emerges through bodily practice rather than cognitive analysis, what legitimacy do academic interpretations possess that operate primarily through conceptual frameworks? This question proves particularly acute in postcolonial contexts where academic analysis risks reproducing colonial hierarchies that privilege Western rational discourse over indigenous forms of knowledge^[11].

Rather than correcting or translating indigenous epistemologies into analytic terms, scholars must consider modes of engagement that preserve the opacity and alterity of embodied religious knowledge. This involves shifting from extractive methods toward dialogical approaches that treat local practices as epistemic events in their own right—not as raw data for external interpretation. In this view, academic inquiry becomes less a site of mastery than of encounter, where the task is not to decode meaning but to witness presence.

3.4. The Political Economy of Spiritual Authority in Contemporary Indonesia

Our integrated analysis situates *Kidung Rumecko Ing Wengi* [Song of Protection for the Night] within broader transformations of religious authority in contemporary Indonesian Islam, contributing to scholarship on religion in postcolonial nation-states^[34]. The text functions as contested resource in ongoing struggles between orthodox Islamic institutions, indigenous Javanese traditions, and emergent forms of com-

modified spirituality that reflect Indonesia’s integration into global religious markets.

3.4.1. Orthodox Islamic Incorporation: Cultural Tokenism and Theological Hegemony

Pesantren communities deploy the *kidung* as evidence of successful Islamic integration of Javanese culture while systematically eliminating elements that challenge orthodox theology. This strategy exemplifies what we identify as “cultural tokenism”—the preservation of local religious forms contingent upon their subordination to external theological frameworks. Kyai Ahmad (Banyumas) explicitly articulates this approach: “*Kidung ini memang warisan leluhur, tetapi harus dipahami dalam kerangka Islam yang benar. Sunan Kalijaga sudah mengIslamkan tradisi Jawa, jadi tidak boleh dikembalikan ke bentuk aslinya yang syirik*” [This *kidung* is indeed ancestral heritage, but must be understood within the framework of correct Islam. Sunan Kalijaga already Islamized Javanese tradition, so it cannot be returned to its original polytheistic form].

This formulation accomplishes what Partha Chatterjee analyzes as “elite nationalism”—the appropriation of subaltern cultural forms for hegemonic projects while eliminating their potentially subversive content^[68]. The claim to “correct Islam” (*Islam yang benar*) functions as what Pierre Bourdieu terms “symbolic violence”—the imposition of dominant cultural categories as universal standards that delegitimize alternative meaning systems^[29].

Such symbolic violence operates not only discursively but affectively, by regulating which emotional responses to tradition are deemed valid. Devotional attachment to pre-Islamic elements, for example, is reframed as ignorance or heresy, disqualifying forms of reverence that fall outside sanctioned doctrine. This affective policing reinforces theological hegemony by reorienting affect toward compliance rather than critical memory. In this sense, tokenism is not merely selective inclusion—it is affective reprogramming, producing obedience through sentimental realignment.

3.4.2. Indigenous Resistance: Epistemic Autonomy and Decolonial Praxis

Rural Javanese communities maintain the *kidung* as evidence of spiritual knowledge that transcends Islamic doctrinal limitations. This represents what we term “epistemic

autonomy”—the assertion of indigenous knowledge systems that resist incorporation into hegemonic religious frameworks. Mbah Slamet (Purworejo) challenges Islamic interpretive authority directly: “*Wong pesantren pinter ngaji, tapi ora ngerti kekuatan sejati. Iki ilmu leluhur sing ora bisa dipelajari saka buku. Kudu ngrasakne dhewe*” [Pesantren people are clever at reciting, but don’t understand true power. This is ancestral knowledge that cannot be learned from books. One must experience it oneself].

This assertion constitutes what Miranda Fricker identifies as “testimonial resistance”—the refusal to accept epistemic authority claims that marginalize alternative knowledge systems. The emphasis on direct experience (*ngrasakne dhewe*) over textual authority (*ngaji*) represents what Walter Mignolo calls “epistemic disobedience”—the rejection of colonial knowledge hierarchies that privilege literacy over embodied wisdom^[28,69].

Such resistance operates through what James C. Scott terms “hidden transcripts”—forms of cultural practice that maintain autonomy while avoiding direct confrontation with hegemonic authority^[70]. The insistence on experiential validation enables rural practitioners to preserve cosmological commitments that predate Islamic hegemony while participating in contemporary Indonesian religious discourse.

3.4.3. Urban Commodification: Spiritual Neoliberalism and Therapeutic Appropriation

Urban communities transform the *kidung* into therapeutic commodity that can be consumed without doctrinal commitment, reflecting broader processes of religious commodification in neoliberal contexts^[71,72]. Facilitator Pak Budi (Semarang) markets the practice through therapeutic discourse: “*Yang penting bukan soal benar salah secara teologi, tapi bagaimana praktik ini bisa membantu orang merasa lebih tenang dan seimbang. Kami tidak memaksa interpretasi tertentu—masing-masing boleh memahami sesuai keyakinannya*” [What’s important is not theological correctness, but how this practice can help people feel calmer and more balanced. We don’t force particular interpretations—everyone can understand according to their own beliefs].

This approach exemplifies what Eva Illouz analyzes as “emotional capitalism”—the transformation of traditional spiritual practices into consumer products oriented toward individual therapeutic benefits rather than collective meaning

or cosmological commitment^[73]. The emphasis on personal choice (*masing-masing boleh memahami*) reflects what Zygmunt Bauman (2000) identifies as “liquid modernity”—the dissolution of traditional authority structures in favor of market-mediated individual consumption.

However, this commodification process encounters resistance from both orthodox Islamic authorities who reject market-mediated spirituality as incompatible with divine authority and indigenous practitioners who insist that authentic spiritual knowledge cannot be purchased or privatized. The *kidung* thus becomes what Arjun Appadurai calls a “contested commodity”—an object whose meaning and value remain disputed across different social contexts^[74,75].

3.5. Theoretical Implications: Toward Post-colonial Religious Studies

Our findings necessitate fundamental reconsideration of interpretive approaches to sacred texts within contemporary religious studies, contributing to emerging postcolonial critiques of the discipline while advancing theoretical understanding of religious authority in contemporary Islamic contexts^[3,33].

3.5.1. Methodological Innovations: Beyond Disciplinary Synthesis

Our triadic analytical approach demonstrates limitations in conventional religious studies methodologies while suggesting new directions for investigating complex religious phenomena. The innovation lies not in combining established approaches but in revealing their productive tensions—moments where textual instability (deconstruction), power relations (discourse analysis), and embodied experience (phenomenology) generate insights unavailable to single-method investigations. This supports recent arguments for “postdisciplinary” approaches that operate through methodological interference rather than synthetic integration. Our analysis demonstrates that religious meaning may emerge through the collision between incompatible analytical frameworks rather than their resolution into coherent interpretation.

This perspective challenges the normative impulse to unify knowledge production within neatly bounded disciplines. Instead, it treats methodological dissonance as epistemologically generative—a space where divergent tools

illuminate different facets of religious reality that cannot be reduced to a single register. By foregrounding tension rather than resolution, our approach invites scholars to inhabit ambiguity not as failure, but as a condition of ethical analysis. Such an approach carries implications beyond the study of Javanese religion, offering a model for engaging with plural epistemologies in other contested domains. Rather than seeking coherence as a mark of analytical rigor, post-disciplinary inquiry embraces fragmentation, contradiction, and excess as methodological resources. This orientation is particularly vital in contexts shaped by coloniality, where attempts at synthesis often function as erasures of epistemic difference. By holding conflicting frameworks in productive tension, scholars can foreground the power dynamics that underlie interpretation itself. In doing so, research becomes not merely descriptive, but interventive—unsettling inherited hierarchies of knowledge while opening space for forms of understanding that remain irreducibly plural.

3.5.2. Challenging Hermeneutical Assumptions

Our findings suggest that sacred texts may operate through irreducible semantic multiplicity rather than interpretive ambiguity. The *kidung* maintains operative efficacy precisely through its resistance to hermeneutical resolution, indicating that meaning in religious discourse may be fundamentally agonistic rather than consensual. This challenges influential approaches within religious studies that assume interpretive communities can achieve mutual understanding through dialogue^[14,76,77]. The concept of “agonistic hermeneutics” developed through this analysis offers an alternative to both objectivist approaches that seek definitive textual meaning and relativist approaches that celebrate interpretive multiplicity without examining power effects. Agonistic hermeneutics acknowledges that meaning in religious discourse emerges through conflict rather than consensus while maintaining critical analysis of how such conflicts serve particular power arrangements.

In this view, disagreement is not a failure of interpretation but a structural feature of sacred discourse itself. Rather than aiming for mutual intelligibility, agonistic hermeneutics foregrounds the asymmetries that shape whose interpretations are heard, legitimized, or silenced. It reveals how sacred texts become sites of struggle where competing cosmologies, authorities, and subjectivities collide. This is especially important in postcolonial settings, where interpretive

conflict often reflects deeper tensions over cultural survival and epistemic sovereignty. Recognizing these dynamics allows scholars to trace not just what texts mean, but how they are mobilized within contested fields of power.

3.5.3. Contributions to Islamic Studies

Our analysis challenges dominant narratives about Islamic expansion and local religious transformation that emphasize either orthodox triumph or syncretistic accommodation^[17,78,79]. The Javanese case suggests more complex dynamics where Islamic and indigenous knowledge systems maintain productive antagonisms that generate novel forms of spiritual authority rather than resolving into stable synthesis. This contributes to emerging scholarship on “vernacular Islam” that recognizes the diversity of Islamic expressions beyond Middle Eastern orthodoxies^[80]. The concept of “epistemic multiplicity” developed through this analysis may prove applicable to understanding how religious authority operates in other contexts where Islamic practice engages pre-existing spiritual traditions—Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and diaspora communities in pluralistic societies.

Such cases reveal that religious transformation is not a unidirectional process of assimilation or replacement, but often a sustained negotiation between divergent ontologies. Rather than converging on a shared theological framework, competing systems may persist side by side, each reshaping the other without collapsing into doctrinal unity. This reframing allows scholars to move beyond binaries like syncretism versus orthodoxy, offering a more dynamic model of religious change as a site of ongoing epistemic tension. Moreover, it challenges the assumption that Islamic universality entails epistemological uniformity, instead highlighting how Islam can be vernacularized without being diluted. The concept of epistemic multiplicity thus enables more nuanced cross-regional comparison while foregrounding the agency of local actors in shaping religious futures.

3.5.4. Future Research Directions

Our methodology opens possibilities for analyzing other sacred texts that function as sites of interpretive contestation within contemporary religious communities. The approach would prove particularly valuable for investigating religious phenomena that resist conventional academic categorization—hybrid spiritual movements, diaspora religious communities, indigenous religions engaging global

traditions, and new religious movements that combine elements from multiple traditions. The theoretical framework developed through this analysis—particularly the concepts of “epistemic multiplicity,” “agonistic hermeneutics,” and “productive impossibility”—may contribute to broader discussions within religious studies about how to analyze religious phenomena that exceed Western academic categories without reproducing colonial knowledge hierarchies. This work thus contributes to ongoing efforts to “decolonize” religious studies while maintaining critical analytical rigor.

At the same time, applying this framework requires a reflexive awareness of the scholar’s own positionality within the knowledge production process. Methodological tools are never neutral; they carry epistemological assumptions that may obscure or overwrite the categories through which communities understand their own traditions. A decolonial approach thus demands not only new objects of study, but also new modes of engagement that prioritize reciprocity, accountability, and epistemic humility. By foregrounding tension and resisting totalizing explanation, this methodology invites a more dialogical encounter with religious complexity. Ultimately, it challenges scholars to approach religious texts not as puzzles to be decoded, but as living sites of struggle, creativity, and unfinished meaning.

4. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that *Kidung Rumecko Ing Wengi* [Song of Protection for the Night] operates as a “heterotopic text”—a discursive space where competing epistemologies coexist without synthesis, challenging dominant paradigms in religious studies that seek unified textual meaning, reduce religious phenomena to social construction, or treat spiritual experience as culturally transcendent. Our analysis reveals that the *kidung* functions through what we term “epistemic multiplicity,” generating irreducible semantic contradictions that enable deployment across radically incompatible interpretive communities while maintaining operative efficacy precisely through logical incoherence. The text’s protective claims demonstrate “escalating impossibility”—assertions that exceed empirical verification yet remain collectively meaningful through productive tensions between textual instability, power relations, and embodied experience.

Rather than representing incomplete Islamization or cultural syncretism, the *kidung* exemplifies “agonistic hermeneutics” where spiritual authority emerges through conflict rather than consensus, revealing meaning in sacred discourse as fundamentally contested rather than consensual. This finding necessitates fundamental reconsideration of interpretive approaches that assume religious communities can achieve mutual understanding through dialogue.

Our investigation exposes how interpretive communities engage in “semantic warfare”—systematic appropriation of shared vocabulary to advance exclusive authority claims while eliminating alternative possibilities. Pesantren authorities accomplish “theological colonization” by subordinating Javanese cosmology to Islamic frameworks; rural practitioners maintain “semantic insurgency” preserving non-Islamic cosmological commitments; urban communities employ “therapeutic appropriation” reducing metaphysical claims to psychological benefits. Despite this interpretive violence, phenomenological analysis reveals remarkable consistency in embodied spiritual effects across communities (92% temporal distortion, 96% respiratory modification, 78% somatic energy sensations), indicating “embodied universality within interpretive particularity” that resists both social constructionist and essentialist explanations. These findings contribute to postcolonial Islamic studies by demonstrating how local spiritual languages function as contested sites where normative Islam negotiates with indigenous expressions, challenging conventional binaries between orthodox and popular Islam. The study advances “postdisciplinary” religious studies methodology that operates through productive tensions between analytical approaches rather than synthetic integration, offering new directions for investigating religious phenomena that resist conventional academic categorization while maintaining critical analytical rigor in postcolonial contexts.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, M.A.; methodology, M.A.; software, M.A. and O.Y.P.; validation, O.Y.P.; investigation, M.A.; data curation, O.Y.P.; writing—original draft preparation, O.Y.P.; writing—review & editing, M.A. and O.Y.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Data Availability Statement

All the data has been added in the main text.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

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