



The Social Construction of New Understanding Wali in Java

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Abstract

The social construction of sainthood lies in a broad-based understanding of Sufism and mysticism in Java. It appears in the way people recognize an individual as a saint in the real life; from fulfilling the role of Islamic propagators and the exercise of magical power as an extraordinary ability to do something. Nowadays, this understanding has apparently flourished, turning into new perceptions and understandings. The case of Gus Dur could be used as an example of the modern constructions of the sainthood in Java. Although there are widespread acceptances this sainthood, but this phenomena remains controversial and debatable. Therefore, this paper focuses on the social construction of new phenomenon called the *Wali Sepuluh* (the ten saints), to examine the issue of Gus Dur as the tenth saint and its impact on the realities of life in Tebuireng.

Keywords

Sainthood, social construction, and pilgrims

Introduction

Abdurrahman Wahid, commonly known as Gus Dur, was born in 1940 into a highly respected family of traditionalist Muslims. He eventually became a leader of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the largest Indonesian Muslim organization in Indonesia, and between 1999 and 2001 he was the fourth President of the Indonesian Republic. Passing away in Jakarta on December 30, 2009, his death made big headlines in daily newspapers, on

television, and in online media. Since the day of his burial at the Tebuireng Pesantren (Islamic boarding school) in Jombang, East Java, his gravesite has been crammed with visitors from morning till night. An especially large number of people visited his grave on the traditional commemorations of the seventh, fortieth, one-hundredth, and one-thousandth day after his death. During first seven days after the burial, as the first groups of pilgrims began to arrive, an interesting incident happened. The board of the Tebuireng Pesantren decided to fence his grave with a piece of rope to prevent pilgrims from taking soil and flowers from the area. Some pilgrims believed that his grave's soil and flowers would bring them *berkah* (blessing). The rumor was that the soil could act as an amulet, to cure disease and bring good luck. This incident is an example of the mystical transformation that is happening in Gus Dur's graveyard, confirming that the *berkah* of his soil is one of the signs of Gus Dur's sainthood.

However, the "official" recognition of Gus Dur's sainthood happened at the time of the first year commemoration (*haul*) of his death. It was Yudian Wahyudi, a professor of Islamic law at State Islamic University (UIN) in Yogyakarta, a Kiai, and one of the Gus Dur's close friends, who said that Gus Dur deserved to be inducted into the list of Java's Muslim saints. The announcement was official, since Yudian proclaimed his opinion in front of thousands of people who arrived at Tebuireng to attend the commemoration. He said that Gus Dur is the Tenth Saint, which means that Gus Dur has an equal position, or even higher position, than the Nine Saints (*Wali Songo*), a famous council of saints associated with the propagation of Islam in Java in the distant past.

Yudian argued that Gus Dur's sainthood can be seen in the five elements that were his main preoccupations during his lifetime. Firstly, Gus Dur built a sense of civilization by spreading the spirit of pluralism. Secondly, he presented Islam as *Rahmatan lil 'Alamien* (blessing for the whole world). Thirdly, he propagated the local character of Indonesian

Islam above and beyond *Arabisation*. Fourthly, he uplifted the marginalized people of the Pesantren school system. And fifthly, he dedicated his life to gaining the better future for Islam. Yudian also argued that Gus Dur may have a higher position than the *Wali Songo*, since Gus Dur's influence reached all areas of the Indonesian Republic, whereas the influence of the *Wali Songo* was confined to just one region (Posmo magazine 2010, 39).

The idea that Gus Dur is the Tenth Saint then began to flourish. Several local books have been published in Tebuireng claiming that Gus Dur is the Tenth Saint, or at least a saint. Souvenirs of Gus Dur, such as T-shirts, clothes, CDs/VCDs, fez/skull caps are being sold in and around the school. Perhaps the most important thing that connects the idea of sainthood with Gus Dur is the pilgrimage itself. Many pilgrims who visit the graves of the *Wali Songo* now say that their pilgrimage tour is not complete if they do not visit Gus Dur's grave as well (personal interview, February 02 2013). It appears that pilgrimage to Gus Dur's grave is fast becoming an obligatory destination in addition to the graves of the *Wali Songo*. Gus Dur's grave has acquired a special status as a pilgrimage destination, not only for Muslims from Java, but also for people from other islands and from overseas. Some pilgrims are even non-Muslims (personal interview, April 19 2013). Since its location is nearby the grave of Soekarno in Blitar (the first president of Indonesia), Quinn (personal information, July 07, 2013) also notes some "secular" pilgrims come to Gus Dur's grave regarding on his important role in the Indonesia's secular political history, as the series of pilgrimage after visiting Soekarno's grave.

Following Berger & Luckmann's view (1966) that humans actively construct their reality through their interactions and consciousness, the reality of Gus Dur's sainthood in Jombang is not merely about Gus Dur himself, but also how people try to define sainthood through their own opinions and practices. This includes what they think about the Tenth Saint, and how they connect it to their understanding of the *Wali*

Songo. Therefore, this paper focuses on the social construction of new phenomenon called the *Wali Sepuluh* (the ten saints), to examine the issue of Gus Dur as the tenth saint and its impact on the realities of life in Tebuireng.

The Sainthood Discourses

To some extent, the issue of the tenth saint challenges an older discourse about sainthood that revolves around the so-called *Wali Songo* or “Nine Saints” of Java. Obviously the meaning of *Wali* is now being contested, a contestation that particularly manifests itself when people try to define the contemporary issue of sainthood through their own opinions and practices. Thus, it would be beneficial to learn about the *Wali Songo* concept in Java, and how people define and recognize it, before talking further about the tenth saint of Tebuireng.

The word *Wali* (Arabic; W-L-Y) is written in the Qur’an in many forms and meanings (Guillot and Chambert-Loir, 2010). However, the main concept of *Wali* mostly centers on three elements; they are closeness (proximity), authority (power), and shelter (protection) from God (White 1998, 13). This understanding relies on Buehler’s conception of *Wali* (2003, 607) as follows:

Wali, the word roughly defined as “saint,” which is derived from the Arabic root *w-l-y* and has a root meaning of proximity, generally is found in the construct *Wali Allah*, that is, someone who is close or intimate with God. It is a designation that Muslims use to define a holy person, and can refer to overlapping categories of pious people, religious scholars, Sufis, and Shi’i imams. In English, *Wali* is translated to variously as protégé, intimate, friend of God, or “saint.” A *Wali* who has power over others has *Wilaya* (being protector or intercessor) while a *Wali* with *Walaya* focuses on the closeness or nearness to God (being a friend of God). Both of these meanings can be harmonized with interpretations of Qur’an usage. Except for hairsplitting grammatical discussion, popular

usage conflates these meanings since one close to God has power to protect and intercede, and vice versa (Buehler's 2003, 607).

Discussing sainthood, Cornell (1998), provides empirically rich and analytical nuanced of it in the case of Moroccan Muslims. He differs between *Wilaya* and *Walaya* as quoted above by Buehler, employing both concepts interchangeably upon its functions in the reality. The best example to portray those categories socially can be drawn from the practice of pilgrimage. The veneration of saint in Java appears on the pilgrimage to the saint's tomb (*ziarah*). Muslims do *ziarah* as the way to obtain *berkah* (blessing) from the persons buried there and the effectiveness of prayers, since the saint or a person buried is an "intermediary" of prayers to God (Lukens-Bull 2005, 32). Those convey the roles played by saints as an intercessor, a function of *tawassul* (mediation). As noted by White (2008), those *berkah* and *tawassul* become the manifestation of sainthood construction in society toward saints.

As we know, Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world. Islam accounts for 87.18% of the Indonesian population or 207.1 million Muslims (BPS, 2010). Most Muslims in Indonesia are concentrated on Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi and West Nusa Tenggara. Java is the biggest, accounting for 45.2% of the total Muslim population.

Islam has become dominant in Java since Islam succeeded to enter and eventually become the powerful heart of Javanese rites and beliefs, characterizing social interaction of everyday life in every social layer (Woodward 1989, 3). Many studies about Javanese Islam reveal one thing that cannot be ignored in the life of Javanese Muslims; it is a belief in mysticism. Geertz (1976), in his idea of *abangan*, and scholars who criticize him, appear to agree that mysticism plays an important role in Javanese life. Beatty (1999) proposes that the syncretism of Islam and local belief is at the heart of Javanese Islam, since the first propagators of Islam in Java came from the mystical path of Islam (Sufism) (Shihab, 2001).

Accepting this close connection, Dhofier (1978, 17) prefers to use the term Islamic Sufism rather than mystical Islam, since the terms mysticism and Sufism are not “synonymous”. Following Nicholson, Dhofier (1978) suggests that “Sufism has specific religious connotations and is restricted to Muslims alone. Sunyoto himself (2011) explains that there is a tight relationship between Islamic Sufism—an Islam of the type propagated by the *Wali Songo*—with the local religion called *Kapitayan*. The result of this synthesis can be perceived in the practices that are followed by a majority of Muslims in Indonesia.

Ricklefs (2007) proposes a “mystic synthesis” to define the kind of Islam practiced in Java. He notes three elements of the synthesis: “Islamic identity, fulfillment of the five pillars of Islam and the acceptance of local spiritual forces” (Ricklefs 2007, 6, 11). Examining history from the early arrival of Islam in Java until recently, Ricklefs states that Sultan Agung, the greatest king of Mataram, was among the first to initiate this new reconciliation between Islam and Javanese royal tradition. He did so by visiting the graveyard of a local saint in Tembayat, Klaten, reconciling with a defeated prince from Surabaya who claimed to be the descendant of one of the *Wali Songo*, creating a new Javano-lunar calendar converting the old Javanese Hindu Saka calendar into Islamic months, and importing some Islamic inspired works into the court culture (Ricklefs 2007, 3). These elite attempts then inspired, and became integrated into the daily life of Javanese commoners as was later reported by some European observers (Ricklefs 2007, 7-10).

In light of this mystic and Islamic Sufism, the veneration of saints can be understood as one of the ways of expressing religious life in Java. This mystical side therefore posits and informs the common understanding of local saints in Java. Bruinessen (2012, 499) states that when Javanese talk about a saint (*Wali*), it conceptually relates to the *Wali Songo*, the nine propagators of Islam who are believed have lived in Java

in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. This is interesting since we know that actually the Javanese honor many saints, not just nine. Chambert-Loir (2002, 134) has counted the tombs which have become pilgrimage destinations, and estimates that there are tens of thousands, so many in fact that it is impossible to know the exact number of them.

Indeed, the concept of “*songo*” itself and who are the persons still become the subject of debates, whether it is truly nine saints or only eight, whether it is “*songo*” (a Javanese word means “Nine”) or “*sana*” (it has two versions, the first is an Arabic word, *Tsana*, means “noble or commendable,” the second is an Old Javanese word, *Sana*, means a place or area) (Saksono 1995, 18-22). However, I would like to argue that the concept of *Wali Songo* itself is generally understood as a form of the saint council (*divanul auliya*) in Java, who are responsible to preserve the process of Islamizing Java time to time. The numbers can be eight or nine (*Serat Walisana* in Saksono, 1995), although most of them are nine (Wahyudi & Khalid, 1985; Shofwan et.al, 2000). Among those saints, the most famous saints associated with *Wali Songo* are Maulana Malik Ibrahim (Gresik, East Java), Sunan Ampel (Surabaya), Sunan Giri (Gresik), Sunan Bonang (Tuban, East Java), Sunan Drajat (Lamongan, East Java), Sunan Kalijaga (Demak, Central Java), Sunan Kudus (Kudus, Central Java), Sunan Muria (near to Kudus, Central Java), and Sunan Gunung Jati (Cirebon, West Java).

In order to understand sainthood in Java, Quinn (2007) suggests that “the exceptional piety, accounts of miracles and premonitions and appearances by saints after death” have become part of the “discourse of saint veneration.” In this sense, Quinn underlines the mystical happenings and the Islamic devotion is the main components in understanding of sainthood in Java. Regarding the *Wali Songo* phenomenon, the recognition of the *Wali Songo* adopts mostly two common understandings. First, the *Wali Songo* are recognized as the most successful propagators of Islam in Java (Sofwan, et.al, 2000; Saksono, 1995; Quinn, 2007, Sunyoto, 2011)

despite the many debates that have developed around the concept of *Wali Songo* itself. Second, people often associate the *Wali Songo* with the mystical view (Lukens-Bull 2005, 48), which relates to another concept of sainthood, called *karomah*, a miracle given by God to a saint (Masyhudi, 2002). *Karomah*, as the privilege given by God, differs from *Mu'jizah*, which is a miracle associated to the prophet. In Javanese, a *Karomah* of Wali seems very the mystical or magical power that cannot be understood logically like flying without wings, walking on the water, meditating three years without stopping and many.

Socio-Economic and Cultural Impact

The Tebuiireng Pesantren (Tebuiireng Islamic boarding school) is located in Tebuiireng hamlet, Diwek village, Jombang regency, in East Java. Pesantren is the term for an Islamic boarding school that emphasizes Islamic teachings (Barton 2002, 14). The Tebuiireng School is located about seven kilometers to the south of the city center. Standing majestically along the national highway from Jombang to Malang, the Tebuiireng Pesantren has great history and respected position among the thousands of Pesantren in Java. Established in 1899 by Kiai Hasyim Asy'ary (Ma'shum 1998, 74), Gus Dur's grandfather and the founder of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Tebuiireng Pesantren has played a role of unparalleled importance in the history of Islam in Indonesia. Under Kiai Hasyim's supervision, many *santri* (students) of Pesantren Tebuiireng later become the founders of many famous and large Pesantren, such as Pesantren Guluk-Guluk in Madura, Pesantren Lirboyo in Kediri, Pesantren Buntet in Cirebon, and Pesantren Asembagus in Situbondo.

One of the sons of Kiai Hasyim, Wahid Hasyim, Gus Dur's father, was also popular and became one of the founders of the Indonesian Republic. Wahid Hasyim played a national role as a member of the PPKI (*Panitia Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia* or The Preparatory Committee of

Indonesian Independence). He was also one of the formulators of the new nation's state ideology called Pancasila, and he was the country's first Minister of Religious Affairs. Yet he had a short life, passing away at the age of 38. For the Tebuireng Pesantren, his monumental legacy was that he succeeded in introducing secular education into the Pesantren, and he established mixed classes for male and female *santri*. Because of this effort, he is acknowledged as the first pioneer to combine Islamic classical teaching with modern education in the Pesantren world (Ma'shum 1998).

Both Kiai Hasyim and his son, Wahid Hasyim are buried in the family cemetery behind the old mosque of the Tebuireng Pesantren, together with other family members and some *santri* or *ustadh* (teachers) of the Pesantren. Many *santri* and ordinary people come in to visit their tombs. Pilgrims visiting the tombs of the *Wali Songo* also sometimes drop in here as an add-on package of a *Wali Songo* pilgrimage tour. From Thursday afternoon until Saturday night the graveyard is more crowded than on other days. Most pilgrims come in groups, but some come individually. For some years people have been able to visit the graves in peace and safety any time they want without having to get permission from the Pesantren's security personnel.

The family graveyard is located on western side within Pesantren's complex. Consists of nearly one hundred graves, the main site is the grave of Kiai Hasyim, Kiai Wahid Hasyim, Kiai Yusuf Hasyim, and Gus Dur. Those four graves are simple, only marked by two poles of marble and the scattered flowers. Gus Dur is also buried here in a simple grave adjacent to the equally simple graves of his father and grandfather. Gus Dur's grave is located in the southern of Kiai Hasyim's grave. Those graves are now surrounded by a black iron fence; no pilgrims can enter except those who have permission from the family. In the outside, there is name plaque of marble containing names of people buried in the graveyard. Most of them are the family of Pesantren, a few *ustadh* (Pesantren's teacher) and some beloved *santris* of Kiai Hasyim, also few local people.

Adjacent to the graves there are two open halls to accommodate the pilgrims. In front, a small and old hall is used to accommodate the pilgrims for Kiai Hasyim. Since Gus Dur's funeral, a larger two-storey hall has been built behind the old one to accommodate the ever increasing number of pilgrims. Firstly, the pilgrims will try to sit and pray at the old one because of its closeness to the grave, although finally most of them will sit in the big new building hall, since it is much bigger and therefore be able to accommodate many more people.

When they come, some pilgrims try to touch or wipe the black fence around the graves. They say *Assalamua'alaikum ya Waliyalloh* (Greetings to you, oh saint of God), and sing or read a greeting ode to the saint while standing outside the fence around the grave. The pilgrims continue by intoning the *tablil* chant (*La ilaha illallah*, There is no god but and only Allah) while sitting in the hall or in the vicinity of the grave. They then send an intoned gift of *Alfatihah* (the opening surah of the Qur'an) to the Prophet Mohammed, his family and companions, some famous *Sufis*, the four leaders of Islamic jurisprudence (*madzhabib Alarba'ah*), some local Ulama in Indonesia, and all dead and living Muslims in the world. The most important thing, of course, is the sending of the *Surah Alfatihah* to Kiai Hasyim, Gus Dur, and the family, as the "householders" of this pilgrimage site. After this prayer pilgrims will end their pilgrimage by uttering a farewell to the occupants of the graves. This is the most general description of pilgrimage devotions at Gus Dur's grave, and it is mostly done by pilgrims in groups. Individual pilgrims usually have their own manner of doing the pilgrimage. Sometimes they read the *Surah Ya Sin*, read the whole Qur'an, or only do a particular *dzikir* chant.

To some extent, the pilgrimage in Tebuireng has changed everything there. The physical changes lie in the development of road infrastructure, the expanded pilgrimage location, the construction of a parking lot, also separation of the buildings used by the *santri* (students) from those used

by pilgrims. The most noticeable change has taken place at the site of Gus Dur's grave. To provide shelter for thousands of pilgrims, the initiative came from the local government of Jombang Regency to expand the place of pilgrimage. With the permission of the family, the government has built a large new hall behind the old, small, *joglo*-roofed pavilion pilgrims had previously used. This new building has extended from the north to the east with two-storeys around 25 meters in length. Surrounded by the black iron fence, this hall has become the new barrier between the cemetery and Pesantren.

Besides the new large hall, the government has also built a one-way entrance and exit for pilgrims behind the Pesantren. Previously, pilgrims could enter the grave from the Pesantren's front gate and exit from any gate around the Pesantren perimeter. Since the remodeling was finished, pilgrims could only enter the grave from this new entrance, and exit by the same gate. This new one-way gate was very helpful for the Pesantren because the arrival of thousands pilgrims around the clock had disrupted the school's study schedule. Indeed in the days between the burial of Gus Dur and the 100 days commemoration, study activity in the Pesantren stopped altogether, because so many pilgrims were freely passing through the Pesantren area (personal interview, April 18 2013). In implementing the one-way gate policy, the Pesantren board has restricted the hours during which visitors may come and visit the grave. The gate is open from 7 am to 4 pm and from 8 pm to 3 am. It means that pilgrims cannot enter the gate between 3 am and 7 am, or between 4 pm and 8 am. These hours are devoted solely to study within the Pesantren.

Pilgrims come and go through the single gate. There is an open corridor connecting the outside directly to the grave. Inside this corridor there are now many kiosks selling a variety of foods, handicrafts, and products to do with Gus Dur. The kiosks were organized by the LSPT (*Lembaga Sosial Pesantren Tebuireng*/The Social Welfare Institute of the

Tebuireng Pesantren). The LSPT has the special responsibility of managing the commercial side of the pilgrimage, especially to manage all things connected to Gus Dur's grave, such as giving permission to rent the kiosks inside the corridor, caring for the grave, and raising funds via charity boxes (*kotak amal*) (personal interview, April 19 2013). After taking walk along to the corridor, pilgrims will directly reach the family graveyard.

Among the most important of the socio-economic and cultural changes is the emergence of new class of merchants offering the wide range of goods and services, including informal parking attendants and the official grave custodians, has created new occupations for people as a commercial characters of local pilgrimage (Quinn 2008, 63-79). Even, there was a marine who prefers to give up his work at Indonesian Navy, for only being a merchant at Tebuireng since he can afford much more money from his business than before (personal interview, February 21 2013)

The appearance of these instant merchants at the Tebuireng complex is a very noticeable development. Most of them are people from outside Tebuireng, even outside Jombang regency. They came from Kediri, Pare, and Nganjuk, three places outside of Jombang regency. This has triggered negative reaction among local people who feel that they have greater right to be merchants at the pilgrimage site than the people from outside of Jombang. The local Tebuireng people have felt shocked by the many merchants who have come and occupied the areas immediately outside the Pesantren (personal interview, February 02 2013). This local feeling has inspired them to establish legal organization for local merchants which is called the *Paguyuban Pedagang* (The Merchants Association) (personal interview, February 21 2013). The organization has around 250 members. One of its goals is to reduce the percentage of outside merchants to a ratio of 80% local merchants against 20% from the outside (personal interview, February 21 2013).

Another change has also taken place in the socio-religious life of Tebuireng. One of the impacts of the increasing number of pilgrims is increasing number of *santri* studying at the Tebuireng Pesantren. According to Gus Sholah, the Chief Kiai of Tebuireng, the number of new admissions has been limited, and he has required prospective students to take an examination to prevent the increasing number of new *santri* from exceeding the carrying capacity of the school (personal interview, April 04 2013). It means that the number of *santri* has increased significantly after Gus Dur's funeral. Because of this, conditions in the Tebuireng pesantren have rapidly become more crowded than before. Many *santris* are now living there to study both Islamic teachings and secular teaching in the secular or religious school within Pesantren and around Tebuireng.

People believed that these changes were signs of Gus Dur's sainthood. Ibu Fulanah, a seller of VCDs and books in front of the Pesantren gate told me, "This change is a Gus Dur's blessing (*berkah*). Since Gus Dur was buried here, I could make money and fed my family by doing this job" (personal interview, April 04 2013). Gus Dur's funeral in Tebuireng also convinced Pak Zaid (personal interview, April 04 2013) to send his son to study (as a *santri*) in Tebuireng. He believed that Gus Dur has added to the already great prestige of Tebuireng Pesantren since his burial.

Social Construction of the Sainthood

Tunggal and Rosyadi (2010) have shown clearly how people recognize Gus Dur as a saint. By telling the mystical stories surrounding the founding fathers of NU (*Nabdlatul Ulama; Resurgence of Islamic Clerics*), they argue that the root of Gus Dur's sainthood arises from a combination of charisma, the moral nobility of his family, his mystical outlook, and his religio-political power. These blends together, and making it reasonable for people to see that Gus Dur as definitely a saint. This conclusion strives

to understand Gus Dur's particular attributes through three key terms: that Gus Dur was liberal thinker, had radical faith, and was close to God (*nalar liberal, iman radikal, dekat dengan Tuhan*).

People in Tebuireng have also recognized Gus Dur's special charisma. They had pointed out that the position of Gus Dur's family in the past and in the present has been a significant factor in the huge public respect for him. However, the crucial thing that we should notice arises from the belief that, besides being a descendant of the great Tebuireng Pesantren family, Gus Dur also had something special within his character and intelligence. Gus Dur's younger brother Gus Sholah, a recent Chief Kiai of Tebuireng Pesantren underlined this particularity by saying that:

“(Besides being a son of Tebuireng), Gus Dur was smart and had high capabilities. For example, he had exceptional skills in writing and speaking, and he also had an exceptional attitude for getting his mind around a host of different things” (personal interview, April 19 2013).

Shortly, Gus Dur complemented the legacy which is inherited to his own capabilities. This is the answer to the question, why did this “*Gus*” become more famous and respected than some other *Gus* (an honorary nickname for sons of prominent *Kiai*) although they have similar position and charisma's legacy from their ancestors.

Portraying Gus Dur as “the complete person” is also similar to what people think in Tebuireng. Pak Trisno, the head of the Merchants Association, says that Gus Dur's tomb deserves to be pilgrimage destination since Gus Dur was famous for the diverse roles he played during his lifetime. He said, “It is because Gus Dur had great attributes: he was a *Kia*, NU leader, had good relationships with overseas and could embrace people from other religions” (personal interview, February 01 2013).

The next question, is this relevant to Gus Dur's sainthood? This is an interesting question that could be a major challenge to the mainstream

understanding of the notion of *Wali* in Java. When people in Tebuireng were asked what are the essential factors in Gus Dur's sainthood, most of them briefly answered this question in a similar tone reflecting two factors that are often cited in relation to the phenomenon of sainthood, including Gus Dur's sainthood.

The first is a common view about the recognition of someone who is able to be called as a saint. It is *nyleneb*, the eccentric or "bizarre" attitude usually exhibited by a saint. It is an attribute of character that logically seems very difficult to understand. Only certain people (*kebos*) can understand it well. This factor has demarcated a new area of sainthood which is mostly for people who have mystical components in their make-up.

Many pilgrims in Tebuireng agree that Gus Dur is a perfect example of figure to this attribute. But the *nyleneb* phenomenon has invariably been associated with controversy. As we know, Gus Dur has often engaged in controversial actions that could not be understood at the time they occurred. Kosasih (2000) compiled an excellent account of Gus Dur's many controversial actions and attributes in his book *Hak Gus Dur untuk Nyleneb* (Gus Dur's Right to be Eccentric), such as, the idea of indigenizing Islam within Indonesia's cultural climate, the replacement of *Assalamu'alaikum* (a characteristic Islamic greeting) with *Selamat Pagi* (good morning), his presence at the congress of the PGI (*Persatuan Gereja Indonesia*/Indonesian Church Union), his strong opposition to ICMI (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia*/Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals Association), his founding and chairmanship of FORDEM (*Forum Demokrasi*/Democracy Forum) and many other actions during and after the Reformation Era (Kosasih 2000, 14).

Using Kosasih's words (2000, 15), this *nylenebism* should have damaged the image of Gus Dur as a religious leader who might have been expected to show concern for the strengthening of orthodox ethics, and

whose teaching should always have encouraged people to move towards religious purity. *Nyelenebism* should have been considered as something putrid, something that a properly ethical view would never have allowed to appear since it would have brought total ignominy upon its doer. However, this did not happen to Gus Dur. On the contrary, the widespread understanding in Indonesia that *nyleneb* is a sign of sainthood saved Gus Dur from the accusation of flawed character and ethics. Kosasih (2000, 16) concluded, “*Itulah Gus Dur, seorang “Waliyullah”. Dengan segala sikap nyelenebnya, dia adalah fenomena unik dalam sejarah Indonesia kontemporer*”. (There he is, Gus Dur, a friend of God. With all of his eccentric attitudes, he is a unique phenomenon in the history of contemporary Indonesia).

The concept of *nyleneb* in Islamic Sufism may be closely allied in meaning with the notion of *khariqul ‘adah* (deviating from what is publicly normal). Gus Dur himself (2010, 88-94) employed this term to describe Gus Miek (a charismatic NU’s *Kiai*, also often regarded as a saint: in Bruinessen, 2012) when Gus Miek showed him a plot of land, as the place where he (Gus Miek), *Kiai Ahmad Shiddiq* (another charismatic leader of NU), and Gus Dur himself would be buried in the future. Gus Miek’s utterance proved prophetic one year later when *Kiai Ahmad Shiddiq* passed away and was buried at that spot. Though Gus Dur tried to clarify his understanding of *khariqul ‘adah* without reference to mystical notions, and his explanation admits that many people agreed that Gus Miek’s attitude showed the relevance of *khariqul ‘adah* as a sign of sainthood. (Now, Gus Miek’s prophecy is not a hundred percent true since Gus Dur was buried in Tebuireng, meanwhile Gus Miek remained buried together there with *Kiai Ahmad Shiddiq* in 1993).

A second factor in the modern construction of sainthood is that, although most of people in Tebuireng have a perception that *khariqul ‘adah* is one important sign of the sainthood, this understanding seems not to be enough to elevate an individual to the status of true saint. They cite

the Arabic phrase *La ya'riful wali illal wali* (nobody knows a saint except a saint) (personal interview, January 27 and April 20, 27 2013). In this sense, the recognition of sainthood by lay people is perfectly closed. It is kind of vicious circle, in which saints can recognize one another, but non-saints cannot. Yet, how do people recognize someone as a saint, if conceptually it will never happen?

The people and pilgrims at Tebuireng admit that they can never know for sure whether someone is a “true” saint. However, they do believe that the signs of Gus Dur’s sainthood are everywhere (Christomy, 2008 as an example to discuss the signs of a *Wali*). The increasing numbers of pilgrims has become principal reason why they believed that Gus Dur is a *Wali*. The pilgrimage phenomenon has tightly bound the people to an understanding that when someone passed away, and afterwards many people visited and prayed over his grave, this affirms that person’s sainthood. However, the pilgrimage phenomenon on its own will not directly convince people to say someone is a *Wali*. Pilgrimage to the holy tombs is a deeply entrenched cultural practice among the Javanese but they need more than this to recognize someone as a saint. Based on Quinn (2007), the recognition of sainthood will be related to at least two things, the high level of piety and mystical component. This combination seems to be taken for granted and nobody disputes the combination. It seems that Gus Dur has qualified those two things without any doubt from people in Tebuireng.

Interestingly, although many people believed that Gus Dur is a *Wali*, there was still no agreement that he is the tenth saint of Java. Pak Bandi, a Tebuireng local people, expresses his view that the tenth saint is no more than a number. “It is only a number in the series of pilgrimage visits,” he says, “and pilgrims feel something is lacking if they visit the tombs of the Nine Saints without also visiting Gus Dur’s grave”. His view is simple and straightforward. There is nothing special in the name “the tenth saint”. It is simply the tenth destination in a pilgrimage itinerary. Expressing an

opinion different from Pak Bandi's, Pak Latif, also a local people, clearly rejected the idea of tenth saint. "The *Wali Songo* is an established name for the saints in Java. They will always be nine in number, there will never ever be any additions, until the end of time," he reckoned (personal interview, April 19 2013). He told me that the *Wali Songo* will always be nine forever. If one saint passed away, another saint will replace him.

Another opinion seems to be more equivocal. *Kiai* Amin, a pilgrim from Jember, East Java (personal interview, April 20 2013), and also Gus Sholah (personal interview, April 19 2013) believe that the recognition of Gus Dur as the tenth saint depends on people's or pilgrims' opinion. Gus Sholah himself divides the recognition of sainthood into two views, the religious and the social view. Gus Dur will be a *Wali*, and even the tenth saint, if the people socially assume it. However, we will not be able to truly determine this from religious teachings, "because nobody knows a saint except another saint" said Gus Sholah. *Kiai* Amin, on the other hand, seems to give up on this question and leaves it to God to decide.

Conclusion

The social construction of sainthood lies in a broad-based understanding of Sufism and mysticism in Java. It appears in the way people recognize an individual as a saint in real life. The *Wali Songo*, as the most famous saints in Java have been recognized on the basis of two main factors: fulfilling the role of Islamic propagators and the exercise of magical power called *kearomah*, an extraordinary and unusual ability to do something. In the course of time, this understanding has apparently evolved and flourished, turning into new perceptions and understandings. The recent phenomenon of Gus Dur's sainthood in Tebuireng suggests that the more modern constructions of the sainthood are more narrowly based than the two broad factors that have traditionally defined the *Wali Songo's* sainthood.

Although there is a widespread acceptance of Gus Dur's sainthood, the issue that Gus Dur is the tenth saint in Java remains controversial and debatable. Many people seem not to take this issue seriously. There are different opinions and reasons over whether Gus Dur should be accepted as the Tenth Saint in Java, though in Tebuireng, there appears to be an attempt to recognize this status. These disagreements emerge over two issues. The first is about the problem of time. The Nine Saints had already existed in Java long before the life of Gus Dur. Secondly, some pilgrims think that a comparison between Gus Dur and the Nine Saints of Java is difficult to make, because Gus Dur and the Nine Saints have had such widely different roles and actions in their respective times and lives. Therefore, the issue of Gus Dur as the tenth saint in Java is still evolving, unfinished, and has not been thoroughly agreed by the people and pilgrims in Tebuireng.

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