DECOLONIZING THE COURT ARCHIVE: *SERAT WICARA KERAS* AS A COUNTER-HEGEMONIC VOICE IN SURAKARTA (1788–1820)

Dewa Alfaquin Faturangga
Islamic Studies, Postgraduate UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, Indonesia
dewa-254091001@mhs.uinsaid.ac.id

Abstract

In the study of early modern Javanese history, royal court archives have frequently been interpreted through colonial frameworks or treated as passive literary monuments, thereby obscuring indigenous critical voices. This study addresses this limitation by examining *Serat Wicara Keras*, a classical Javanese manuscript composed by Yasadipura II during the transformative reign of Pakubuwana IV (1788–1820) in Kasunanan Surakarta. The main purpose of this research is to investigate how textual variations, metaphors, and ethical critiques within the manuscript functioned as a counter-archive to subvert Dutch colonial hegemony and internal political decay. Employing a historical-philological approach integrated with critical discourse analysis, the study conducts textual criticism, transliteration analysis, and historical contextualization of the manuscript's poetic stanzas (tembang). The findings demonstrate that Yasadipura II strategically utilized satirical poetics to articulate subtle resistance against intensifying colonial legal penetration, geopolitical intervention, and moral degradation among palace bureaucrats. Rather than serving as mere royal documentation, the manuscript actively negotiated authority and preserved local ideological autonomy. In conclusion, this research highlights the necessity of decolonizing court archives, asserting that traditional Javanese literary artifacts must be recognized not as inert historical relics, but as active, counter-hegemonic instruments of indigenous knowledge production and intellectual resistance in transition-era Java.

Keywords: *Serat Wicara Keras*, Decolonizing Archives, Philology, Counter-Hegemony, Surakarta.

INTRODUCTION

The history of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Java has long been reconstructed through a complex corpus of colonial reports, court chronicles, genealogies, administrative records, and literary texts. Yet the coexistence of these sources does not necessarily produce an equal historiographical field. Archives are not neutral repositories in which the past is simply preserved; they are sites in which particular forms of knowledge become authoritative while others are marginalized, classified, or rendered less visible. Michel-Rolph Trouillot has demonstrated that historical silences emerge not only from what is omitted from historical narratives but also from the unequal processes through which sources are produced, preserved, and interpreted (Trouillot, 1995). Ann Laura Stoler similarly urges historians to approach archives not merely as containers of information but as products of political and epistemic practices that participate in the

making of colonial knowledge itself (Stoler, 2009). These insights are particularly important for the study of Javanese court history, where colonial documentation and indigenous court texts have often been positioned asymmetrically: the former tends to be treated as historical evidence, while the latter is frequently reduced to literary, symbolic, or legitimizing texts.

The problem becomes more complicated in the case of Surakarta during the reign of Pakubuwana IV (1788–1820), a period marked by intense political contestation, the continuing consequences of the division of Mataram, and increasing European intervention in Javanese political affairs. Pakubuwana IV ascended the Surakarta throne at a young age and pursued political policies that repeatedly brought the court into tension with Dutch interests and rival Javanese polities. The *Pakepung* crisis of 1790 became a decisive episode in this relationship. Dutch forces, supported by Yogyakarta and Mangkunagaran contingents, surrounded Surakarta, forcing Pakubuwana IV to retreat from his political position and surrender five of his religious advisers to the VOC. Contemporary and later historical interpretations have often approached this episode primarily through the prism of political conflict, diplomatic calculation, and colonial intervention (Carey, 1977). Yet the textual production surrounding the court reveals another dimension of this history: the existence of indigenous intellectual voices that did not simply reproduce royal authority but evaluated, criticized, and morally judged the exercise of power from within the cultural world of the court.

One particularly significant text in this regard is *Serat Wicara Keras*, attributed to R. Ngabehi Yasadipura II. Unlike many courtly literary works whose relationship with power is conventionally understood through praise, legitimation, and genealogical continuity, *Wicara Keras* is remarkable for its sustained moral and political criticism. Previous scholarship has identified the text as a work characterized by distinctive diction, imagery, and criticism of rulers and court officials. Sunarya, for example, demonstrates that the manuscript's linguistic and imagistic structures constitute an important expression of its author's literary strategy, while Ahmad Wahyu Sudrajad shows that excerpts of *Wicara Keras* circulated beyond their immediate textual context and continued to function as meaningful signs within later manuscript traditions (Sudrajat, 2014; Sunarya, 2013). More importantly, research on Yasadipura II has emphasized the controversial

character of his authorship and his willingness to criticize Javanese rulers, including Pakubuwana IV (Ekowati, 2011). The manuscript itself is therefore not merely a passive record of court culture; it constitutes a textual intervention into the moral and political order of the court.

The contents of *Serat Wicara Keras* reinforce this interpretation. Its criticism does not operate primarily through direct political declaration. Instead, Yasadipura II employs metaphors, satire, ethical contrasts, historical exemplars, and indirect references to contemporary political actors. The text repeatedly measures rulers and officials not by genealogy or formal rank alone but by budi, restraint, wisdom, responsibility, religious commitment, and their capacity to protect the welfare of the state. One passage, for example, insists that a ruler should not merely pursue ascetic practice but should "think of the welfare of the state"; elsewhere, the text criticizes the abuse of aristocratic lineage and questions the legitimacy of those who claim noble descent without demonstrating corresponding ethical capacity (Purnomo, 2026). Such passages are significant because they relocate political legitimacy from inherited status toward moral performance. The court is thus represented simultaneously as a center of authority and as an object of ethical scrutiny.

The text's treatment of the *Pakepung* episode makes this critical position particularly visible. In the relevant passages, the five royal advisers associated with Pakubuwana IV are represented through the metaphor of being carried away by a "white crow," a formulation interpreted in the accompanying study as an allusion to European/VOC power. The narrative describes their eventual submission and removal following the crisis, while the broader sequence associates their political failure with misplaced confidence, concealed motives, and inadequate judgment (Purnomo, 2026). The significance of this representation lies not simply in its apparent criticism of Dutch intervention. More fundamentally, Yasadipura II exposes the vulnerability of indigenous political authority when royal decision-making becomes detached from ethical prudence. Colonial power consequently appears not only as an external force but also as a power capable of exploiting fractures within the Javanese political order. This textual configuration complicates a simple binary between "colonizer" and "colonized": the

manuscript's critique operates simultaneously against external intervention and internal political degeneration.

This dimension of *Wicara Keras* has important implications for the study of archives and historical knowledge. If the court archive is approached exclusively as an instrument of royal legitimation, then a text such as *Wicara Keras* risks being classified as another literary product of the palace rather than as an intellectual intervention within it. Conversely, if it is read solely as an anti-colonial text, its internal critique of rulers, officials, religious advisers, and courtly morality may also be obscured. A decolonizing approach therefore requires a more careful reading of the text's position within the court. It means asking not simply whether the text "resisted" colonialism, but how indigenous categories of moral judgment enabled a court intellectual to criticize both external domination and internal failures of authority. In this sense, decolonization is not merely the replacement of European sources with indigenous ones. It involves questioning the hierarchy through which some sources are presumed to possess historical authority while indigenous literary texts are treated primarily as cultural artifacts.

Such a perspective also invites a reconsideration of the concept of the "archive" itself. *Serat Wicara Keras* was not produced as a colonial administrative document, nor does it conform to the modern bureaucratic definition of an archive. Nevertheless, it preserves historically situated perceptions, political memories, ethical judgments, and conceptual vocabularies through which actors within the Surakarta court understood their own political world. Its historical value therefore lies not only in the factual information that can be extracted from its verses but also in the categories through which its author interpreted power. This approach resonates with Stoler's insistence that historical researchers should attend to the forms, anxieties, and epistemic structures through which documents are produced, while Trouillot's formulation of historical production encourages attention to the unequal relationship between what happened, what was recorded, and what subsequently became authoritative historical knowledge (Stoler, 2009). Reading *Wicara Keras* as a court archive in this expanded sense allows the manuscript to become a site from which indigenous political thought can be reconstructed rather than merely an object to be contextualized by external colonial records.

The existing scholarship nevertheless leaves an important analytical gap. Studies of *Serat Wicara Keras* have largely concentrated on literary dimensions such as imagery, diction, semiotics, moral teachings, or the characterization of historical figures (Sunarya, 2013). Other scholarship has examined Yasadipura II primarily as a court poet and his relationship with Javanese literary traditions. While these studies establish the literary and intellectual significance of the text, they have not sufficiently examined *Wicara Keras* as a counter-archival text through which indigenous political and ethical knowledge challenges dominant constructions of authority. The question is therefore not merely what *Wicara Keras* says about Pakubuwana IV, the VOC, or other Javanese rulers, but how its literary strategies produce an alternative historical voice from within the court itself. This constitutes the central historiographical gap addressed by the present study.

Accordingly, this article asks: How does *Serat Wicara Keras* construct a counter-hegemonic voice within the Surakarta court during the reign of Pakubuwana IV (1788–1820), and in what ways do its satire, metaphor, ethical judgments, and representations of political actors challenge dominant configurations of royal and colonial authority? The article argues that *Serat Wicara Keras* should be read neither as a conventional royal chronicle nor simply as an anti-colonial literary text. Rather, it functioned as a counter-hegemonic intellectual intervention that negotiated authority through indigenous Javanese ethical, political, and religious categories. Its criticism of Pakubuwana IV and court officials, its representation of the *Pakepung* crisis, and its differentiated evaluations of Javanese rulers reveal an intellectual strategy in which political legitimacy was continually measured against moral competence, responsibility, prudence, and the welfare of the nagari.

The article ultimately proposes that decolonizing the court archive requires a shift from treating indigenous literary texts as supplementary sources toward recognizing them as sites of historical knowledge production in their own right. *Serat Wicara Keras* demonstrates that criticism of political authority did not necessarily emerge outside the palace or in the form of open rebellion. It could also operate through poetic indirection, ethical instruction, historical analogy, satire, and the selective praise and condemnation of rulers. The significance of Yasadipura II therefore lies not simply in his role as a pujangga but in his capacity to transform the literary space of the court into a site of

intellectual contestation. By recovering this critical voice, the study contributes to the decolonization of Javanese historiography by repositioning the court manuscript as an active interlocutor in the reconstruction of Surakarta's political and intellectual history.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Decolonizing the Archive and Javanese Historiography

Scholarship on the decolonization of archives begins with a critique of the assumption that archives are neutral repositories of historical knowledge. Archives are produced through processes of selection, classification, preservation, and knowledge production that operate within particular relations of power. Trouillot demonstrates that historical silences are produced at different stages of historical production, while Stoler emphasizes that colonial archives should be understood as epistemic constructions that reflect the ways in which colonial power classified, ordered, and interpreted society (Stoler, 2009; Trouillot, 1995). In the context of Javanese historiography, this perspective is particularly important because colonial sources have frequently occupied a privileged position in reconstructing the political history of Java. Decolonization, however, does not simply mean replacing colonial sources with indigenous ones.

Rather, it requires creating space for alternative categories of knowledge and historical perspectives generated by the communities whose histories are being studied. Chakrabarty's notion of provincializing Europe highlights the need to challenge the dominance of European historiographical categories as universal frameworks for understanding non-European histories (Chakrabarty, 2000). Similarly, Florida demonstrates that Javanese historical texts possess their own modes of constructing history, memory, and political authority that cannot be fully understood through Western historiographical categories (Nancy K. Florida, 1995). From this perspective, serat and babad should be approached not merely as supplementary materials to colonial archives, but as sites of historical and political knowledge production within Javanese society.

2. Court Literature, Yasadipura II, and Critiques of Political Authority

The second body of scholarship concerns the role of court literature as a medium for articulating political and moral ideas. Studies of Javanese

historiography demonstrate that court texts did not merely record historical events but also constructed interpretations of power, legitimacy, morality, and political conduct. Within this context, the position of Yasadipura II is particularly significant because he was a pujangga whose literary production did not function solely as a mechanism for legitimizing royal authority. Ekowati demonstrates that Yasadipura II was a controversial intellectual figure whose writings articulated criticism of several Javanese rulers, including Pakubuwana IV (Ekowati, 2011).

More specifically, Sunarya's studies of Serat Wicara Keras demonstrate that the text contains criticism of Surakarta's aristocrats and political leaders through the use of diction, semantic oppositions, and linguistic constructions that distinguish between desirable and undesirable forms of conduct (Sunarya, 2013). Thus, Wicara Keras may be understood not merely as a text of piwulang or moral instruction, but also as a textual space in which the conduct and legitimacy of political authorities were evaluated. Nevertheless, previous scholarship has predominantly approached Wicara Keras from literary, stylistic, and moral perspectives. Its significance as a form of political and historiographical knowledge produced from within the courtly environment remains insufficiently explored.

3. Hegemony, Counter-Hegemony, and the Problem of Courtly Criticism

The third body of scholarship draws on the concept of hegemony to examine how *Serat Wicara Keras* may be interpreted as a voice that negotiates and simultaneously challenges political authority. From a Gramscian perspective, hegemony operates not only through coercion but also through the production of consent, values, and shared understandings of legitimate authority (Antonio Gramsci, 1971)Consequently, counter-hegemony does not necessarily take the form of an open rebellion against rulers; it may emerge through the production of alternative discourses that question the foundations upon which authority is legitimized. This perspective is particularly relevant to *Wicara Keras* because Yasadipura II's criticism does not simply seek to reject the institution of monarchy. Rather, the text evaluates the moral qualities and political conduct of

rulers. It therefore establishes a distinction between formal authority and ethical legitimacy.

In this sense, the present study approaches *Wicara Keras* as an alternative archive or counter-archive not an archive in the bureaucratic sense, but a textual repository of perspectives, critiques, memories, and ethical categories through which Javanese society interpreted political authority. By bringing together the perspectives of decolonial archival studies, Javanese historiography, and theories of hegemony, this study argues that *Serat Wicara Keras* can be read as a counter-hegemonic voice that articulated criticism of political authority through Javanese ethical and political categories, while simultaneously opening possibilities for rereading the history of Surakarta under Pakubuwana IV (1788–1820).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative historical research design combined with textual-historical analysis to examine *Serat Wicara Keras* as an indigenous political discourse and a potential counter-hegemonic voice in the Surakarta court during the reign of Pakubuwana IV (1788–1820). This methodological choice corresponds to the research objective of examining not merely the content of the text, but also how it constructs political criticism, represents legitimate authority, and articulates alternative understandings of power within the courtly and colonial context. The text is therefore approached as a historically situated intellectual artifact whose language, moral evaluations, representations of political actors, and narrative structures constitute important historical evidence (Schrag, 2021).

The primary corpus consists of *Serat Wicara Keras*, attributed to Raden Ngabehi Yasadipura II, supported by available manuscript records and textual documentation. The historical scope covers the reign of Pakubuwana IV (1788–1820), while remaining attentive to the textual composition and transmission of the work. Relevant passages were purposively selected based on their discussion of political authority, rulers, court officials, moral conduct, religious authority, and representations of political crisis. Secondary sources concerning Yasadipura II, Surakarta political history, Javanese historiography,

and the intellectual context of the period were employed to contextualize rather than replace the primary textual evidence (Ekowati, 2011).

Data analysis was conducted through four stages: (1) source criticism to examine the provenance, authorship, textual identity, and historical positioning of *Serat Wicara Keras*; (2) textual and thematic classification to identify representations of kingship, political authority, moral conduct, religious authority, and criticism of court actors; (3) contextual-hermeneutic interpretation to relate textual representations to the political and intellectual circumstances of Surakarta under Pakubuwana IV; and (4) counter-hegemonic analysis to examine how the text challenges, negotiates, or redefines dominant conceptions of political legitimacy. The concept of counter-hegemony is applied cautiously, since the text does not function exclusively as an anti-colonial document but also contains criticism of indigenous political authority (Sunarya, 2013).

The credibility of the interpretation was established through source triangulation, textual comparison, contextual verification, and interpretive transparency. Claims derived from *Serat Wicara Keras* were compared with available manuscript records, previous philological studies, and independent historical scholarship on Surakarta and Pakubuwana IV. The study also distinguishes between textual evidence, historically corroborated information, and the researcher's interpretation. Thus, validity is established not through statistical reliability but through the traceability of interpretations to primary evidence, consistency between research questions and analytical categories, and critical engagement with the historical context (Schrag, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. *Serat Wicara Keras* and the Contestation of Courtly Authority

The first finding demonstrates that *Serat Wicara Keras* constructs criticism of political authority from within the intellectual and cultural environment of the Surakarta court. Rather than functioning merely as a literary work containing moral advice, the text articulates a sustained evaluation of rulers, court officials, religious figures, and members of the aristocracy according to particular ethical standards. This is significant because Yasadipura II occupied the position of a court poet, making his critical voice structurally different from an

external opposition to the palace. The critique therefore emerges from within the very institution whose authority the text simultaneously recognizes and evaluates. Previous scholarship has identified *Wicara Keras* as a work associated with Yasadipura II's response to the social and political conditions of Surakarta between 1789 and 1816, including criticism directed toward Pakubuwana IV (Ekowati, 2011).

The textual evidence suggests that the central problem addressed by *Wicara Keras* is not the existence of kingship itself, but the moral legitimacy of political authority. Authority becomes questionable when rulers and elites fail to embody the ethical qualities expected from those who occupy positions of power. In this sense, the text establishes an implicit distinction between power as position and authority as moral legitimacy. Such a distinction is particularly important for interpreting the work as a counter-hegemonic voice. The text does not simply reject the hierarchical order of the court; instead, it introduces an internal normative standard through which that hierarchy can be judged. Earlier research similarly finds that *Wicara Keras* represents moral and social decline among various groups in Surakarta and can be read as a criticism of the political power associated with Pakubuwana IV (Susanto et all, 2022).

This finding qualifies a purely oppositional interpretation of the text. *Wicara Keras* should not be understood as a straightforward rejection of the Surakarta political order, because its criticism remains embedded within Javanese ethical and courtly concepts. Yasadipura II does not position himself outside the political system; rather, he speaks through the cultural language available to a pujangga of the court. His criticism therefore operates through internal contestation: the legitimacy of authority is challenged not by abolishing hierarchy, but by questioning whether those who possess authority have fulfilled its ethical obligations. This interpretation extends previous studies that have primarily emphasized the text's moral criticism, ideological dimension, or linguistic characteristics by showing how these elements collectively function as a mechanism for negotiating political legitimacy (Sunarya, 2013).

The significance of this finding lies in its implications for the reading of court literature. If the archive is treated merely as a repository of royal ideology, texts such as *Wicara Keras* risk being reduced to instruments of court legitimation. Yet the text reveals a more complicated relationship between authorship and power. Its existence demonstrates that court intellectuals could simultaneously participate in the structures of royal authority and articulate criticism of the way that authority was exercised. The court archive, therefore, should not be approached as a monolithic voice of the ruler; it also contains tensions, negotiations, and competing formulations of political morality.

2. **From Moral Counsel to Counter-Hegemonic Discourse: Language, Satire, and Indirect Criticism**

The second finding concerns the discursive strategies through which criticism is articulated. *Serat Wicara Keras* does not generally communicate political criticism through direct political confrontation. Instead, criticism is mediated through moral instruction, evaluative language, metaphor, contrast, characterization, and the aesthetic conventions of Javanese *tembang macapat*. The use of these literary forms is not merely an aesthetic feature but also constitutes an important mechanism for communicating politically sensitive ideas within the hierarchical environment of the court. Ekowati's study demonstrates that *Wicara Keras,* although characterized by a strong expression of anger toward the political and social conditions of its period, retains sophisticated Javanese literary aesthetics, including *tembang macapat, tembung saroja, tembung garba, sasmita tembang, purwakanthi,* and figurative expressions (Ekowati, 2011).

The significance of these linguistic strategies becomes clearer when considered in relation to power. Earlier research on the diction of *Wicara Keras* identifies positive and negative lexical choices, oppositional structures, naming practices, and other linguistic devices that convey both *piwulang* and criticism (Sunarya, 2013). The present study extends this observation by interpreting such linguistic patterns not only as stylistic characteristics but also as discursive resources for negotiating political authority. Criticism becomes possible because it is expressed through culturally legitimate forms of moral discourse. Rather than

explicitly declaring political rebellion, the text establishes criteria by which the conduct of rulers and elites can be evaluated. The political force of the text consequently lies partly in its ability to transform literary and moral discourse into a space for questioning power.

This pattern is particularly relevant to the concept of counter-hegemony. If hegemony operates partly through the normalization of particular understandings of authority, then counter-hegemonic discourse does not necessarily have to reject the entire political structure. It can instead expose contradictions within the dominant order by introducing alternative standards of legitimacy. In *Wicara Keras*, the courtly hierarchy remains recognizable, but the moral superiority of its occupants is no longer assumed. Kings, aristocrats, religious advisers, and other elites become objects of evaluation. The text thus creates a discursive space in which authority must justify itself through ethical conduct rather than relying exclusively on status and proximity to the ruler.

An important qualification, however, is that this counter-hegemonic character should not be overstated. Research on *Wicara Keras* shows that the text simultaneously contains criticism and reproduces elements of Javanese aristocratic ideology. Indratmo and colleagues, for example, interpret the work through the relationship between Javanese ideology, priyayi hegemony, and social hierarchy (Susanto et all, 2022). Similarly, recent hermeneutic research emphasizes that Yasadipura II's criticism remained constrained by the etiquette and cultural conventions expected of a Javanese priyayi.

This apparent contradiction is not a weakness of the text; rather, it is precisely what makes *Wicara Keras* historically significant. Its counter-hegemonic potential does not emerge from a complete escape from the dominant ideological order, but from negotiation from within it. The text simultaneously reproduces and questions hierarchy. Such ambivalence suggests that resistance in the courtly archive should not be defined only by explicit rejection of political authority. It can also take the form of moral critique, discursive displacement, and the redefinition of the criteria through which authority is understood.

3. Decolonizing the Court Archive: Recovering Indigenous Political Critique

The third finding has broader implications for the interpretation of the Surakarta court archive. Reading *Serat Wicara Keras* as a counter-hegemonic voice demonstrates that the archive should not be treated as a transparent representation of royal power or as a passive record of political history. Instead, it should be understood as a contested intellectual space in which different understandings of authority, morality, social order, and political legitimacy interacted. This perspective is particularly important for a decolonial reading because colonial and modern historiographical frameworks have frequently privileged administrative, political, and institutional records as the principal evidence for reconstructing Southeast Asian history. Court literature, by contrast, has often been approached primarily as literary or cultural material rather than as evidence of indigenous political reflection.

Serat Wicara Keras complicates such a hierarchy of evidence. Its political significance lies not simply in the historical events that it records but in the categories through which a Javanese intellectual evaluated political reality. The text contains reflections on the conduct of rulers, elites, religious figures, and society, thereby providing evidence of indigenous criteria for distinguishing proper and improper authority. Previous research has already demonstrated that the work reflects the social and political conditions of Surakarta during the reign of Pakubuwana IV and contains criticism of the ruler and his political environment (Sudrajat, 2014). The present analysis extends this scholarship by treating such criticism as an epistemic intervention: the text does not merely describe political disorder but produces its own knowledge about what legitimate authority ought to be.

This finding also challenges a binary distinction between "colonial archive" and "indigenous voice." *Wicara Keras* was produced within a court that itself participated in complex relations with colonial power, indigenous aristocratic authority, religious networks, and competing Javanese polities. Consequently, decolonizing the archive does not mean replacing colonial narratives with an idealized indigenous narrative. Rather, it requires recognizing the plurality and internal contradictions of indigenous historical knowledge. The

text's criticism of Pakubuwana IV, for example, should not automatically be interpreted as anti-colonial resistance. Indeed, the historical context of Pakubuwana IV's political orientation and the tensions surrounding the court complicate any simplistic classification of the text as either pro- or anti-colonial. The stronger argument is that *Wicara Keras* exposes the contested nature of authority within the court itself.

From this perspective, the concept of decolonizing the court archive refers to a methodological shift: instead of reading court manuscripts only as evidence of elite domination, researchers can examine them as sites where domination was interpreted, negotiated, criticized, and sometimes reproduced. This approach expands the archive beyond the intentions of rulers and opens analytical space for court intellectuals, literary figures, and ethical discourses as producers of political knowledge. The result is a more complex understanding of Surakarta's political culture, in which power was not simply imposed from above but was continually mediated through language, morality, cultural conventions, and intellectual contestation.

The implication for the study of Javanese intellectual history is therefore substantial. *Serat Wicara Keras* demonstrates that indigenous political criticism could operate through literary and ethical forms rather than through institutional opposition. Its counter-hegemonic quality emerges precisely because criticism is embedded within the cultural vocabulary of the court. In this sense, the text does not merely preserve the memory of political conflict; it preserves a Javanese mode of thinking critically about power. This finding extends previous scholarship on Yasadipura II by shifting the analytical focus from whether the poet was “critical” of the king toward the more fundamental question of how political criticism became intellectually and culturally possible within the court itself (Ekowati, 2011).

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that *Serat Wicara Keras* constitutes an internal counter-hegemonic discourse within the intellectual and cultural environment of the Surakarta

court during the reign of Pakubuwana IV (1788–1820). Rather than rejecting the court hierarchy or functioning as an explicitly anti-colonial text, the work questions the moral legitimacy of political authority through ethical standards embedded in Javanese intellectual and religious traditions. Its criticism of rulers and court elites therefore represents a form of political contestation articulated from within the cultural structures of the court itself.

The study further shows that this counter-hegemonic potential is articulated through moral instruction, evaluative diction, satire, metaphor, and indirect criticism. These literary strategies transform courtly textual expression into a space for negotiating the meaning and legitimacy of power. The principal contribution of this study is consequently to demonstrate that the court archive should not be read merely as a repository of royal ideology, but also as a contested site of indigenous political thought, where authority could simultaneously be reproduced, negotiated, and criticized. In this sense, *Serat Wicara Keras* complicates the binary between domination and resistance and offers a more nuanced understanding of political criticism in Javanese court culture.

This conclusion remains limited to the particular textual and historical context of *Serat Wicara Keras* and should not be generalized as evidence of a unified anti-colonial consciousness in Java. Future research may compare this text with other serat, babad, correspondence, and court manuscripts from the same period to identify broader patterns of indigenous political critique. Such comparative research would further strengthen the project of decolonizing the court archive by placing indigenous textual traditions at the center of the reconstruction of historical understandings of power, morality, and political authority.

REFERENCES

Aloysius Indratmo, Wakit Abdullah Rais, Susanto, D. S. (2022). Serat Wicara Keras and The Hegemony of Javanese Priyayi. *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference of Local Wisdom (Incolwis 2022)*. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-224-8_17

Antonio Gramsci. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith*. International Publishers.

Carey, P. (1977). *The Sepoy Conspiracy of 1815 in Java*. Oxford University Press.

Chakrabarty, D. (2000). *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000)*. Princeton University Press.

Ekowati, V. I. (2011). *Yasadipura II: Pujangga Kerajaan Jawa yang Kontroversial*. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Nancy K. Florida. (1995). *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future: History as Prophecy in Colonial Java*. Duke University Press.

Schrag, Z. M. (2021). *The Princeton Guide to Historical Research*. Princeton University Press.

Stoler, A. L. (2009). *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton University Press.

Sudrajat, A. (2014). Kajian Semiotika Penggalan Serat Wicara Keras dalam Naskah H. Tabbri. *Jumantara*, *5*(02).

Sunarya. (2013). PENCITRAAN DALAM SERAT WICARA KERAS KARYA R. NG. YASADIPURA II. *Alayasastra: Jurnal Ilmiah Kesusatraan*, *9*(1).

Suryosumunar, T., Rahmawati, L., & Purnomo, H. (2026). Politik dinasti, oligarki, dan krisis moral elite: Relevansi nilai kritik Serat Wicara Keras dalam politik Indonesia kontemporer. *Jurnal Politik Dan Kebudayaan*, *9*(1).

Trouillot, M.-R. (1995). *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 26–27*. Beacon Press.