

## Marking Sacred Time and Sacred Place in The Grave of Sunan Pandan Aran

Usman

Research Center for Society and Culture, Indonesian Institute of Sciences

[asyqi\\_wahidi@yahoo.com](mailto:asyqi_wahidi@yahoo.com)

### Abstract:

*This study analyzes Islamic relations and traditions in the Pilgrimage ritual debate. The subject matter of the study emphasizes the aspects of timing and place of pilgrimage as important in the zairah procession. Through qualitative research, with the setting of the Tomb of Sunan Pandan Aran, data was obtained from interviews, observation and documentation. This study succeeded in revealing the grave pilgrimage debate in the contestation of traditional and modernist Islam. On the other hand, the community believes that the right time and day are important elements in the success of the pilgrimage. Making a pilgrimage in the middle of the night, especially on Tuesday and Friday nights becomes a determinant in the pilgrimage ritual. They feel fear, admiration, love, joy. These religious feelings are important things that make them miss, so they always want to come back again and again. The tomb of Sunan Pandan Aran is believed to be a holy place, the place of prayer for pilgrims is granted, and is considered sacred and mystical as a religious narrative of the community.*

**Keywords:** Religion, Culture, Pilgrimage, Tradition, Prayer.

### INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, tradition of pilgrimage to grave is not a new religious phenomenon, but it could be considered as an ancient tradition which was practiced by Jews, Christians, Buddhists, and Hindus. It means Muslims only continue the tradition. Actually it was an ancient tradition; but it still relevant to study because the tradition always changes time by time. It is also interesting because the local tradition will influence the tradition of pilgrimage. For instance, the tradition of pilgrimage in Javanese culture is closely related to the tradition of Hinduism. Then Islam adopted the tradition and acculturated with the local tradition, and it becomes popularly a new religious phenomenon called ziarah. Following Durkheim's idea, I can say that religious phenomena were classified into two basic categories: beliefs and rites. Beliefs are states of opinion which consist of representation, while rites are particular modes of action. (Emile Durkheim, 1995: 34).

From this explanation, I argue that ziarah could be considered as rite because in ziarah there are many particular modes of action such as saying prayers, reciting the holy books, and so forth. In further explanation, Durkheim distinguished the difference

between rites and other human practices. For him, the presence of the special nature of their object is the characteristic to differentiate between rites and other human practices. In the case of ziarah, the special nature of their object is the presence of the "holy" (sacred) grave as the visited object. In addition to rite, Durkheim also mentioned the importance of belief behind the rite. In brief, I can say that people conduct ziarah because they have certain beliefs to the object. They also have certain purposes in doing so. Because of the certain beliefs and purposes, the pilgrims always give more attentions to the exact time and place in practicing ziarah.

Now let me talk in brief about ziarah in Islamic view. Andre Moller wrote that not all parts of ummat are overly enthusiastic about this practice, however: Sufis and traditionalists are generally in favor of the concept, whereas repeated criticism is heard from the modernist camp. (Andre Moller, 2007, 266). The debate between Islamic traditionalists and modernists related the position of ziarah. Some scholars reject ziarah, and they categorized ziarah as bid'ah (invention). It means that ziarah is forbidden. Whereas other scholars stated that ziarah is mubah (something which is allowed) or even it is sunnah (recommended).

From this debate, we can simply recognize that the visitors of the grave are mostly Muslim traditionalists. It does not mean that all traditionalists are uneducated people; even the highly educated people or very interested people still conduct ziarah. It seems irrational but it really happens in Indonesia. Indeed, for some people such as politician or entrepreneur, the ziarah cannot be separated from political interest or economical gain. But I want to emphasize here that the ziarah had become part of Indonesian people, mostly traditionalist Javanese people. To conduct ziarah, some of Javanese people intentionally set up time and save money. Usually they conduct ziarah in group. So, we can see many groups of pilgrims in the sites of ziarah, including in the Sunan Pandan Aran's grave.

In the context of Javanese tradition, the most popular graves to be visited in ziarah are the grave of Wali Song (nine saints), the kings, the founders of Islamic boarding schools, and the sultans. In other words, many Javanese Muslims have performed pilgrimage (ziarah) to one of the graves of the Wali Sanga, or to other local respected figures. (Andre Moller, 2007: 266). One of sultan's grave which is often visited is the grave of Sultan Pandan Aran or Sunan Tembayat. Administratively the grave of Sunan Pandan Aran is on the village of Paseban, Bayat sub-district, Klaten, Central Java. The grave of Sunan Pandan Aran located in Cokrokembang Mountain which is east of the Jabalkat Mountain.

Thus, this article will focus on two things as my research questions. Firstly, why the time of ziarah becomes importance among visitors? Secondly, what is the consequence of the existence of holy places? Basically, the article was also written with a qualitative approach that produces descriptive data. The data is based on literature review and in-depth interviews with key informants such as juru kunci, the pilgrims, the florists, the village officials, the local residents, and religious leaders. For participation observation, I conduct ziarah in this grave from afternoon until the middle of the night. The data and findings of field trip will be analyzed by using some social theories on religion, including: Emile Durkheim, William James, Rudolf Otto, and Mircea Eliade. From William James, Rudolf Otto, and Mircea Eliade, I will use their concepts to explain and answer the first research question. For example, some pilgrims felt the unity with God; when they visit the grave. In this case, James' theory is very relevant to explain this personal religious experience where he stated that religion shall mean for us the feelings, acts, and experiences

of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend to stand in relation whatever they may consider the divine. (Daniel L Pals, 1996: 175).

In the similar tone, Otto's theory is also significant to understand the personal religious experience. In his term such experience called as "mysterium tremendum." While Eliade's and Emil Durkheim theory will be used to answer the second research question. For instance, there are some people who prefer conduct ziarah in the grave of Sunan Pandan Aran's rather than other graves because they have a thought that the grave of Sunan Pandan Aran is the most sacred grave. In this context, the concept about the sacred and the profane will be useful to analyze this case.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Correct Timing for Successful Ziarah**

The visitors of the grave always notice the correct time and day when they will visit the grave. The successful of ziarah will depend on the right time and the right day, although, in fact, some visitors did not give any attention the time and the day. Some graves have different appropriate time to be visited. In the case of Sunan's grave, the exact day for ziarah are the nights preceding Legi Tuesday and Legi Friday (Malam Selasa and Malam Jum'at) because it is related to the day of birth and death of Sunan. Usually in Islamic Javanese view, the beneficial day and time to pray is the kliwon Friday night because it is believed as the most sacred day. But in Sunan's grave the best day to visit is legi Tuesday and Friday night. One of the Guardians of the Keys (juru kunci), Mulyono, explains that legi Tuesday and Friday are related to the birth and death of Sunan. Thus, the visitors who want get more blessing (barakah) should consider the day. Consequently the number of pilgrims increased sharply in the mentioned two nights every month, while the most visited month yearly is the month of Rajab and Ruwah. It is related to the Javanese traditions called as nyekar and nyadran. (Personal interview, December 30, 2013).

Now let me take more explanation about the importance of correct time during ziarah. I will use the Eliade's concept about time. According to Mircea Eliade, for religious man time is neither homogenous nor continuous. (Mircea Eliade, 1987: 68). Without homogeneity and continuity of the time ziarah can be practiced anytime, but to get more successful they have to consider the exact time, because in the time of ziarah there is religious moment that cannot be explained by words. As Eliade said, furthermore, there are the intervals of a sacred time during the time of festival (in this case, I can say, "during the time of ziarah). Every religious festival, any liturgical time, represents the re-actualization of a sacred event that took place in a mythical past. (Mircea Eliade, 1987: 68). In the context of ziarah the sacred time appears when the visitors are saying prayers or reciting the Holy Qur'an in front of the Sunan's grave. Then, they think that it is the best time to ask something to the God in that time. Thus, sacred time is indefinitely recoverable, indefinitely repeatable. (Mircea Eliade, 1987: 69). From this, we can understand the reason why some visitors of the Sunan's grave conduct ziarah many times. Sometimes they conduct ziarah in the morning and in the afternoon, and another time they choose the time of ziarah in the evening or even in the middle of the night. Generally speaking, the most favorable time for visiting the graves, in general, is in the evening or in the middle of the night.

Afterwards the time of visiting the grave is closely related to the religious feeling. I will use William James concept to analyze the religious feelings related to the practicing ziarah. William James explained about religious feeling into many categories such as

religious fear, religious love, religious awe, religious joy, and so forth. (William James, 2002: 27). In practicing ziarah, some people have different feelings. For example, Adi Nugroho said that ziarah makes him feel fear because he strongly believed that ziarah will make him closer to the God. When he looks at the Sunan's grave, suddenly he remembers the death. So, for him ziarah can be useful to control his self from worldly tendencies. (Personal interview, December 30, 2013). In the term of William James, religious fear is only the ordinary fear of commerce, so to speak, the common quaking of the human breast, in so far as the notion of divine retribution may arouse it. (William James, 2002: 27). In addition to religious fear, he also feels awe when he visited the Sunan's grave. Thus, ziarah inspired him to do the best things for his life in order to follow the Sunan's teachings. This kind of feel, according to William James, is the same organic thrill which we feel in a forest at twilight, or in a mountain gorge; only this time it comes over us at the thought of our supernatural relations; and similarly of all the various sentiments which may be called into play in the lives of religious persons. (William James, 2002: 27).

### **Sacred Place for Guaranteed Wish**

Before discussing the holy place in the Sunan's grave, I will briefly explain the concept of holy place. John Renard divided holy places in two kinds of overlapping sacred geography: global/universal and local/regional. Muslims have always been keenly aware of living in a global religious setting whose center is the Arabian city of Mecca. (John Renard, 2008: 188). As it is commonly known that in Arabian city there are two sacred places: Mecca and Media which is commonly called as a haramain (two sacred places). In Mecca, there is the most sacred thing called the Ka'bah (a roughly cube-shaped structure). The structure of Ka'bah existed during the lifetime of Muhammad, and Islamic lore reports, variously, that it came into being in the time of Adam and that God commanded Abraham and his son Isma'il to rebuild it, or that Abraham initiated the structure. Some scholars argued about the emergence of Ka'bah. I do not want to follow their debates. Either way, the Ka'bah symbolizes many centuries of spiritual questing and reconnoitering, for it was a destination for pilgrims long before Muhammad's time. (John Renard, 2008: 188). In other words, the pilgrimage to the Ka'bah had become religious tradition for a long time before Muhammad's life, and Muhammad continued the tradition. In Islamic view, the pilgrimage to the Ka'bah is popularly known as a visiting two sacred places (Ziaratul Haramain) which is then used as one of the pillars of Islam, called as Hajj. In my opinion, this is the basis of ziarah among Muslims traditions in general. Afterwards the practical form and physical object of ziarah change from generation to generation depending on the place and local culture. Stricly speaking, the understanding of ziarah refers to visiting grave. Thus, time and place intersect in important ways in the beliefs and practices of all religious traditions. Although some accounts of ritual feature extraordinary ecstatic behavior at shrines, most shrine activities are more orderly and reserved. (John Renard, 2008: 210).

Now let me discuss about holy place in Javanese tradition. Nelly van Doorn-Harder and Kees de Jong write that:

"Basically, sites for *ziarah* on Java are the graves of Muslim saints or Muslim kings and nobles. For example, the graves of the wali sanga, the founders of Islam on Java, draw visitors from all over the archipelago, while many graves of Muslim leaders, mystics, or initiators of pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), the kyai, are

of local importance. Pilgrimages are also made to sites situated in impressive natural landscapes, for example, mountaintops and caverns often considered to be holy places, loci of spiritual and magical forces. Popular belief holds that a grave on top of a mountain considerably adds to the atmosphere of holiness. Thus, several graves of Muslim saints are situated on tops of mountains."

Nelly van Doorn-Harder and Kees de Jong (2006: 325)

The Sunan's grave located in the Cokrokembang Mountain which is believed as the highest and the most sacred area, and it is east of the Jabalkat Mountain. Administratively the grave of Sunan Pandan Aran is on the village of Pabean, Bayat sub-district, Klaten, Central Java. Within the complex of Sunan Pandan Aran, there are two mosques which are relatively intact and used as a place of prayer for pilgrims, the Sunan's grave complex is divided into six areas, each of which is separated by a circumferential wall and gate entrance. The grave of Sunan Pandan Aran located in the top area which is believed as the highest and the most sacred area. For visitors who want to conduct *ziarah* in Sunan's grave should follow the rules of *ziarah*. There are five rules. Firstly, the visitors have to register and show their identity card. Secondly, the visitors who want to be overnight should permit to the village government. Thirdly, the couple visitors should show marriage licenses. Fourthly, the grave care takers will guide the visitors during *ziarah*. Fifthly, the visitors are not allowed to sleep or take a rest inside the grave of Sunan Pandan Aran. Sixthly, the visitors should keep silence and calm.

Now let me explain how to enter the grave of Sunan Pandan Aran. It will show the importance of sacred places among visitors. The grave of Sunan Pandan Aran which is located in Tembayat's hill was likely the center of a pre-Islamic sacred site, and the story of Pandan Arang's appropriation of the site effectively claimed the holy place in the name of Islam. (John Renard, 2008: 208). All visitors will enter to the area of Sunan Pandan Aran's grave through Segara Muncur gate. It is the first gate that will be seen by them. The gate is near parking area, and there is traditional market, especially for souvenirs. The Segara Muncur gate looks like a temple. The second gate called as Dhuda gate. This is the starting point for the visitors to climb the stairs into the grave of Sunan Pandan Aran. The total number of the stairs is 300 approximately. Before entering the third gate, which called as Pangrangtungan gate, all visitors should take off their sandals. It show the sacredness of the Sunan's grave. According to Mircea Eliade, for religious man, space is not homogeneous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others. (Mircea Eliade, 1987: 20). And then, he gave an example about Moses who put off his shoes in the holy ground. The Moses' story was commonly known among Judaists, Christians, and Muslims. It means the concept of holy place is essential for religious men. There is, then, a sacred space, and hence a strong, significant space; there are other spaces that are not sacred and so are without structure or consistency, amorphous. (Mircea Eliade, 1987: 20).

Afterwards the visitors will enter to Pangrangtungan gate. In this area there are two wards which called as Nglebet ward and Jawi ward. The first ward is provided for a place of rest for women visitors and children. The second ward is provided for men visitors. Beside two wards, there is a space for registration. Before entering the grave, all visitors should register in this place. For visitors who want to pass the night in the sunan's grave, should inform to the village government. Without any recommendation from the village government, *juru kunci* will prohibit, and the maximum for overnight is three days.

According to Mulyono, this is the new rule. Several years earlier, there is no strict rule for overnight. The rule is actually for anticipation from a crime. For example, a fugitive might make the grave as a hiding place. (Personal interview, December 30, 2013).

In registration place, usually juru kunci asks visitors for charity. There is no minimum or maximum limitation on the charity. After finishing registration the visitors will step to the next gate which called as Panemut gate. This is the fourth gate, and we can see the graves of Pandan Aran's companions in this area. We can feel the sacred situation when we entered this area. The fifth, the sixth, and the seventh gate are Pamuncar gate, Bale Kencur gate, and Prabayeksa gate respectively. This is the last gate toward the grave of Sunan Pandan Aran. In this area, we can see a big barrel. Historically speaking, Sunan Pandan Aran used the barrel to perform ablution (wudhu). The man who was responsible to fill the water in the barrel was Syekh Domba, one of his students. The last is Regol Sinaga gate. From this gate, the visitors will enter the grave. The door's gate is deliberately small and relatively narrow, so visitors should be careful when entering the door. They should be lowered in order to enter. Tomb of Sunan Pandan Aran is located in a fairly large room. The tomb was covered with a white cloth. Not all the visitors are allowed to enter this room. Usually the visitors sit lined up around the room.

The above description shows the importance of holy place in Islamic tradition or Javanese tradition to be exact. The holy place refers to the concept of sacred. In this case, we can understand the concept through Durkheim theory. He establishes the sacred/profane dichotomy as the fundamental characteristic of religious phenomena. Sacred things are things "set apart and forbidden." We generally call things "holy" if extraordinary properties are held to be inherent in them. (Terry F Godlove JR, [ed.], 2005: 60). Because of the sacredness of the holy place, we can see the visitors' attitude during the time of ziarah. Some of them really appreciate the existence of the grave and other things. Their appreciation is sometimes shown by kissing the wall of building which covers the grave, or by smearing the white cloth on the wall with perfume. Other visitors seem to appreciate the grave with kissing the tombstone, and lay wreath at the existing tomb in the complex. They believe everything that was in the complex is the sacred and keramat, adapting the Arabic term for "marvel" or "saintly miracle" and applying it to virtually every object or place associated with religious practices as well as to a host of sacred items with little or no connection to Islam. (John Renard, 2008: 207).

## CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, I conclude the ziarah which is considered as an acculturation between Javanese culture and Islamic tradition becomes a popular living tradition in Indonesia. Recently the ziarah is not limited to the site of Wali Songo (Nine Sanits), but it goes broader to the sites which are believed as sacred place such as the grave of kings or sultans. The grave of Sunan Pandan Aran can be categorized as the site of sultan. There is significant increase of the number of the visitors in the Sunan's grave from day to day. Especially in the night of Legi Tuesday and Friday, the number of the pilgrims will increase dramatically. Many pilgrims has known and believed that these two nights are the most sacred day to conduct ziarah.

They believed that the successful of ziarah will depend on the right time and the right day. The most favorable time to conduct ziarah is in the middle of the night, especially in these two nights. Some visitors acknowledge that in such moments they can enjoy the ziarah. During the ziarah, they feel fear, awe, love, joy, and so forth. These religious

feelings are an essential thing that makes them yearning, so they always want to come back again and again. In addition to the religious feelings, some of the pilgrims believe that the ziarah support them to be more religious people. Others asserted that the ziarah make their lives happier, easier, and more blessing (*berkah*).

Another reason that drives them to perform the ziarah is the existence of certain belief claimed that the grave of Sunan Pandan Aran is the most sacred place, so they are willing to sacrifice, take the time and save money in order to be able to go to the grave of Sunan Pandan Aran, because many pilgrims come from far region such as West Java and East Java. Because of the sacredness of the Sunan's grave, they believe that if they say a prayer here, then their prayer will be answered faster and sooner. In fact, most people assume that the ziarah in the grave of Sunan Pandan Aran can guarantee any kinds of wishes. In brief, they say that if you have an urgent eagerness, you can make a wish in the sunan's grave. Finally, the implication of the article will encourage the scholars, researchers, and academics to conduct more intensive researches to map the sacred sites in Indonesia which are frequently visited or rarely known. The maps are very useful to explain the diversity of Indonesian religious traditions and to understand the process of the acculturation between religious traditions, Islamic tradition for instance, and local culture.

## REFERENCES

- Durkheim, Emile, 1995. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Translation and introduction by Karen E. Fields. The United States of America: The Free Press.
- Eliade, Mircea, 1987. *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*. The United States of America: Harcourt, Inc.
- Godlove JR, Terry F (ed.), 2005. *Teaching Durkheim*. New York: Oxford University.
- Guillot, Claude, 2002. "The Tembayat Hill: Clergy and Royal Power in Central Java From the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century," translated by Jean Couteu, in *The Potent Dead: Ancestors, Saints, and Heroes in Contemporary Indonesia*, edited by Henri Chambert-Loir & Anthony Reid. North America: University of Hawaii Press.
- Doorn-Harder, Nelly van & Kees de Jong, 2006. "The Pilgrimage to Tembayat: Tradition and Revival in Islamic Mysticism in Contemporary Indonesia," in *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, edited by Ibrahim Abu-Rabi'. The United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd.
- Moller, Andre, 2007. *Ramadhan in Java: the Joy and Jihad of Ritual Fasting*. Sweden: Lund University.
- Otto, Rudolf, 1958. *The Idea of the Holy*. The United States of America: Oxford University Press.
- Pals, Daniel L., 1996. *Seven Theories of Religion*. New York: Oxford University.
- Renard, John, 2008. *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment, and Servant hood*. London: University of California Press, Ltd.

