Adat as a Means of Unification and its Contestation. The Case of North Halmahera

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Becoming Aristocrats:
*Keraton* in the Politics of *Adat*

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**Introduction**

An incident in West Jakarta District involving a group of thugs unravels the fraught relationship between the royal families of Javanese *keratons* and the public,\(^1\) exposing contentious issues over cultural property, political connection and symbolic status. The incident discloses an overlooked connection between the aristocracy and economy and sheds light on the challenges the aristocrats confront to rethink how noble culture and *adat* encounter the encroachment of capital and the state into the palace realm. In other words, the incident with the thugs depicts the predicament that the *keraton* and its noblemen must negotiate in order to sustain and assert the cultural sovereignty of the palace despite the continuous pressures from the state and capital to curtail the political role of the *keraton*.

Indonesians often talk about thugs and thuggery, or *premanisme*.\(^2\) Thugs are extrajudicial actors, some recruited by the police to help monitor the criminal world, and others employed by politicians and businessmen as bodyguards to protect them from political rivals or business competitors. The security apparatus compensates the

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1. In this essay, I use *keraton* (palace) as a generic category to refer to *kasultanan* (sultanate) and *kenajaan* (kingdom).
2. *Preman* comes from *vrijman* (Dutch), literally meaning “free men”. *Preman* refers to people involved in petty crimes or organised crime, including robbery, extortion, mugging, or debt-collecting.
“preman” by allowing them to exert control over a specific territory and extort “protection money” from local businesses, creating reciprocal relationships between the thugs and the state apparatus and between the thugs and the local business owners. Therefore, no-one is surprised if the police rarely crack down on the protection businesses run by the thugs.

However, an incident in early 2013 unsettled the comfortable alliance of thugs and state apparatus. The West Jakarta District Police arrested forty thugs from a construction site in West Jakarta. Hired by the contractor to watch the construction site, the thugs tried to force the company to raise their service fee, a request that the company quickly turned down. The company complained that they had paid more than 5 million rupiah (USD 550) to the thugs. The company reported the extortion to the police who reacted swiftly to arrest the thugs after a small scuffle over police presence at the construction site. The event would have passed unnoticed had the media not disclosed that Hercules was among the forty thugs arrested by the police.

Hercules Rozario Marshal, nicknamed Hercules (about 50 years old), is one of the most feared criminal “godfathers” in Jakarta. Before coming to West Jakarta, he controlled Tanah Abang, a dangerous district in Central Jakarta densely populated by drug-dealers, drug-users, gamblers, and prostitutes. From Tanah Abang, Hercules had run many businesses to provide “security” guards, debt-collectors and even hit-men for anyone who wanted to eliminate their enemies. In 1997, Muhammad Yusuf Muhi, a competitor in the crime business, managed to push him out of Tanah Abang. Hercules had moved and, since then, he has controlled West Jakarta District.

The Hercules affair attracted public attention not only because it was the first time the police had put him behind bars, but also because people immediately learned that Hercules held an honorary noble title (gelar bangsawan) from Kasunanan palace of Surakarta. Hercules received the honorary title in 2012, conferred by KGPH Tedjowulan in his claimed capacity as Sunan Pakubuwono XIII. As an honorary noble title holder, Hercules was assigned the honorary name, KR Yudhopranoto. While the arrest confirms Hercules’ involvement in many illicit businesses, at the same time, it has exposed his connections to the military and Javanese aristocrats.

KGPH Tedjowulan, a colonel in the Armed Forces, knew Hercules, a native of East Timor, when the prince was on military assignment in East Timor in the 1970s. During the military operation in East Timor, the military entrusted Hercules with guarding ammunition storage. Hercules was wounded in the war against the Fretilin guerrillas and was brought to Jakarta to undergo amputation of his right hand. Since

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3 KGPH stands for Kanjeng Gusti Pangeran Haryo, the highest title of Kasunanan noblemen after the king. The title KGPH is reserved only for direct male descendants of the king. When Hercules received his title, the Surakarta’s Kasunanan palace was divided into KGPH Tedjowulan and KGPH Hangabehi factions, both claiming to be the legitimate Sunan Pakubuwono XIII. KGPH Hangabehi occupied the palace in Surakarta, while KGPH Tedjowulan was ousted and had to “rule” from outside the palace.

4 KR stands for Kanjeng Raden, this is the lowest rank of male honorary titles from Surakarta’s Kasunanan palace.
then, he has lived in Jakarta, and soon turned into an important figure in the criminal world of Jakarta.

Hercules’ controversial honorary noble title is the story of an ambiguous and contentious encounter between the Javanese palaces and the outside public. It is also about the desire of the monarchs to hold on to their role as the custodians of culture, tradition and adat in the modern era. Awarding and receiving an honorary noble title is, therefore, a practical event, identical to what Sherry Ortner (1999) calls a “serious game”. Ortner says that people do not just enact either material necessity or cultural scripts but live life with (often intense) purpose and intention; [...] social and cultural contexts [...] frame not only the resources [people] start with but the intentions and purposes they bring to the games of life; that social life is precisely social, a matter of relationship – of cooperation and competition, of solidarity and exploitation, of allying and betraying.

(Ortner 1999:23)

As a “serious game”, the event of giving and receiving an honorary noble title draws attention to a transactional encounter that shapes the relationship between the palace, the economy, and the definition of and access to cultural property in the politics of adat. At the same time, it also relates the narrative of the desire and intention of the aristocrats when they want to reclaim and fulfil their declining status as the custodians of culture and adat.

The “serious game” of an honorary noble title award endows the efforts pursued by the royal families with symbolic value to maintain and reinstate the cultural and political sovereignty of the keraton, at a time when the keraton is threatened by state politics and capital encroaching into the realm of the monarchy. There are three settings that frame the “game”. Firstly, it demonstrates how the royal families of the Javanese palaces reach out to people not genealogically related to the royal families. Secondly, it differentiates noble titles into the titles that remain owned exclusively by the royal family and the titles that can be accessed by the public, albeit in a limited manner. The encroachment leads to a parcelling out of the adat into symbolic and material elements, and into elements that can be distributed to the public and those that should remain exclusively retained by the monarch as their traditional custodian. Thirdly, it indicates an ambiguous desire and intention of the aristocrats in responding to the encroachment of state politics and capital into the most private realm of the adat norm of the palace.
The Palace and the Encounters

The relationships between the *keraton* and the state and between the *keraton* and the public have often been contentious ones. Before the Dutch instituted the colonial government in the Netherlands East Indies in the late-18th century, the *rajas* and the *sultans* were able to maintain independent sovereignties and often waged war against each other to secure important sea or land trade routes. The *Verenigde Oost Indische Compagnie* (VOC; Dutch East India Company), which arrived in the 17th century, was soon involved in fierce competition against the *rajas* and the *sultans* over access to cloves, nutmeg and spices. The decline of the VOC in the 18th century and its transformation into the Dutch colonial government brought the Netherlands East Indies under the direct control of the Dutch government. The Dutch soon created new bureaucratic institutions to manage and secure colonial interests in the colony, and the new institutions required numerous people to fulfil clerical work (Sutherland 1979).

The institutionalization of the colonial bureaucracy caught the aristocrats in an ambiguous position. On the one hand, they were reluctant to join the colonial bureaucracy, since it would mean that they conceded to colonial power and colonial authority. At the same time, the aristocrats must find ways to sustain their symbolic status and cultural sovereignty when the colonial government challenged the *keraton*'s formerly independent control over cultural and economic resources. This ambiguous situation continued until the late-1940s when the Dutch colonial government gradually lost their political control over the Netherlands East Indies.

After Indonesia declared its independence in 1945, the sovereign status of the *rajas* and the *sultans* remained a contentious issue in the postcolonial political structure. In the early-20th century, the Dutch colonial government created a self-governance domain (*zelfbesturend gebiet* or *swapraja*) to force the *rajas* and the *sultans* into a quasi-contract transaction with the Dutch. However, after independence, the nationalist and the socialist factions in the republican government opposed the *swapraja* domain, arguing that maintaining the *swapraja* would mean acknowledging the independent jurisdiction and regulation of the *keratons* over territories under their direct control. At the same time, the volatile political situation sent a clear signal that the republican government should avoid interfering with the *swapraja* domain since it would confront the sovereignty of the *rajas* and the *sultans*. The existence of the *swapraja* domain had, therefore, undermined the political authority of the republican government and become a target of attack from officials who condemned the colonial inherited system of having violated republican consensus.

International political pressure and the struggle for independence in the 1940s hardly prevented the Dutch from launching a massive military campaign to regain its control over the Netherlands East Indies and disrupted the process of consolidating political power in the new state. Lack of a mutually recognised transfer of authority created an uncertain period that lasted from 1945 until 1949. Amid the confusion, the Dutch created the Federation of Kings (*Dewan Raja-raja*) in September 1946 to assure that the *rajas* and the *sultans* hold on to the contracts they had signed with the colonial government, and, in so doing, they acknowledged Dutch control. The Federation of
Kings, however, only lasted a few years; Law No. 44 enacted in 1950 by the republican government abolished the Federation of Kings (Ardhana 2005:52-54).

The political and economic contracts between the monarchs and the Dutch colonial government that culminated in the abolishment of the Federation of Kings had accentuated the ambiguous stance of the noblemen toward the revolutionary cause, especially with regard to the economic and political interests of the rajas and the sultans. The leftist faction of the republicans particularly denounced the support that the keratons received from the Dutch to nurture their elite cultures. Dutch patronage produced an elite circle disconnected from the people who fought for independence in the revolutionary war. The leftists pointed out that the aristocrats had enjoyed a special social status that opposed the principle of social equality that the postcolonial Indonesian state hoped to fulfil.

The postcolonial government failed to resolve the ambiguous status of the monarchies. The nationalist and socialist factions in the government together with the political parties (PKI, PNI, PSIi, Murba, Sobsi, Perbesi, Partai Buruh, Pemuda Muslimin Indonesia, Pemuda Banteng, Mahasiswa Demokrat, and Sarbupri) insisted that the monarchy system should be abolished. These groups formed a coalition called the Anti-Swapraja movement (De Locomotief 1954). They argued that the monarchy system propagated a stratified status system that classified people according to their hereditary rank, and it was contrary to the democratic system that they would like to institute. The republicans’ argument regarding the incompatibility of the monarchy with the democratic ideal of equal opportunity reflected a distrust the republicans had (and still have) about the loyalty of the rajas and the sultans to the newly independent state.

The heightened tension, starting in 1945, between the republican government and the monarchies had affected the royal families in different ways. The period of 1945-1950 was crucial to understanding the role of the palace and the royal families in modern Indonesia. The Javanese palaces in Surakarta (Kasunanan and Mangkunegaran) and Yogyakarta (Kasultanan and Pakualaman) reacted differently to Sukarno’s proclamation of independence and to the Dutch attempt to restore their colonial power. In Surakarta, the Kasunanan and the Mangkunegaran keratons struggled hard to restore their symbolic status and political influence, but were immediately confronted by socialists and republicans who disliked the idea of recuperating the autonomous status of the keratons. Besides, the relationship between the anti-colonial, revolutionary fighters and the Surakarta noblemen during the late colonial period had always been contentious. During the revolutionary war, the revolutionary laskars (freedom fighters) received little support from Surakarta’s Kasunanan aristocrats, who were uncertain whether the Dutch would be able to restore their control over the former Netherlands East Indies territory. On the contrary, the Kasultanan and the Pakualaman keratons in Yogyakarta responded diligently to the proclamation by affirming their loyalty to the new republican government and declaring that the Kasultanan and the Pakualaman territories belonged to the Indonesian state. Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX of the Yogyakarta Sultanate along with KGPAA Pakualam VIII of Pakualaman palace drafted a historic statement declaring their loyalty to the republican government (de Rosari 2011:64-65). Prince GBPH Prabukusumo, the son
of Hamengkubowono IX, describes the Sultan’s decision as a very emotional gesture since it means that the Sultan “has surrendered his dignity and his pride as a king and became a subject of the nation-state”. On September 5, 1945, Sultan Hamengkubowono and KGPAA Pakualam VIII enunciated a decree instructing Yogyakarta people to obey the republican government and the Indonesian state. Sukarno responded in favour of the statement, and the state announced Law No. 3 in 1950 to grant a legal recognition of Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (Yogyakarta Special Autonomy Status). This special status later provoked an emotional controversy when the post-1998 regime wanted to abolish it under the pretext that the automatic appointment of the Sultan as a governor and the Pakualam as a vice-governor runs against the democratic electoral system. The debate over the special status is also a “serious game” because it shapes the normative construction of the legal existence of the keratons and, at the same time, affects the dignity of the aristocrats.

The anti-swapraja movement in the late-1940s and early-1950s proved to be a decisive moment that shaped the encounter between keraton, royal families and the state with consequences up to the present. Small palaces faced far-reaching consequences of the encounter. There were palaces that had to immediately relinquish their territorial control to the local governments and, in so doing, also lost political privilege. These small palaces have lost their lands and buildings, appropriated legally by the state or illegally by squatters. In Buton Sultanate (South-eastern Sulawesi Province), for example, what remains after the 1950s is no more than a few dilapidated buildings and a small plot of land once part of a larger palace compound. The anti-swapraja movement and its political and administrative consequences drove the aristocrats to rethink and re-evaluate their political role and symbolic position as the custodians of adat.

When the New Order military regime (1967-1998) managed to seize power in 1967 and secure its political consolidation of the postcolonial Indonesian state in the early-1970s, rajas and sultans were soon confronted with a difficult option: They had to negotiate with the new military regime over an appropriate way to keep the keraton existing. Otherwise, they could have no other choice than terminating court rituals and activities, discharging palace employees and closing down palace offices. However, there was a limited number of keratons that had the power and resources to negotiate with the military regime. Large keratons in Java (Surakarta, Yogyakarta, Cirebon) and Bali are examples of such keratons, while Buton Sultanate represents the palaces that failed to consolidate resources required to continue their symbolic functions and cultural sovereignties. However, regardless of whether they were large or small keratons, they had, firstly, to accept the political sovereignty of the new military regime and its ideology of a negara kesatuan (united state).

The historical fact that the keratons were able to exercise sovereignty despite the Dutch surveillance alerted the postcolonial regimes about the alleged capacity of the monarchies to undermine the negara kesatuan. The anti-swapraja movement in the 1940s until the 1960s was an effort by the Sukarno administration to pacify the political

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5 Interview with Prince GBPH Prabukusumo, March 20, 2013.
influence of the *keratons*. In the New Order period, Suharto’s military regime followed the attempt to mitigate the *keratons’* political power by enacting Law No. 8 on Mass Organisations (*Organisasi Kemasyarakatan*) in 1985. The law defines the *keraton* as a cultural institution (*organisasi kebudayaan*), and the administration and activity of the *keraton* is subject to regulation stipulated in the law. Law No. 8/1985 classifies the *keraton* in the same category as the religious Islamic organisation of Nahdlatul Ulama, the environmental organisation of Wahana Lingkungan Hidup (WALHI), or the other social or non-governmental organisations. In classifying the *keraton* as a “cultural mass organisation”, the New Order regime managed to draw a clear boundary between the political role and the cultural sovereignty of the *keraton*. Law No. 8/1985 was a normative strategy deployed by the New Order regime to reduce the political reach of the *keraton*. Other strategies included the full support granted to cultural activities and court rituals, and the adoption of Javanese court norms in the political discourse of the state (Pemberton 1994).

Another important legal move introduced by the New Order regime was the inclusion of the *keraton* into the discourse of cultural heritage, as stipulated in Law No. 5/1992 on the Protection of Cultural Monuments (*Perlindungan Cagar Budaya*). The law limits public access to the *keraton* by designating some sites or buildings in the palace compound as protected historical monuments. It prevents anyone, including the royal families, from changing anything or using the buildings for purposes other than activities endorsed by the Cultural Office (*Dinas Kebudayaan*) or the Office for Preservation and Protection of Historical and Ancient Monuments (*Balai Pelestarian and Perlindungan Sejarah dan Purbakala*). The enactment of Law No. 5/1992 directly encroaches upon the sovereignty of the palace, since the *raja* or the *sultan* no longer has unlimited access to their properties.

Laws No. 8/1985 and No. 5/1992 delineate the encounters of the *keraton* with the New Order state and with the public. In other words, the “serious game” takes place only within the normative space allowed by the laws, framing the palace as a cultural instead of a political actor, especially through Law No. 5/1985, which discourages the palace from exercising its political role. If the Dutch colonial government required the assistance of the *keraton* to secure its political control, the postcolonial state was hardly interested in acquiring political support from the *keraton*. On the other hand, however, it was feared that the abolishment of the monarchy system would provoke strong resistance and might incite radical separatist movements. Framing the role of the *keraton* within the discourse of culture is the most critical option in the “serious game”. It allows the monarchy to exist but, at the same time, restricts the political influence of the *keraton*.

The appeasement of the *keraton* opened up different room for manoeuvre. Because the New Order regime distrusted the aristocrats, the *keraton* had to rely on the individual initiative of a king, a prince or a princess to deal with the bureaucratic apparatus of the state. It, therefore, depended on the network, intention, experience, and willingness of the individuals to reach and negotiate with the state bureaucracy. The *rajas* or *sultans* with long experience dealing with the state bureaucracy faced less difficulty in reaching the state than did those with little or no experience, or those with a history of opposition against the political regime. The *rajas* or *sultans* drew on their
personal networks to co-operate with the state apparatus; some aristocrats joined political parties, ran as local or national legislators, or occupied bureaucratic posts in local or national state offices. The limitation imposed on the keraton to exercise political authority holds the state to be responsible for helping advance cultural activities. The support the keraton received from the state in the cultural sphere allowed the aristocrats to focus more on or expand existing cultural activities. Palace rituals flourished during the New Order period, and the Javanese and Balinese palaces became the most important sites for cultural tourism. Awarding an honorary noble title to people not genealogically related to the royal blood started to become more common during this time.

**Buton Sultanate and the Keraton Festival**

When the swapraja domain in Buton was abolished in 1951, the Buton Sultanate also ended. Sultan La Ode Muhamad Falihi, the 38th Sultan of Buton and the last sultan (ruling 1937-1960), appointed no caretaker of the sultanate, so that the Buton Sultanate slowly faded away. The adat council also ceased to function and members of the adat council grew older without anyone to replace them. Sultan Falihi’s son, La Ode Manarfa, the strongest candidate to replace his father should the sultanate continue, never tried to revive the sultanate. Instead, he pursued a political career. He was elected as a member of the Provisional People’s Consultative Assembly (MPRS) in 1967, and he was the spokesperson of the provincial parliament (DPRD-GR) in 1971. He joined the People Representative Assembly (DPR) in 1972 and again from 1982 until 1987. Manarfa held many Certificates of Acknowledgement (Piagam Penghargaan) that he obtained from the Golkar party, the Parliament, several ministries, and the National Defence Institute. All these distinctions demonstrated his close connection to the Golkar ruling party and the military. He passed away in 2009.

Butonese adat regulates that an adat council (siolimbona) elects a king and, therefore, kingship is not inherited. Because the adat council had ceased to function since the 1960s, the sultan’s seat remained empty after Sultan Falihi’s death. Everything was quiet until 2010, when the Forum Komunikasi dan Informasi Keraton se-Nusantara (FKIKN), or the Forum for Communication and Information of Archipelago Keratons, selected Buton keraton to host the 8th Festival Keraton Nusantara (FKN), or the Festival of Archipelago Keratons, in 2012. The selection alerted government officials in Buton City and South-eastern Sulawesi Province to find someone who could represent Buton Sultanate, as the sultan’s seat was empty. Butonese aristocrats were also anxious and embarrassed to acknowledge that the keraton lacked a sultan, and choosing a new sultan would be a very difficult process because the adat council was inactive and, therefore, could not perform its duty.

However, in 2011, people claiming to be Butonese adat leaders gathered to revive the Buton Sultanate, and their first step was to reactivate the adat council (siolimbona). A few months later, the new adat council gathered to hold a ritual for the election of a sultan. They eventually appointed La Ode Muhammad Ja’far, La Ode Manarfa’s nephew, as the new Sultan of Buton. The inauguration ritual of the new sultan took
place on May 19, 2012, at batu popaua, the most sacred spot in the palace compound. The election and inauguration of La Ode Muhammad Ja’far as the new sultan of Buton remained controversial. Some Butonese aristocrats refused to acknowledge the sultan, claiming that since the adat council was illegitimate, its decision was, therefore, an unlawful violation of adat. However, the majority of the aristocrats had chosen to remain passive and made no effort to resist the newly appointed sultan.

The biggest challenge came from the local government. When La Ode Muhammad Ja’far was inaugurated at the batu popaua, there were no officials of the city government attending the ceremony. The city government, in fact, went further to issue a certificate acknowledging La Ode Ja’far Hibali, the cousin of La Ode Muhammad Ja’far, as the Sultan of Buton. This government move irritated La Ode Muhammad Ja’far and other aristocrats who alleged that the government had interfered too deeply in adat matters. Even though La Ode Ja’far Hibali was related to La Ode Muhammad Ja’far, his manoeuvre annoyed the Butonese royal family. Since then, the Butonese public has talked about the quarrel as a conflict between the “adat sultan” (sultan adat) and the “certificate sultan” (sultan piagam).

The conflict between the two sultans peaked at the 2012 FKN. The two sultans, La Ode Muhammad Ja’far and La Ode Ja’far Hibali, attended the Festival Keraton Nusantara activities and the presence of the two sultans at the event confused other kings and embarrassed the Butonese royal family. The Sultan of Aceh wondered: “I do not know which one is the Sultan of Buton.” The son of the former secretary of Buton
Sultanate also remarked: “This incident is a slap in our face (tamparan ke muka). Buton Sultanate should be ashamed that this incident was taking place in front of kings from all over the country.” La Ode Muhammad Ja’far’s faction reacted fervently to the presence of La Ode Ja’far Hibali. At a ceremony before the street parade commenced, the kapitalao (prime minister) of La Ode Muhammad Ja’far went berserk, drawing out his sword and warning people that they should obey the decision of the adat council. In Butonese adat, the kapitalao’s gesture of drawing his sword was a very strong statement that no-one was allowed to question the sultan. In the past, if the kapitalao brandished his sword before the public, he should behead someone to prove that the statement he had made was a serious one.

The incident between the two Sultans of Buton at the FKN illustrated how practice shapes the legitimacy of access to adat. A sultan should reiterate his access to the legitimacy continuously through gestures, appearances and transactions, in short, through “serious games”. If the legitimacy was questioned, the sultan must reclaim it back through gestures, performances and transactions. At the Festival Keraton Nusantara, the competition over legitimate access to adat between the government official and Sultan La Ode Muhammad Ja’far also took place on the stage. During the opening ceremony at the Baubau City Hall, the Governor of South-eastern Sulawesi appeared on the stage dressed in traditional clothing specifically designed to honour prominent guests. By comparison, the sultan wore a simple traditional costume for receiving ordinary guests. Butonese aristocrats sensed this gesture was to reflect the governor’s attempt to overpower the sultan and the sultanate. Dressed in a more prestigious costume than the sultan’s, the governor was making the statement that he was more important than the sultan and he was the real host of the event.

The state has been the source of legitimacy for past and present sultans of Buton and, at the same time, the Butonese aristocrats have to compete with local politicians for access to state resources. The Butonese aristocrats have encountered similar experiences that the other sultans or rajas have also faced, especially the sultans and the rajas who no longer have palaces and symbolic resources but want to revive the status they used to hold. On the other hand, however, larger keratons, mostly in Java and Bali, resort to cultural resources they possess to negotiate with the state.

Twin Suns Hanging over Kasunanan Palace

The phrase “twin suns” (matahari kembar) refers to the conflict between two kings (sunan) of Surakarta’s Kasunanan palace, Central Java Province. The conflict broke out when Sunan Pakubuwana XII died on June 11, 2004, without leaving behind or appointing a successor. The keraton’s adat rules that the successor of a king is the son of a queen (prameswari), preferably her oldest son. However, Sunan Pakubuwana XII did not appoint any of his eight wives as the queen. No-one knew why the Sunan

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6 See Klinken (2007) for a list of keratons that have sought to revive their symbolic status and political power.
Pakubuwana XII decided to have no queen, but this situation left a serious and emotional consequence when Pakubuwana XII’s death revealed an enduring anxiety over what political and cultural sovereignty would mean for the Kasunanan palace.

Internal conflicts often take place in Central Javanese keratons, despite the fact that all Javanese kings of Kasunanan, Mangkunegaran, Kasultanan, and Pakualaman palaces descend from Sultan Agung, the first Sultan of the Mataram kingdom. The current keratons originated in the 1755 Giyanti Agreement when the Dutch VOC divided the Mataram kingdom into the Surakarta and Yogyakarta palaces. Internal conflicts in each palace further split the Surakarta palace into the Kasunanan and Mangkunegaran keratons, and the Yogyakarta palace was divided into the Kasultanan and Pakualaman keratons. While frictions and rivalries shape the relationship between the Surakarta’s Kasunanan and the Mangkunegaran palaces, only minor tensions exist between the Kasultanan and the Pakualaman palaces of Yogyakarta.

SUCCESSION HAS ALSO OFTEN BEEN THE SOURCE OF INTERNAL CONFLICT IN THE KERATON, EVEN THOUGH, IN SOME CASES, WHEN A SULTAN DID NOT APPOINT ANYONE TO BE THE CROWN PRINCE, THE SITUATION DID NOT ESCALATE INTO A CONFLICT. AN EXAMPLE OF THIS WAS WHEN SUNAN PAKUBUWONO X, SUNAN PAKUBOWONO XII’S PREDECESSOR, DID NOT SELECT A QUEEN; THE SULTAN’S DEATH PROVOKED NO DISPUTE OVER WHO HAD THE LEGITIMATE RIGHTS TO BE CROWNED AS A NEW KING (MOEDJANTO 2002). HOWEVER, AFTER SUNAN PAKUBUWANA XII HAD PASSED AWAY, THE SITUATION TURNED UGLY. KGPH HANGABEI CLAIMED THAT HE WAS THE RIGHTFUL SUCCESSOR TO THE THRONE. HE ARGUED THAT SINCE HE WAS THE OLDEST SON OF THE LATE KING’S FIRST WIFE, KRAy PRADAPANINGRUM, THE adat endowed him with the rights to replace the Sunan. However, another son from one of the late Sunan’s wives asserted a similar claim. KGPH Tedjowulan, the son of KRAy Retnadaningrum, stated that the majority of royal families (sentana dalem) and the general public supported him ascending to the

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7 When questioned by one of his sons, Sunan Pakubuwana XII never explained why he did not select a queen nor appoint a son to be the crown prince. The prince could only guess that the king was not convinced that any of his wives had a son that he could trust (Interview with an anonymous prince, April 2013).

8 KRAy stands for Kanjeng Raden Ayu, a title for a Kasunanan noblewoman.
throne. On September 30, 2004, KGPH Tedjowulan declared himself as Sunan Pakubuwono XIII, a move that soon triggered a reaction from KGPH Hangabehi, who also declared himself as Sunan Pakubuwono XIII only ten days after Tedjowulan’s declaration. Since then, the Kasunanan keraton has had two kings, each claiming to be the legitimate successor of Sunan Pakubuwana XII.

Despite the continuing dispute over the legitimate Sunan, KGPH Tedjowulan worked actively with other rajas and sultans, mostly from Java, Sumatra and Kalimantan, to promote Forum Silaturahmi Kerajaan Nusantara (FSKN), the Alliance Forum of Archipelago Palaces, and chaired the FSKN from 2009 to 2012. However, King Tjokorda Jambe Pamecutan of Bali disputed Tedjowulan’s chairmanship, claiming that he, King Tjokorda Jambe Pamecutan, has been the legitimate chairman of the FSKN since 2007 when the FSKN was established. The Kasunanan keraton had actually sent Prince Gunarso Kusumadiningrat to serve as the General Secretary of the FSKN before he was fired in March, 2009, by King Pamecutan over an allegation of a fraudulent use of the FSKN name.9

Despite its initial aim to provide an independent venue for rajas and sultans to cooperate and work to promote royal culture and adat, the FSKN has relied on the state for political support. The first and most important step was when the FSKN held a courtesy visit to President Susilo B. Yudhoyono at the Presidential Palace in 2009. During the meeting, the FSKN Chairman, Tjokorda Jambe Pamecutan, assured the President and the government officials that the FSKN had no intention of creating negara dalam negara (a state within the state) or of pursuing political interests, but simply wanted to advance existing cultural activities. The President’s statement at the meeting made it clear that the government supported the FSKN because the forum was a cultural, not a political, forum. The FSKN Chairman’s and the President’s statements hinted at a veiled distrust that had existed between the state and the keratons since colonial times. The end of the authoritarian New Order regime had changed nothing and the state remained anxious that the noblemen could have persisted with their political objective. KGPH Tedjowulan’s active involvement in the FSKN shows how the Kasunanan keraton of Surakarta tries to reach out to the state and to other keratons. In addition to the FSKN, there are actually two other associations or networks created by the noblemen: the Asosiasi Keraton dan Kerajaan Nusantara (AKKN) and the Forum Komunikasi dan Informasi Keraton se-Nusantara (FKIKN). The Kasunanan keraton also supports the activities of the FKIKN. Whereas KGPH Tedjowulan was a central figure in the FSKN, KGPH Hangabehi’s faction, especially GKR Koes Moertiyah and her husband KGPH Edy Wirabhumi, plays an indispensable role in the FKIKN. This shows that the dualism of leadership inside the Kasunanan palace, the “twin suns”,

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9 Gatra Magazine (24/03/2009) reported that a scandal broke out in 2009 allegedly involving King Pamecutan and the FSKN. Several renowned artists and 258 royal family members from keratons all over Indonesia gathered in Jakarta to prepare an excursion trip to Europe to meet European royal families. When they had arrived in Jakarta, they realised that they had been cheated. The delegates reported they had paid 3 million rupiah each to the king to participate in the trip. King Pamecutan denied his involvement in the scandal and accused the Surakarta prince of having misused the FSKN by sending the invitation letters to the rajas and the sultans on behalf of the FSKN.
extends to shape different affiliations of the *keraton* to existing palace organisations or networks.

The FKIKN was founded during the first of the bi-annual Festival Keraton Nusantara (FKN) in 1995. The Central Javanese *keratons* of Kasunanan, Kasultanan, Mangkunegaran, and Pakualaman initiated the first festival, and were soon joined by the Cirebon palaces (West Java Province). When the festival participants consisted of fifteen palaces, they decided to establish the FKIKN, stating that the forum would function mostly as a communication forum among its members. Since then, GKR Koes Moertiyah and her husband have played a decisive role in the activities of this association. They designate their private office at the Kasunanan *keraton* as the FKIKN secretariat. Until the latest festival held in Buton in 2012, GKR Koes Moertiyah and KGPH Edy Wirabhumi had pushed the FKIKN to set up a working agenda; for example, during the 2012 festival in Buton, they urged the FKIKN to prepare a legal drafting of the Law on *Adat* People (*Draft Rancangan Undang-undang Masyarakat Adat*) and advise the People’s Representative Assembly (DPR) to include *keraton* in the normative definition of *masyarakat adat* (*adat community*).\(^\text{10}\)

\(^{10}\) The follow-up of the FKIKN meeting still remained unclear at the time this essay was submitted for publication. Even though the DPR has held hearings with several *rajas* and *sultans*, they came to the hearings in their individual capacities, not representing the FKIKN. The academic draft of the
Building an alliance with the state and with other palaces through active participation in the palace organisations or networks is a “serious game” (see Ortner 1999) that the Surakarta’s Kasunanan palace and its noblemen play to craft a space for reclaiming cultural sovereignty. The Kasunanan’s “game”, however, does little to attract the Yogyakarta palaces (Kasultanan and Pakualaman keratons) to follow, apart from limited participation of the Yogyakarta palaces in the cultural performances held during the keraton festivals. A high-rank prince of the Kasultanan keraton said that the Kasultanan was reluctant to participate actively in the palace organisations or networks, either the FSKN or the FKIKN, because he felt that the organisations were more interested in pursuing a political agenda than a cultural one. Despite the different interests they have in the existence of palace organisations or networks, the Surakarta Kasunanan and the Yogyakarta Kasultanan are both involved in the “game” to award honorary noble titles (gelar bangsawan kehormatan) to outsiders. The keratons resort to the “game” to craft room to reclaim and assert their cultural sovereignty as the legitimate custodians of adat.

Becoming Aristocrats

Awarding honorary noble titles to people not genealogically related to a royal family is a common practice in many palaces all over the world. As Sherry Ortner has demonstrated (1999), the practical context and implication of a “serious game” emerges from the intentions, desires and anxieties of those involved in the game, as well as from the engagement of the actors with chances and dispositions opened up by the political or economic structure. Therefore, the republican political system of the post-New Order Indonesian state reveals the practical contexts that address the aristocrats’ concern over the future existence of the palace, either physically or symbolically.

The practice of bestowing an honorary noble title to people other than royal descendants of the Mataram kings has existed for a long time. However, in earlier times, the honorary titles were awarded only to abdi dalems, a group consisting of palace clerks, soldiers and guards, lower ranking administrators such as lurahs and wedanas, and court artists and performers. Only later, after 1945, did outsiders with no royal blood connection begin to receive the honorary titles. The Surakarta and Yogyakarta keratons apply similar criteria to bestow the honorary titles. The receiver of the title should express his or her commitment to help to protect Javanese culture, or he or she has demonstrated actual work to promote Javanese culture and tradition, such as staging art performances or publishing rare, ancient Javanese texts.

The Hercules’ royal title affair demonstrates the ambiguity of the criteria that the keraton applies to select a person to receive the title. Despite the normative criteria that the person is supposed to express a good conscience, the Sunan or Sultan retains the law, the one that GKR Koes Moertiyah asked the rajas and the sultans to prepare drawing on their palaces’ concerns, has yet to materialise.

11 Interview with an anonymous prince of Yogyakarta’s Kasultanan palace.
final and absolute decision to grant the title. Each year, the court administration (*Pengageng Parentab Keraton*) recommends names of people that meet the criteria to bear an honorary title. When the proposed names have passed a careful examination by the court administration, the Sunan or Sultan typically accepts the recommendation. Apart from this list, the Sunan or Sultan often has his own candidates, and, in this case, the court administration has to accept the king’s candidates. When KGPH Tedjowulan suggested that Hercules should receive the honorary title, the prince referred to Hercules’ merits in supporting the security apparatus during the military operation in East Timor. Although Hercules has never demonstrated any public contribution to promote Javanese culture, nor assisted the Kasunanan palace, the award of the honorary noble title to Hercules was never disputed until the incident in West Jakarta attracted public attention.

In addition to the Hercules affair, some honorary noble titles awarded by Surakarta’s Kasunanan *keraton* have also created public controversies. The honorary titles awarded by KGPH Hangabehi are no less controversial. His decision to grant an honorary noble title to Julia Perez, a controversial artist, provoked furious reactions. Julia Perez is also known for her involvement in sex scandals and her inappropriate behaviour. This reputation runs against the image of Javanese culture as a sophisticated and refined culture. Similar to Hercules, Julia Perez has never made any effort to promote Javanese culture and tradition. Regardless of the negative public image, KGPH Hangabehi bestowed a noble title on the artist in 2010 by giving her the name Nyi Mas Ayu Yuli Rachmawati. The controversy over the title reached a peak when Julia Perez was later found guilty of physical attack against Dewi Perssik, another controversial artist, and she was sentenced to a few months in prison. Since the court decision came out, the Kasunanan has decided to withdraw the noble title.12

The “game of becoming aristocrats” is a social practice to mediate the *keraton*’s encounter with the outside realm. The practice foregrounds the transactional element of the game and, in so doing, shows how the *keratons* choose arenas, resources and strategies to reclaim their cultural sovereignty that the state has undermined. It demonstrates how the aristocrats draw on the desire and intention (Ortner 1999) to hold on to their symbolic role when the *keraton* encounters the state that has encroached upon the palace realm.

The decision made by KGPH Tedjowulan to award the honorary noble title to Hercules shows how the cultural practice of granting titles can also serve as a political statement. Hercules’ assistance and his close connection to the Indonesian military during the occupation of East Timor becomes a more important factor than his later involvement in the criminal world. In other words, the game being enacted in the Hercules affair sheds light on a potential role of the *keraton* to make a political statement and, in so doing, situates the *keraton* on the same discursive level as the state institutions. On the other hand, KGPH Hangabehi’s decision to bestow a title on the

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12 The Hercules and Julia Perez affairs are only two examples among other controversial honorary noble title awards granted by the two Sunans. The others include noble titles awarded to the artists Syahrini and Ahmad Dhani and to politicians and high-ranking government officials. The decision of the Kasunanan to revoke Julia Perez’s title was related to me by a Kasunanan prince. (Interview with an anonymous Kasunanan prince).
controversial artist Julia Perez draws upon the economic potential of the award. Before she was imprisoned and despite her negative image, Julia Perez was a famous public figure. Her stage performances and films attracted audiences throughout the country. KGPH Hangabehi could have seen this economic potential that the artist could draw and, by incorporating her into the inner circle of the cultural elite, the keraton expected to enjoy the fame and accompanying economic benefits. This was a rational option to resolve the financial problem that the Kasunanan keraton had been facing since the internal conflict broke out. Since KGPH Tedjowulan and KGPH Hangabehi each announced that they were Sunan Pakubuwono XIII, the Solo city government has halted its regular assistance funds (dana bantuan) to the Kasunanan. As the regular funds constituted the major part of the keraton’s annual budget, the city’s decision to stop the disbursement of the funds affected the regular maintenance activities of the keraton and the routine and compulsory cultural ceremonies arranged by the keraton, such as the gerebeg maulud ritual and jumenengan ceremonies. This situation required the keraton to find alternative sources to compensate the suspended funds.

Unlike Yogyakarta’s Kasultanan or the neighbouring Mangkunegaran palace that still run their businesses or have the means to invest in private companies, many of which they obtained during colonial times, the Kasunanan palace lost most of its businesses in the aftermath of the anti-swapraja movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Even though the Kasunanan palace owned a railway company, sugar plantations and sugar factories in the early-20th century, the anti-swapraja faction in the government had managed to take over the keraton’s ownership of the businesses. As a consequence, the keraton’s source of income diminished significantly. This situation requires the keraton to be creative in its search for alternative sources, and the awarding of noble titles is seen as a viable solution without drastically compromising the adat. A Kasunanan prince points out that the noble title award is, in a general sense, a transactional practice. The Sunan grants the noble title drawing on contextual interests: Firstly, as a gesture of honour to individuals proven to be valuable assets promoting Javanese culture and, secondly as a response to fulfil people’s need to have a symbolic social status. In the first gesture, the Sunan exercises his function as the custodian of Javanese culture and adat. In the second gesture, he is in pursuit of viable alternatives to secure the continuation of the keraton institution and administration, and the maintenance of palace buildings. In other words, in the first gesture, the Sunan is a Javanese king. In the second one, he is the manager of Keraton, Inc.

Epilogue: Toward Keraton, Inc.

John and Jean Comaroff (2009) write on how the struggle for ethnic recognition in the late-20th century has entered a realm where identity, rights and history intermingle with capital, state power and affects. The intertwining of identity, capital and power forms an “identity economy”, an economy of producing feeling and attachment to a

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13 For a rare account of businesses owned by Mangkunegaran palace, see Pringgodigdo (1950).
14 Interview with an anonymous Kasunanan prince in 2013.
particular construct of identity (2009:8-9). They emphasise that the identity economy in the late-20th century relies less on an uncritical view of collective consciousness than on the ability of ethnic discourse to be construed as an entrepreneurial activity. The process of framing something as emotional as an ethnic identity and ethnic attachment into entrepreneurial discourse lies at the heart of what John and Jean Comaroff have termed Ethnicity, Inc. Ethnicity, Inc., the Comaroffs say, includes practices, materials and dispositions toward recognising a different engagement with collective identity and collective consciousness, in short, toward “giving affective voice to belonging” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009:142). The central element in the Ethnicity, Inc. practice is the affective disposition to recognise the significance of belonging and the working of the capital, in their case, the venture capital.

The “serious game” of the encounter of the keraton with the outside realm is also a practice where a collective consciousness of becoming an aristocrat intermingles with state power, individual disposition and capital. The collective consciousness of becoming an aristocrat runs parallel with the interest of the aristocrat to enact a role as the custodian of adat, a consciousness comparable to a political move to repossess the custodian interest of the indigenous people. Part of the collective consciousness of the noblemen emerges from the encounters of royal family members with the state, and the other part of the collective consciousness transpires in the co-operation and competition among the rajas and the sultans, as reflected in the politics of the FSKN and the FKIKN. As Sherry Ortner aptly demonstrates in the “serious game” of high-altitude mountaineering (1999), the dispositions create a structure of feeling and desire, and, at the same time, accentuate the different experiences, interests and desires of the individuals. The “serious game” of awarding honorary noble titles illustrates the structure of feelings among the Kasunanan or Kasultanan aristocrats, and among the factions within the Kasunanan keraton. Surakarta’s Kasunanan invests an improvised meaning on the noble titles, locating the practice in the desire to recuperate the symbolic role of the keraton as the primary custodian of Javanese adat. On the other hand, the Yogyakarta’s Kasultanan dwells on the “serious game” with an interest in affirming loyalty from its abdi dalem and to strengthen the patron-client relationship of the royal families with their close relatives. In other words, the Kasunanan’s “serious game” has drawn on a structure of feeling different from the one framing the Kasultan’s “game”.

The “serious game” to reclaim access to adat is taking place not only among the keratons, but also among the groups of indigenous peoples. The keratons and the indigenous groups both draw their claims on the discourse of custodians of culture, but they differ in the materials incorporated to frame the notion of custodianship. The keratons locate their claim in the arts and written culture, while the indigenous groups frame their claim with international legal instruments. It is not surprising if the indigenous rights movement is less interested in the expressive dimension in the “serious game” of claiming access to adat.

The encounter between the keraton and the outside realm is a struggle for recognition and over ownership of cultural properties. Since the colonial time, the keraton has received recognition not only through the political power it exercises, but also through the economic capacity of the keraton to shape and mould cultural identity.
The encounter of the *keraton* and the outside realm forges the “economic identity” of the *keraton* by reworking *adat* and symbolic materials into entrepreneurial activities that can be offered to politicians, to people seeking symbolic status, to the state apparatus, and to tourists looking to experience authentic culture. This is what would constitute “Keraton, Inc.”.