

Myth, Ritual, and the Construction of Sacredness: A Cultural Anthropology Study of Cepuri Parangkusumo, Bantul, Yogyakarta

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Abstrak

Cepuri Parangkusumo di pesisir selatan Bantul, Yogyakarta, merupakan situs sakral yang menyatukan narasi mitologis pertemuan Panembahan Senopati dengan Kanjeng Ratu Kidul, praktik ritual lintas zaman, serta otoritas politik Kasultanan Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat. Penelitian terdahulu tentang situs ini umumnya bersifat deskriptif-tematik menyoroti dimensi teologis, semiotik, atau pluralisme religius secara terpisah tanpa membangun model konseptual yang menjelaskan bagaimana kesakralan tempat tersebut diproduksi dan direproduksi secara berkelanjutan lintas rezim politik dan komunitas religius yang berbeda. Artikel ini mengisi kesenjangan tersebut dengan mensintesis fenomena sakral Mircea Eliade, teori praksis ritual Catherine Bell, konsep liminalitas Victor Turner, dan kapital simbolik Pierre Bourdieu ke dalam satu model triadik yang disebut Model Narasi-Praksis-Kuasa. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif-interpretif berbasis analisis dokumen dan literatur etnografis, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa kesakralan Cepuri Parangkusumo tidak melekat secara statis pada lanskap geografisnya, melainkan dihasilkan melalui tiga mekanisme yang saling menguatkan: narasi mitos sebagai hierofani yang memberi kerangka makna; ritualisasi berulang yang mengaktualisasikan makna tersebut secara embodied; dan relasi kuasa keraton serta ekonomi spiritual yang melembagakan dan mendistribusikan ulang makna itu ke ranah sosial-politik. Ketiga mekanisme tersebut membentuk siklus penguatan diri (self-reinforcing loop) yang menjelaskan daya tahan kesakralan situs ini di tengah pluralitas agama dan modernisasi pariwisata. Temuan ini memberi kontribusi teoretis berupa model yang dapat diterapkan pada situs-situs sakral sinkretik lain di Nusantara, serta kontribusi praktis bagi pengelolaan warisan budaya dan toleransi lintas-iman di kawasan pesisir selatan Jawa.

Kata kunci: Kesakralan, Ritual, Mitos, Kuasa Simbolik, Cepuri Parangkusumo, Antropologi Budaya Jawa

Abstract

Cepuri Parangkusumo, located on the southern coast of Bantul, Yogyakarta, is a sacred site that unites the mythological narrative of the encounter between Panembahan Senopati and Kanjeng Ratu Kidul, recurring ritual practices, and the political authority of the Yogyakarta Sultanate. Prior studies of this site have largely been descriptive-thematic, examining theological, semiotic, or religious-pluralism dimensions in isolation, without offering a conceptual model of how the site's sacredness is continuously produced and reproduced across shifting political regimes and religious communities. This article addresses that gap by synthesising Mircea Eliade's phenomenology of the sacred, Catherine Bell's theory of ritual practice, Victor Turner's concept of liminality, and Pierre Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital into a triadic model termed the

Narrative–Practice–Power Model. Using a qualitative-interpretive approach grounded in document and ethnographic-literature analysis, the study demonstrates that the sacredness of Cepuri Parangkusumo is not a static property of geography but is generated through three mutually reinforcing mechanisms: myth as hierophany, which supplies a framework of meaning; ritualisation, which embodies and reactivates that meaning; and the power relations of the court and the spiritual economy, which institutionalise and redistribute that meaning within the social-political domain. Together these mechanisms form a self-reinforcing loop that accounts for the site's enduring sacredness amid religious plurality and tourism-driven modernisation. The findings offer a theoretical contribution transferable to other syncretic sacred sites across the archipelago, as well as practical implications for heritage management and interfaith tolerance along Java's southern coast.

Keywords: *Sacredness, Ritual, Myth, Symbolic Power, Cepuri Parangkusumo, Javanese Cultural Anthropology*

Introduction

The southern coast of Java holds one of the most powerful cosmological complexes within the corpus of Indonesian local belief systems: the mythology of Kanjeng Ratu Kidul, or Nyi Roro Kidul, the supernatural ruler of the Southern Sea. Among the many points along this coastline, Cepuri Parangkusumo in the Kretek subdistrict of Bantul, Special Region of Yogyakarta, occupies a distinctive position, being believed to mark the locus of the spiritual encounter between Panembahan Senopati, founder of the Islamic Mataram Sultanate, and Kanjeng Ratu Kidul (Wessing, 1997; Ichsan & Hanafiah, 2020). Inside the Cepuri complex stand two stones known as Batu Cinta (the Stones of Love), believed to be the seats occupied by the two figures during that mystical meeting. This site is not merely a dormant mythological artefact preserved in collective memory; it is a living space continually visited by pilgrims, used as the starting point for the Yogyakarta Sultanate's official Labuhan ritual, and frequented by religious tourists from diverse faith backgrounds (Nuzulanisa & Fariha, 2022; Kristianto, Singgih, & Haryono, 2024).

The significance of Cepuri Parangkusumo lies in the convergence of three domains that are usually examined separately in studies of local religion: the mythological-cosmological domain, the domain of everyday ritual practice, and the domain of court politics. This convergence makes Cepuri Parangkusumo an ideal laboratory for examining how the sacredness of a place is not merely inherited passively across generations, but is continuously regenerated through the interplay of narrative, action, and power. This question forms the point of departure for the present article. Previous research on Cepuri and the Parangkusumo tradition has developed considerably, yet it tends to remain at the level of single-theme description. Ichsan and Hanafiah (2020) examined the mysticism and socio-cultural transcendence of Islam among the coastal community of Parangkusumo, foregrounding inner spiritual practice (*laku batin*) as a distinctively Javanese religious phenomenon. Nuzulanisa and Fariha (2022) studied the Labuhan Parangkusumo tradition through a living Qur'an approach, showing how the ritual procession becomes an arena of religious pluralism that communicates local Javanese wisdom alongside the moral message of the Qur'an. Kristianto, Singgih, and Haryono (2024) read the figure of Nyi Roro Kidul through the lens of Christian maritime contextual theology, positioning belief in the Spirit of the Sea as a bridge for interfaith dialogue

in the coastal region of Yogyakarta. In a different vein, Rosli, Othman, Abdullah, Sulaiman, and Hasan (2025) interrogated the figure of Nyai Roro Kidul from a hydro-political and gender perspective, positioning water and femininity as a cosmological infrastructure of power. Meanwhile, Widyatwati, Suganda, Dienaputra, and Mamun (2017) specifically highlighted the Labuhanlaut Parangkusumo ritual as a representation of the social, political, and cultural order binding the king and the people.

When these five strands of research are mapped together, the state of the art on Cepuri Parangkusumo can be seen to move along four axes: a theological-mystical axis (Ichsan & Hanafiah, 2020), a hermeneutic-pluralism axis (Nuzulanisa & Fariha, 2022), a cross-faith contextual-theology axis (Kristianto et al., 2024), and a hydro-political-gender axis (Rosli et al., 2025), with a classical power-relations axis (Widyatwati et al., 2017) serving as their historical-political backdrop. However, these five axes generally run in parallel and are rarely brought together within a single analytical framework that explains the very mechanism by which sacredness is produced. Each study tends to treat the sacredness of Cepuri Parangkusumo as a given social fact whose meaning is to be described, rather than as a social process whose origin and mechanism of persistence must be explained. Herein lies the research gap addressed by this study: no prior work has explicitly synthesised the phenomenology of the sacred, the theory of ritual practice, the concept of liminality, and the theory of symbolic capital into a unified conceptual model explaining how myth, ritual practice, and power structures mutually sustain one another in producing and reproducing the sacredness of Cepuri Parangkusumo over time.

This gap is not merely a matter of data accumulation but reflects a deeper theoretical limitation. Much classical theory of sacredness, particularly Eliade's (1987) phenomenology of hierophany, treats sacredness as a manifestation that "reveals itself" at a particular point in space and time, thereby framing sacredness as something given by the sacred itself. This approach is powerful in explaining subjective religious experience but weak in explaining why and how the sacredness of a place can be sustained, renegotiated, or even commodified amid changing social-political contexts. Conversely, Bell's (1992) theory of ritual practice and Bourdieu's (1990) notion of symbolic capital are strong in explaining the social-political dimension of meaning production, yet they are not specifically designed to account for the hierophanic phenomenon that lies at the core of local religious experience. This study argues that combining the two, reinforced by Turner's (1995) concepts of liminality and *communitas* and Berger and Luckmann's (1966) thesis on the social construction of reality, is necessary to fully understand Cepuri Parangkusumo as a dynamic system for the production of sacredness.

Based on this gap, the novelty of the present study is formulated explicitly as follows: this study proposes the Narrative-Practice-Power Model as a new conceptual framework for explaining the construction of sacredness at syncretic sites along the Javanese coast. The model asserts that the sacredness of Cepuri Parangkusumo is produced through three mechanisms that operate simultaneously and mutually reinforce one another: (1) myth as hierophany, which supplies a cosmological framework of meaning; (2) ritualisation as a recurring practice that embodies and performatively reactivates that meaning; and (3) the power relations of the court together with the spiritual economy, which institutionalise and redistribute that meaning within the broader social-political domain, thereby reinforcing the authority of the myth in the following cycle. This novelty differs fundamentally from previous studies that treat these three dimensions separately; this study instead positions all three as a single cyclical system that mutually explains one another. Building on this framework, the present study aims to: (1) analyse the myth of the encounter between Panembahan Senopati and Kanjeng Ratu Kidul as a hierophany underlying the sacredness of Cepuri Parangkusumo; (2) uncover the mechanisms of

ritualisation that actualise this sacredness in both everyday religious practice and state ceremony; (3) explain the power relations, symbolic capital, and religious plurality that institutionalise the sacredness of this site; and (4) synthesise these three findings into the Narrative–Practice–Power Model as a theoretical contribution to the study of ritual and sacred space in Indonesia. Practically, this study is expected to provide a conceptual foundation for the management of cultural heritage, religious tourism, and the strengthening of interfaith tolerance in the southern coastal region of Yogyakarta.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative-interpretive approach within the paradigm of cultural anthropology, treating meaning as an intersubjective construction that must be interpreted rather than an objective fact that need only be recorded (Geertz, 1973). Given that the focus of this study is the reconstruction of the conceptual mechanism underlying the sacredness of the site—rather than the mapping of variation in individual pilgrims' experiences—the study is designed as a document-based qualitative inquiry that synthesises secondary data drawn from prior ethnographic research, indexed scholarly articles, official documentation of the Yogyakarta Sultanate's Labuhan procession, and classical ethnographic accounts of Javanese religiosity (Geertz, 1976). This approach is consistent with the tradition of qualitative library-based research commonly employed in studies of local religion and culture in Indonesia when the research objective is the development of a conceptual model grounded in the synthesis of data already available within the public and academic domain.

The research corpus consists of three categories of material. First, indexed academic literature directly addressing Cepuri and the Parangkusumo tradition, including studies of coastal mysticism (Ichsan & Hanafiah, 2020), pluralism within the Labuhan ritual (Nuzulanisa & Fariha, 2022), maritime contextual theology (Kristianto et al., 2024), hydropolitics and gender (Rosli et al., 2025), and king-people power relations (Widyatwati et al., 2017). Second, classical ethnographic literature on Javanese religiosity and the figure of Ratu Kidul that serves as the cultural-historical foundation, particularly the works of Geertz (1976) and Wessing (1997). Third, cross-disciplinary theoretical literature on sacredness, ritual, liminality, and symbolic capital, namely the works of Eliade (1987), Bell (1992), Turner (1995), van Gennep (1960), Bourdieu (1990), and Berger and Luckmann (1966), which serve as the analytical lenses of the study. Data analysis proceeded through four stages. The first stage was thematic reduction, identifying units of meaning within the corpus relevant to three analytical domains: mythic narrative, ritual practice, and power relations. The second stage was cross-domain categorisation, grouping findings into these three domains while noting points of intersection between them. The third stage was interpretive synthesis using thick description (Geertz, 1973), which emphasises contextual and reflective explanation of cultural meaning, combined with theoretical triangulation—reading the same findings through more than one theoretical lens (Eliade, Bell, Turner, Bourdieu) to avoid single-theory reductionism. The fourth stage was model construction, assembling the synthesis of the three domains into a single cyclical conceptual framework termed the Narrative–Practice–Power Model. The validity of the interpretation was maintained through source triangulation, comparing findings across different types of documents (scholarly articles, court documentation, classical ethnography) to ensure thematic consistency before a proposition was accepted as part of the model. This study acknowledges its methodological limitations: because it relies on document and literature analysis, it does not generate new participant-observation data or fresh in-depth interviews in the field, and therefore does not directly capture the nuances of individual pilgrims' subjective

experience. This limitation is deliberately accepted as a trade-off, since the primary aim of the research is the development of a cross-case, cross-theory conceptual model, which in turn requires a broad and academically verified data base rather than the depth of a single informant's experience. Further research based on long-term field ethnography is recommended to test and enrich the model proposed here.

Results and Discussion

Myth as Hierophany: The Encounter of Panembahan Senopati and Kanjeng Ratu Kidul

The narrative core that shapes the sacredness of Cepuri Parangkusumo is the story of the mystical encounter between Panembahan Senopati, founder of the Islamic Mataram dynasty, and Kanjeng Ratu Kidul, the spiritual ruler of the Southern Sea. In the widely circulated version of this story, the encounter occurred after Senopati undertook meditation and ascetic practice on the shore, an act that triggered “goro-goro”, or cosmic disturbance, in the unseen kingdom of the Southern Sea, prompting Ratu Kidul to come to him and seal a spiritual pact that subsequently became the foundation for the legitimacy of successive Mataram rulers (Wessing, 1997). Two stones within the Cepuri complex, known as Batu Cinta, physically mark the location of this encounter and remain the focal point of ritual activity to this day (Nuzulanisa & Fariha, 2022).

Read through Eliade's (1987) phenomenology of the sacred, this event can be understood as a hierophany a manifestation of the sacred within profane space that simultaneously creates a “centre” qualitatively distinct from the surrounding space. In this framework, Batu Cinta functions as a miniature axis mundi, a connecting point between the human world and the unseen realm of the Southern Sea that provides cosmological orientation for the Javanese coastal community. However, a purely Eliadean reading risks treating sacredness as something purely given and ahistorical. A critical reading is therefore necessary: the hierophany of Cepuri Parangkusumo did not emerge in a social vacuum, but is closely interwoven with the political legitimation needs of the newly established Mataram dynasty in the sixteenth century. As demonstrated by Widyatwati, Suganda, Dienaputra, and Mamun (2017), the narrative of the Senopati–Ratu Kidul encounter structurally functions to bind the relationship between king and subjects by representing a social, political, and cultural order, and may therefore legitimately be read as an instrument of political legitimation cloaked in cosmological idiom.

The causal relationship that can be drawn from this analysis is as follows: the need for political legitimation by a new dynasty (the structural cause) drove the production and preservation of a hierophanic narrative concerning an encounter with the supernatural power of the sea ruler (the narrative effect), which in turn rendered the site of that encounter Cepuri Parangkusumo a permanent sacred space, sustained by the court institution to this day. The theoretical implication is significant: the sacredness of a place, in this case, cannot be adequately explained solely through the phenomenological category of “the sacred revealing itself”, but must instead be read as the outcome of an intersection between religious experience and political interest that mutually sustain one another. Myth, accordingly, serves a dual function: as a cosmological framework of meaning for the community, and as an instrument of symbolic capital for the ruler (Bourdieu, 1990) a relationship elaborated further in section 3.3.

Ritualisation as Recurring Practice: Pilgrimage, Kliwon Nights, and the Court Labuhan

While myth supplies a framework of meaning, the sacredness of Cepuri Parangkusumo would not endure without ritual practice that continuously actualises it. Ethnographic data indicate at least three layers of ritual practice occurring at this site: individual pilgrimage on

specific nights, particularly Selasa Kliwon (Tuesday Kliwon) and Jumat Kliwon (Friday Kliwon), undertaken in search of clarity and guidance from the spiritual ancestors Senopati and Ratu Kidul; the sale and offering of flowers, water, and incense around the Cepuri complex as part of the ritual's transactional mechanism; and the periodic Labuhan procession conducted by the Yogyakarta Sultanate as an official offering to Ratu Kidul (Kristianto et al., 2024; Nuzulanisa & Fariha, 2022).

Catherine Bell (1992) offers an important corrective to views that treat ritual merely as a passive expression of pre-existing belief. For Bell, ritualisation is a strategic practice that actively produces the distinction between the sacred and the profane through the repetition of bodily gesture and patterned procedure. Within this framework, every pilgrimage to Cepuri Parangkusumo does not simply “reflect” belief in the Senopati–Ratu Kidul myth, but performatively regenerates the sacredness of the site for the pilgrim concerned, as well as for the community that witnesses it. In this sense, the sacredness of Cepuri is not a static reserve of meaning waiting to be accessed, but an ongoing accomplishment that must continually be renewed through repeated action.

Turner's (1995) concept of liminality enriches this reading further. When pilgrims of various religious backgrounds—Islam, Protestant and Catholic Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism—gather at the same Cepuri complex to perform their respective rituals (Kristianto et al., 2024), they enter a liminal space and time that temporarily suspends the formal religious-identity categories that ordinarily separate them in everyday social life. This phenomenon approaches what Turner termed *communitas*, the emotional bond and sense of equality arising from a shared experience outside ordinary social structure (Haggar, 2024). It must be noted critically, however, that the *communitas* occurring at Cepuri Parangkusumo is partial and situational: it does not erase theological differences among participants, but instead creates a space of coexistence in which different systems of meaning—Javanese Islam, Christian contextual theology, and local belief alike—can operate side by side without being merged into a single syncretism. This distinction matters because earlier literature on Javanese syncretism (Geertz, 1976) tended to treat the *abangan*, *santri*, and *priyayi* as variants within one unified Javanese religious system, whereas contemporary data on Cepuri instead show cross-faith coexistence in which each formal tradition retains its own identity.

The most institutional layer of ritual, the court's Labuhan, reveals a different dimension of ritualisation: not merely a repeated individual act, but a state ceremony performed by official court personnel as a representation of the ongoing relationship between the ruler and the power of the Southern Sea. Unlike individual pilgrimage, which is voluntary and personal, the Labuhan is customarily obligatory and scheduled, underscoring that this ritual functions beyond individual spiritual need toward the maintenance of the kingdom's overall cosmological-political order (Widyatwati et al., 2017). The causal relationship that can be drawn here is as follows: the repetition of ritual—at both individual and institutional scales—progressively reinforces the authority of the Senopati–Ratu Kidul myth (since every ritual presupposes and confirms the truth of that narrative), which in turn provides justification for the ritual's continued performance. This constitutes the second mechanism in the triadic model proposed by this study: ritualisation as a practice that actualises, rather than merely reflects, the sacredness of place.

Power Relations and Symbolic Capital: The Court, the Spiritual Economy, and Religious Plurality

The third mechanism sustaining the sacredness of Cepuri Parangkusumo is the power relations that institutionalise myth and ritual practice within a wider social-political structure. Bourdieu's (1990) concept of symbolic capital explains how a non-material resource—in this case, the claim to a privileged relationship with Ratu Kidul—can be converted into widely recognised political authority. The Yogyakarta Sultanate, through its consistent performance of the court Labuhan, effectively converts this mythological-ritual capital into political legitimacy that reinforces its position as guardian of the Javanese cosmological order, a pattern consistent with the broader Mataram tradition of statecraft (Widyatwati et al., 2017).

Power relations at Cepuri Parangkusumo do not stop at the court-community level alone, but extend into the micro spiritual economy surrounding the complex. Vendors of offering flowers, water, and incense, as well as the role of the site caretaker (*juru kunci*) as guardian and interpreter of correct ritual procedure, form an informal economic network that depends on the continued sacredness of this place (Kristianto et al., 2024). The logic of symbolic capital applies at this level as well: the legitimacy of the caretaker's authority as “holder of knowledge” concerning the correct ritual procedure grants him a particular social and economic standing within the coastal community, which in turn depends on the continued public belief in the site's sacredness. The spiritual economy is thus not merely an epiphenomenon of religious belief, but one of the mechanisms that helps sustain the sacredness itself, since the actors involved have a direct stake in continuously reproducing the narrative and ritual practice.

A gender dimension adds further complexity to these power relations. Rosli, Othman, Abdullah, Sulaiman, and Hasan (2025) show that the figure of Ratu Kidul, as a feminine entity ruling over the element of water, offers a model of sovereignty distinct from the masculinity of royal power: a sovereignty grounded in circulation, nurture, and reciprocity rather than unilateral domination. A critical reading must note, however, that although this narrative symbolically places femininity in a position of power, in practice it remains mediated and managed by a court institution that is historically patriarchal in character. The relationship between Senopati and Ratu Kidul, in this reading, can be seen as a “spiritual marriage without offspring” (Kristianto et al., 2024) that structurally allows the king's masculine authority to claim the support of a supernatural feminine power without having to share real political power with it. Thus, the feminine symbolic capital of Ratu Kidul is converted into the masculine political capital of the court—a conceptual relationship that illustrates how gender, myth, and power are interwoven in the production of this site's sacredness.

The religious plurality occurring at Cepuri Parangkusumo must likewise be read within the framework of power relations, rather than treated merely as evidence of spontaneous tolerance. Nuzulanisa and Fariha (2022) note that the Labuhan procession involves open cross-faith participation, while Kristianto, Singgih, and Haryono (2024) show that the Spirit of the Sea at Cepuri is understood inclusively across Islamic, Protestant, Catholic, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions. This openness is made possible precisely because the court's authority over the site is customary-cultural in nature rather than the exclusive religious authority of any single formal tradition; in other words, the court's symbolic capital is in fact more effective when it can be claimed inclusively by various religious groups as a representation of Javanese cultural identity that transcends religious boundaries. This pattern differs significantly from other sacred sites in Asia managed by modern states for commercial tourism purposes, such as the Famen Temple in China, where analyses of contested sacred space reveal a more top-down negotiation between

state authority and local religious communities aimed at the commodification of cultural heritage. Cepuri Parangkusumo, by contrast, retains a more organic and bottom-up character of plurality, even as it remains under the shadow of a customary court authority that is historically hierarchical.

The Narrative–Practice–Power Model: A Conceptual Synthesis of the Construction of Sacredness

The findings of the preceding three subsections show that the sacredness of Cepuri Parangkusumo cannot be adequately explained by any single mechanism. The myth of the Senopati–Ratu Kidul encounter supplies a cosmological framework of meaning (hierophany, in Eliade's terms), yet this framework of meaning would not endure without being continuously actualised through ritual practice (ritualisation, in Bell's terms, enriched by Turner's concept of liminality), and ritual practice in turn would not become stably institutionalised without being converted into symbolic capital that sustains the court's political authority and the surrounding spiritual economy (symbolic capital, in Bourdieu's terms). These three mechanisms, accordingly, do not merely run in parallel but form a mutually reinforcing cycle: narrative legitimises practice, practice actualises narrative while generating symbolic capital, and symbolic capital institutionalises and finances the continuity of narrative and practice in the next cycle. This study terms this closed cycle the Narrative–Practice–Power Model.

The theoretical implications of this model are twofold. First, the model shifts the understanding of sacredness from an essentialist-static category (something a place “possesses” because a supernatural event once occurred there) to a processual-dynamic category (something that must continually be “done” through the interweaving of narrative, practice, and power). This shift is consistent with, while specifically extending, Berger and Luckmann's (1966) thesis on the social construction of reality, which asserts that social reality—including religious reality—is the outcome of an ongoing dialectic of externalisation, objectivation, and internalisation. Second, the model explains why the sacredness of Cepuri Parangkusumo has been able to endure across the transition from the classical Mataram era to the modern Indonesian state, as well as across an increasingly diverse formal religious plurality: because each of its three sustaining mechanisms—narrative, practice, power—possesses its own capacity to adapt to changing context, such that the system as a whole remains stable even as its individual components continue to transform.

Compared with similar studies outside the Javanese context, such as research on the configuration of sacred space in traditional Persian houses, which identifies ritual as the dominant factor shaping space (Fazeli & Negarestan, 2023), or cross-tradition studies of religious space in South Asia that highlight the distinction between private and public ritual in the formation of sacred space (Gellner, 2023), the Narrative–Practice–Power Model offers a distinctive position by explicitly incorporating the dimension of traditional-state power (the court) as a mechanism of institutionalisation, rather than merely as historical background. This conceptual contribution is relevant to the broader study of sacred space in Indonesia, given that many sacred sites across the archipelago—from Gunung Kawi to various pilgrimage sites along the southern coast of Java—exhibit a similar pattern, namely a founding-dynasty myth interwoven with community ritual and local customary authority.

Practically, this model carries important implications for the management of cultural heritage and religious tourism in the Parangkusumo area. If the sacredness of a place depends on the balance among three mutually sustaining mechanisms, then any policy intervention that touches only one mechanism—for instance, massive tourism commercialisation without regard

for the continuity of authentic ritual practice, or conversely, the restriction of ritual access in the name of tourism order—risks disrupting the equilibrium of the entire Narrative–Practice–Power cycle, ultimately weakening the site's spiritual and cultural appeal for future generations. Sustainable management should ideally attend to all three mechanisms simultaneously: preserving the myth as a respected narrative heritage, allowing space for authentic cross-faith ritual practice to continue, and ensuring that the power relations among the court, local government, and local community remain oriented toward cultural sustainability rather than short-term economic interest alone.

Conclusion

This study has shown that the sacredness of Cepuri Parangkusumo cannot be adequately understood as a static attribute inherent in its geographical landscape alone, but rather as the outcome of a dynamic and continuously sustained system of social production. Through a synthesis of Eliade's phenomenology of the sacred, Bell's theory of ritual practice, Turner's concept of liminality, and Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital, this study proposes the Narrative–Practice–Power Model as a new conceptual framework: the myth of the encounter between Panembahan Senopati and Kanjeng Ratu Kidul supplies a cosmological framework of meaning; ritual practice—from individual pilgrimage on Kliwon nights to the court Labuhan—actualises that meaning repeatedly and performatively; and the power relations of the court together with the surrounding spiritual economy institutionalise and redistribute that meaning within the wider social-political domain, thereby reinforcing the authority of the narrative in the next cycle. Together, these three mechanisms form a self-reinforcing loop that explains the resilience of this site's sacredness amid changing political regimes and ever-increasing religious plurality.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in shifting the understanding of sacredness from an essentialist category toward a processual category that can be empirically examined through three clearly defined analytical domains, while also extending the global discourse on sacred space by adding the dimension of traditional-state power distinctive to the Indonesian archipelagic context. Its practical contribution lies in offering an evaluative framework for heritage managers and religious-tourism authorities in the Parangkusumo area, so that site-management policy attends to the balance between the preservation of narrative, the continuity of authentic ritual practice, and equitable power relations among stakeholders, including the continued sustainability of the cross-faith space of coexistence that has long been one of the site's distinctive features.

This study has limitations, as it relies on the analysis of secondary documents and literature, and therefore does not directly capture the nuances of individual pilgrims' subjective experience or the micro-level dynamics of interaction in the field during specific ritual moments. Further research grounded in long-term participatory ethnography at Cepuri Parangkusumo, as well as comparative studies with other syncretic sacred sites across the archipelago, such as the Gunung Kawi pilgrimage complex or other sites along Java's southern coast, is recommended to test the generalisability of, and further enrich, the Narrative–Practice–Power Model proposed in this article.

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