

THE ONENESS OF GOD

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**THE ONENESS OF GOD WITHIN THE
LOCAL TRADITIONS OF NUSANTARA ISLAM:**

The Theo-Anthropological-Interpretive Research
On Sasak Muslims in Lombok

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Abstract: This study aims to elucidate Nusantara Islam and finds the concept of oneness of God within the Sasak Muslim traditions as analytical tool to understand Nusantara Islam in the local context of Lombok. God is only one, but ways of finding “The One” vary. Islamic teachings manifest in local traditions are termed Nusantara Islam. In this study, Nusantara Islam is analyzed theoretically and practically regarding Sasak Muslim traditions. This study uses a qualitative approach and employs the interpretive paradigm and Theo-anthropological perspective. This study shows that Nusantara Islam in Lombok can be observed through various religious concepts, practices and rituals, such as *mulut* (the celebration of Prophet’s birthday), *maleman* (last ten days of fasting Ramadan month) and *rowab* (sending prayer to the dead). *Tawhīd* or the notion of One God lies behind these traditions. *Tawhīd* is more than just the notion of oneness of God; it is a worldview manifesting not only in spiritual domains but also in socio-cultural spheres.

Keywords: Nusantara Islam, Theo-Anthropology, Religious Concepts, Ritual, Polytheist, and the Oneness of God

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SASAK Muslim traditions can be viewed as one of the representations of Nusantara Islam. However, this statement brings about a controversy. First, Nusantara Islam remains a debatable concept. Second, Sasak Muslim traditions are often considered polytheist, heretic, and syncretic forms of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Therefore, it is essential to describe and disentangle this controversy through the Theo-anthropology perspective. Anthropology is used because religions such as Islam will not be understood comprehensively without studying where and how religion interacts with its adherents. The interpretive paradigm is used to comprehend religious meanings hidden within the observed rituals.

Nusantara Islam is one of the popular issues nowadays. Some big events used Nusantara Islam as the theme of their agenda. One of them was the 33rd conference of Nahdatul ‘Ulama held in Jombang on August 1-5, 2015. Nusantara Islam is, in fact, not a new concept. Some people perceive Nusantara Islam negatively as a polytheist activity, heresy, or a kind of deviation in Islam. On the other hand, some people view Nusantara Islam as the manifestation of universality in a locality to make Islamic teachings adaptable and sustainable at any time, place, and condition while maintaining essential Islamic teachings. In this context, Azra states that Nusantara Islam is distinctive Islam resulting from the vivid, intense, and dynamic interaction, contextualization, indigenization, and vernacularization of universal Islam with Indonesian social, cultural, and religious realities.¹ It means that Nusantara Islam is a fair way of universal Islam in its interaction with local traditions.

Another term used in describing Nusantara Islam is glocalization. The term of glocalization derives from “global” and “local”. This term is typically used in the business world, but it is now used in other study fields such as theology, sociology, and anthropology of religion. Glocalization is defined as a

¹Azyumardi Azra: “Islam Nusantara adalah Kita,” <http://fab.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/20-articles/kolom-fabim/197-islam-nusantara-adalah-kita> (accessed August 25, 2015).

mixture of globalization and localization.² It illustrates that globality is not just a label but is also manifest in the locality. The interaction between globality and locality is a must to create a co-presence between the global and the local. The use of globality to portray Nusantara Islam is based on Robertson's statement cited by Sarma, "According to a sociologist, Robertson, who is credited with popularizing the term, glocalization describes the tempering effects of local conditions on global pressures. At the 1997 conference on "Globalization and Indigenous Culture," Robertson said that glocalization means "the simultaneity -the co-presence- of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies."³ Glocalization is necessary for the sustainability of any ideas such as universal Islamic teachings worldwide.

Nusantara Islam Is Not A Theology

Many people state that Nusantara Islam is not a theology since it is just the way of how the universal Islamic teachings coming from Saudi Arabia are implemented all over the world. In this case, according to Nasution, it is well known that theology studies principles of religion. Anybody intending to understand his or her religion deeply needs to study theology.⁴ In the Arabic terminology, theology is called as *uṣūl al-dīn*, *ilm al-kalām*, or *tawḥīd*. Theology derives from *theos* and *logos*. According to el-Ders, theology is related to God in Abrahamic religious traditions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and also in theologies developed by humans such as natural theology or philosophical theology.⁵ To be functional, theology can be

²<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/glocalization.html>, accessed August 25, 2015.

³Deepti Sharma, "A Study of Glocalization: Concept As A Current Trend in Indian Economy", *SVIM e-Journal of Applied Management* 1, no. 1 (January-June 2013): 124, <http://svimi.org/ejournal/downloads/vollissue1/10.pdf>, accessed September 1st, 2015

⁴Harun Nasution, *Teologi Islam: Aliran-Aliran, Sejarah Analisa Perbandingan* (Jakarta: Universitas Indonesia Press, 2002), ix.

⁵Referring to Ahmadie Thaha & A.Ilyas Ismail, islamic universalism may be seen from the concept of *tawḥīd* in Islam. The concept teach us the oneness of God which means that Allah is God for all universes. It

approached through different ways. One of the approaches to studying theology is anthropology. Theology and anthropology have been used for a long time to study Christianity especially in human cultural relationship with God. According to Abdulloh Hadziq, cited by Umam, theology will be in vain if it only talks about God and credos. Ideally, theology must have significance for the practical life of the community (*umma*).⁶ He also states that theology accompanies the limited logic of religious community, religion's adherents, and certain credos followers.⁷ Besides, a popular statement from a Scottish historian, Gibb, is useful to mention. Gibb, cited by Yatim, states that Islam is, indeed, much more than a system of theology, it is an entire civilization.⁸ Based on these reasons, Nusantara Islam is not a theology but it studies a lot of things related to theology. In other words, Nusantara Islam integrates the theo-anthropological perspective in studying religion.

Responses To Nusantara Islam

Indonesians have responded the concept of Nusantara Islam differently. There are at least two responses with different and unique reasons.

First, some people accept Nusantara Islam theoretically and practically based on theological, sociological, and anthropological considerations. The universality of Islam will not be actualized without locality. Historically, the Indonesian community received Islam well because of its suitable orthodoxy. Arabs are different from Indonesians. Arabs hold the Hambali's orthodoxy, which tends towards a textual

illustrates that Allah is not for certain group of people (ethnic, nation, etc) but for all men on this world. For more detailed and comprehensive explanation, see Ahmadie Thaha & A. Ilyas Ismail, "Universalisme Islam dan Kosmopolitisme Peradaban Islam," in *Kebudayaan Spritual Masyarakat Modern, Respon dan Transformasi Nilai-Nilai Islam Menuju Masyarakat Madani*, ed. Nurcholis Madjid (Jakarta: Media Cita, 2000), 356.

⁶M. Helmi Umam, "Cosmo-theology of Islam Indonesia," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 2, no. 2 (2012): 322.

⁷Ibid., 323.

⁸Badri Yatim, *Sejarah Peradaban Islam, Dirasah Islamiyah II* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2001): 3.

approach in the interpretation of Islamic teachings while Indonesians hold the Shafii's orthodoxy in Islamic jurisprudence and al-Ghazali's orthodoxy in Sufism. Besides, Nusantara Islam had been practiced by the Nine Saints (*Wali Songo*) when they initiated the first interaction of Islam with the local community. The Nine Saints also applied contextualization and vernacularization of Islamic teachings within the local traditions. These methods made universal Islam brought from Saudi Arabia received well and welcomed by the local community at that time. The dialectic between the universal and the local in Islamic teachings also resulted in complex Islam. The Nine Saints (*Walisongo*) actualized their missions successfully. Theologically, God (Allah) is the Creator of all creatures. God does not create only Muslims and Arabs. He is God for all over the world. Therefore, Islam is a universal teaching (*rahmatan li al-'alamīn*). This concept is defined by looking at *al-'alamīn* as a plural form of *al-'alam*. This shows that the *al-'alamīna* (plural) of al-Qur'an can be actualized with the *'al-'alam* (singular).⁹

Second, the others refuse Nusantara Islam based on the same argument as those who accept it. According to them, *rahmatan li al-'alamīn* means that Islam is a complete religion, universal, and needs no locality; and thus, there is no local term or concept of Islam. They also acknowledge that the Nine Saints (*Walisongo*) played a role in the Islamization in Indonesia. Nonetheless, they believe that the Nine Saints (*Walisongo*) transformed Nusantara into Islam and not vice versa. They rely their argument on the the Qur'an:

الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا

*This day, I have perfected your religion for you, complete my favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.*¹⁰

This group often interprets Islamic teachings textually without the contextualization and regards Saudi Arabia as Islam. They do not realize that Saudi Arabia was only the first

⁹See A.W. Munawwir, *Kamus Al-Munawwir, Arab-Indonesia Terlengkap*, (Yogyakarta: Unit Pengadaan Buku-Buku Ilmiah Keagamaan Pondok Pesantren Al-Munawwir Krapyak, 1984), 1037.

¹⁰Qs. Al-Māidah (5): 3.

place/local of Islamic teaching interaction. They attach several labels to Nusantara Islam such as *bidh'ab dalālah*, polytheism, and syncretism. This group is also well known as puritan or the purification movement. One of their jargons is “back to al-Qur’ān and Hadits (*al-rujū’ ila al-Qur’ān wa al-ḥadīts*).¹¹

Based on different ideas of Nusantara Islam above, this study explored the ideas of the group who accept Nusantara Islam as a portrait of the Islam dialectic in Indonesia. Nusantara Islam shows that Islam is universally applicable in any place, time, and condition. According to Oliver Roy, cited by Misrawi, Nusantara Islam is a way to maintain religious universalism.¹²

Nusantara Islam in the al-Qur’ān

It seems that searching for the word “Nusantara Islam” in the Qur’an is a useless effort because there is no such term in it. In this case, it is crucial to mention Nasser’s view in his book entitled *Ideas and Reality in Islam*. He states that the Qur’an is a prototype of all books symbolizing knowledge.¹³ Nevertheless, the Qur’an does not describe everything systematically. It provides only general guidance for human life. In fact, it is feasible to find the concept of Nusantara Islam in the Qur’an. First of all, the definition, method, content, and goals of Nusantara Islam should be defined. The followings are the ways of understanding Nusantara Islam.

Nusantara Islam as a method

Nusantara Islam shows that Islam should be delivered in methods suitable to its audience. Nusantara Islam relates to the communication principles mentioned in the Qur’an such as *qawlan balīgha*,¹⁴ *qawlan sadīda*,¹⁵ and *qawlan ma’rūfa*.¹⁶ Those terms

¹¹Fawaizul Umam, *Reposisi Islam Reposisi Ajaran* (Mataram: LEPPIM IAIN Mataram, 2011), 105.

¹²Zuhairi Misrawi, “Islam Emansipatoris, Dari Tafsir Menuju Pembebasan,” in *Islam Emansipatoris, Menafsir Teks Untuk Praksis Pembebasan*, ed. Very Verdiansyah (Jakarta: P3M and Ford Foundation, 2004), xxix.

¹³Hossein Nasser, *Ideals and Realities in Islam* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1972), 37.

¹⁴Qs. Al-Nisā’ (4): 63.

¹⁵Qs. Al-Nisā’ (4): 9.

indicate that Islam should be taught not only in right ways but also in accurate ones with considerations about realities. A preacher (*muballigh*) should undergo the preaching process (*tabligh*) with communicative and understandable messages (*baligha*). *Baligha* also means a right and true message delivered based on the realities of the society. The al-Qur'an also states, "*lawkunta faẓẓan galīẓa al-qalbi la infaddu min hawlīka.*"¹⁷ This verse illustrates that Islam cannot be delivered well without polite, tolerant, and good attitudes as have been demonstrated by the Nine Saints (*Walisongo*), who spread Islam successfully in Java. The Nine Saints (*Walisongo*) did not imitate the Arab model of Islam (Arabization) exactly, but they integrated Islam into the local culture without dismissing its essentials. In addition, Nusantara Islam demonstrates that Islam should be taught gradually as has been stated in the Qur'an:

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ
إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

*Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom, fair exhortation and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord most knows who has strayed from His way and He most knows of who is (rightly) guided.*¹⁸

We can also learn from the first chapter of the Qur'an, which uses the word *al-rabb* instead of *al-ilāh* to suit to the local language of the Arabs. The Arabs were familiar with the term *al-rabb*. Chapter al-'Alaq verse 1 uses the word *al-rabb*:

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ

*Recite in the name of Lord who created.*¹⁹

The Qur'an uses different terms to address people when the Prophet Muhammad in Macca and Madina. This represents the dialectic of Islam with the local community. For example, the Qur'an does not use the phrase "*yā ayyuha al-ladhīna āmanū*" in Maccabut "*yā ayyuha al-nāsu*". This shows that locality is a

¹⁶Qs. Al-Nisā' (4): 8.

¹⁷Qs. Ali 'Imrān (3): 159.

¹⁸Qs. Al-Nahl (16): 125.

¹⁹Qs. Al-'Alaq (96): 1.

significant consideration of the Qur'an in addressing its community. Besides, Islam considers not only the Qur'an and Ḥadīth as sources of its teachings but also *al-'urf*, *syar'u man qablana*, and *maslahat al-mursalab*.

Nusantara Islam as a content and goal

The content and final purpose of Nusantara Islam can be seen in the term “*rahmatan li al-'alamīn*” in the Qur'an. The Qur'an chapter al-Anbiyā' (21): 107 states:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

*We sent thee not, but as a mercy for all creatures.*²⁰

In that verse, Allah says clearly: “We did not send you, O Muhammad except as a mercy, that is to (give) mercy to all worlds, the world of mankind and jinn through you.” The concept of *al-'alamīn* is also mentioned in chapter al-Furqān (25): 1 as follows:

تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ الْفُرْقَانَ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ لِيَكُونَ لِلْعَالَمِينَ نَذِيرًا

*Blessed be He Who sent down the criterion to his servant, that he may be a warner to all creatures.*²¹

From the concept of “*rahmatan li al-'alamīn*” in chapter al-Anbiyā', verse 107 above, it can be understood that the meaning of universal does not derive from “*rahmatan*” but *al-'alamīna*. The word “*al-'alamīna*” is a plural form of *al-'alam*. This shows that Islam is universal (*al-'alamīna*) by responding and adapting to the local (*'alam*). The word “*li al-'alamīna nadhbira*” in chapter al-Furqān verse 1 also shows the same meaning. The Qur'an (al-Furqān) mentions *nadhira* (a warner) for “*li al-'alamīna*” (for all over the world). This implies a consequence that Islam must be relevant to any time and place (*ṣālibun likulli al-ḡamān wa al-makān*).²²

²⁰Qs. Al-Anbiyā' (21): 107.

²¹Qs. Al-Furqān (25): 1.

²²Islam is relevant to any time and place (*ṣālibun likulli ḡamān wa al-makān*). The enforcement of the Arabian Islam in Indonesia is not only irrelevant to the Indonesian context but also reduces the essence of Islamic teachings. Islam is universal while Saudi Arabia is not. The revelation of

Based on those verses, historically, we can see many responses of Islamic teachings to locality:

1. Islam rejects a local tradition if it is irrelevant.

Islam repudiates the Arabian tradition of daughters killing due to a fear of poverty and a sense of inferiority. In chapter al-Isra' (17): 31, Allah says:

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ خَشْيَةَ إِمْلَاقٍ نَحْنُ نَرْزُقُهُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ إِنَّ قَتْلَهُمْ كَانَ خِطْئًا كَبِيرًا

*Kill not your children for fear of want, we shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily, killing them is a great sin.*²³

Islam renounces the Arabian young people's tradition of marrying into their fathers' wives. In Islam, a woman is not a heritage as has been mentioned in chapter al-Nisa' (4): 22:

وَلَا تَنْكِحُوا مَا نَكَحَ آبَاؤُكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ إِلَّا مَا قَدْ سَلَفَ إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَاحِشَةً وَمَقْتًا وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا

*And marry not women whom your fathers married, except what has already passed, it was shameful and odious, an abominable custom indeed.*²⁴

2. Islam amends the Arabian tradition of statue worship. They are directed to return to the right Ibrahim religion (*millata ibrahīma ḥanīfa*).
3. Islam accepts the Arabian traditions such as high respect for each other.

It is also important to refer to Umar Faruq to describe the Prophet Muhammad's and his companions' responses to the local culture. They were not against culture, but generally they showed a positive view and accommodated some of it. The Prophet Muhammad and his companions neither saw culture as black and white nor divided societies into the absolute good and the absolute evil. Islam did not eliminate all "alien" cultures of

Islam in Saudi Arabia in the arabic language and the incorporation of some Arabian culture in the Qur'an and Ḥadīth demonstrate a dialogue between Islam and the Arab culture.

²³Qs. Al-Isra' (17): 31.

²⁴Qs. Al-Nisā' (4): 22.

Arabs or non-Arabs. The Prophet Muhammad suggested maintaining cultures, which are beneficial, while altering negative ones.²⁵ This is one of the causes of why Islam has spread and become mercy in the worldwide.

Nusantara Islam In Sasak Religious Traditions

Islam is a philosophy of life. It is a comprehensive principle and worldview (*weltanschauung*) of life.²⁶ According to Agus, a worldview is related not only to critical thinking but also to cultural values of ethnic of a religious community.²⁷ Indeed, Islam is believed as religion revealed from God. The main resources of Islamic teachings are the Qur'an and ḥadīth. In this case, at first, Islam was one because it came from God. Nevertheless, when Islam written in the Qur'an and ḥadīth has interacted with the community, many interpretations and diverse actualization of Islam have appeared. Muslim scholars have interpreted the meaning of Islamic teachings from the Qur'an and ḥadīth. The interpretation has not meant to reduce the sacredness of Islam, but to make it always relevant to any time and condition. Even though Islam is religion from God, it is not for God. The Qur'an is guidance for humans (*hudan li al-nāsi*), not guidance for God. Therefore, Muslims should spread the essential meaning of Islam in line with socio-cultural dynamics. Islam plays a role in creating culture and conversely it is affected by culture. In the Arabic term, this process is called *muntaju wa muntaju al-thaqāfab* (made of and made for culture).

In this article, the study of Sasak Islam used the perspectives of theology and anthropology. Geertz sees religion as an instance of culture. Together with common sense, arts, science, ideology, and religion constitute a cultural system. A cultural system is not just parts of culture but also organized parts. Parts composed of beliefs and practices serve the same functions as

²⁵Umar Faruq Abdullah, *Islam and The Cultural Imperative*, Nawawi Foundation Paper, 2004), 3. <http://www.nawawi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Article3.pdf>

²⁶Burhanuddin Agus, *Agama dalam Kehidupan Manusia, Pengantar Anthropologi Agama* (Jakarta: Rajawali Press, 2006), 37.

²⁷Ibid.

culture as a whole: they both make sense of life and convey the sense made. According to Geertz, all humans need to make sense of life.²⁸ Agus states that²⁹ a religious system consists of beliefs in the supernatural, sacred, ritual, religious, and mystical aspects. Agus's theory is quite different from Koentjaraningrat's. Koentjaraningrat uses the terms of religious emotion, belief systems, the system of rites and ceremonies, rites and ceremonial equipment, and religion adherents.

For instance, as the consequence of religious concepts, there are many Sasak rituals such as *roah* and *ziyarah maqam* (visiting cemetery). In the explainer paradigm based on the positivistic-empiric approach of August Comte, what Sasak people do may be considered polytheist or *bid'ah* (heretic). Nonetheless, in the interpretive paradigm,³⁰ which focuses on the meaning of the phenomenon, Sasak's rituals are the actualization of Islamic values integrated with the local culture. In fact, Sasak Muslims believe in the oneness of God (*tauhid*) within all of their rituals, and they do not have any intention of deification (*shirk*). Islam did not originally come from Sasak, but Saudi Arabia. In the Theo-anthropological approach, the Sasak community has received and embraced Islamic teachings through an evolution process.³¹ The Islamization process has gone through gradually. In the following section, the oneness of God within Sasak traditions is described.

²⁸Robert A. Segal, "Clifford Geertz's Interpretive Approach to Religion," in *Selected Readings in the Anthropology of Religion: Theoretical and Methodological Essays*, ed. by Stephen D. Glazier and Charles A. Flowerday. (London and Connecticut: Praeger, 2003), 19.

²⁹Agus, *Agama*, 60.

³⁰"Interpreters view religion from the standpoint of participants or insiders. They are therefore primarily concerned with the meaning of religion. Explainers view religion from the standpoint of observers or outsiders. See Robert A. Segal, *Selected Readings in the Anthropology of Religion: Theoretical and Methodological Essays* (London: Praeger Publisher, 2003), 17-19.

³¹Evolution here is different from the evolution theory of Charles Darwin. This evolution means that Islam is believed from God and the oneness of God is acknowledged, but the concept did not come simultaneously but gradually.

The Oneness Of God within The Sasak Religious Emotion and Concepts in Lombok

Religious emotion is an essential part of religion. Religious emotion is sometimes associated with the transcendental experience of religion's adherents regarding with mysticism, spiritual beings,³² and God. Religious emotion is an esoteric aspect of religion. It relates to feelings or expression (*zawq*), which results from the belief in the Almighty/supernatural power. In a religious system, a sense or esoteric aspect of religion can be positioned at the beginning or the end. Koentjaraningrat puts religious emotion in the first position in religion and uses a different term of mysticism. Religious emotion is understood and regarded as a need for safety, comfort, peace, and tranquility. When one cannot meet such need by the visible, empirical, or concrete things, he or she may find religion as a solution. Religious emotion is evident in a belief in the supernatural or God. In Islam, God provides guidance for humans to receive the religious emotion through the *shari'a* (the exoteric aspect) delivered by His messengers.

The culture of religion's adherents influences the religious emotion inevitably. For example, Hinduism and Buddhism dominated Narmada before Islam arrived. Therefore, Hinduism and Buddhism have influenced Sasaks' religious emotion in Narmada. Similarly, since Islam arrived at Lombok, it also has affected Sasaks' religious emotion. For instance, many people who want peace and freedom from fear and anxiety because of the presence of disrupting supernatural beings, they create rituals with certain symbols. In this case, it is crucial to cite Geertz's view of religion as a cultural system, namely: (1) a

³²In this case, Geertz states that most, but not quite all, religions have notions about more or less well-known spiritual beings. All of the beings that we ordinarily meet are "physical" or "material"—that is, they have corporeal bodies, they take up space, they are constrained by laws of motion, they age and die, etc. Spiritual beings are different in some (but not every) way. In some versions they do not have physical bodies, or they might not occupy space or might be able to coexist in the same space as physical bodies (for more detailed explanation, see Jack David Eller, *Introducing Anthropology of Religion* (New York And London: Routledge, 2007), 34.

system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing reviews these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.³³

The unseen is often referred as supernatural. It shows the power of the Almighty (*maha*) behind any visible things. A belief in the supernatural depends greatly on the believer's conviction. In Islam, the supernatural power is called God. The belief in God is based on the revelation received by the Prophet Muhammad and delivered to his people (*umma*). There are also several terms used to refer to the supernatural forces, which are believed to affect humans' life, such as Allah, jinn, and angels. Besides, a belief in the supernatural power results from the interaction between humans and their culture with all its strengths and limitations. In this case, communities may perceive the unseen supernatural forces differently. Whatever the source of religion, be it *samawi* or *ardi*, and whatever its components, every religion contains ideas or abstract concepts. Therefore, it is plausible to accept some experts' view stating that the essence of religion is a belief in unseen, which raises some ideas or religious concepts. Many of those religious ideas or concepts derive from the dialectic between Islam and local culture regarding values, activities, or religious symbols. In the context of Sasak people, the belief in the supernatural generates several religious concepts, for example:

- a. Sasak people call God with the term "*nenek/Nene*", which means "grandmother" etymologically. For example, when a Sasak states about the omnipotent God, he or she says, "*nene' kaji sak keuse*."³⁴ The use of the term *nene*³⁵ reflects that Sasak

³³Clifford Geertz, *Religion As a Cultural System: The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Book, 1973), 90. As a comparison, see Khadziq, *Islam dan Budaya Lokal, Belajar Memahami Realitas Agama dalam Masyarakat* (Yogyakarta: Teras, 2009), 44. See also James Donovan, "Defining Religion," in *Selected Readings in the Anthropology of Religion: Theoretical and Methodological Essays* ed. by Stephen D. Glazier and Charles A. Flowerday (Londo and Connecticut: Praeger Publisher, 2003), 88.

³⁴Interview, August 25, 2015.

people believe in the oneness of God. They use “*neneke*” as a name of God to whom they worship. *Neneke* is unseen, one, and different from other supernatural beings such as jinn and devils. For Sasak Muslims, *neneke* that means “grandmother” is used to call God because, in the Theo-philosophical perspective, He is the source or creator of all creatures.³⁶

- b. The other Sasak concept of God is found in the term of *epengumi*. *Epen* means who owns and *gumi* means the earth. *Epen Gumi*³⁷ is Allah. This term is expressed, for example, when a *lindur/boyot* (earthquake) occurs. According to old Sasak people, an earthquake occurs because *Epen Gumi* (God) wants to give a warning to human beings. There is also a view that an earthquake occurs because *Epen Gumi* (God) wants to know whether there are people on the earth or not. But the latter view is wrong because it is impossible that God does not know the existence of mankind on the earth. For some people, this could be called a myth. A myth is a discourse that emerges as a portrait of humans’ incapability in explaining that an earthquake occurs because of the movement or shift of tectonic plates. Within all those Sasaks’ beliefs about an earthquake, there is a religious concept called *Epen Gumi* (the Almighty) or “*neneke*”. The adherents of *Wetu Telu* Islam in the old times used the term of “*pedewak*” (a stone where spirits stayed) to call God. However, this term has not been used any longer in the *Wetu Telu* tradition nowadays. *Pedewak* is now more known in Hindu-Budha traditions. In the positivistic-empiric perspective, *epengumi*, *pedewak*, or other old Sasak religious concepts may be considered polytheist. These are not polytheist because the Sasak Muslims believe in God/*Neneke* and they worship nothing or nobody but God constantly. They just look for safety from disturbance of other unseen God’s creatures.
- c. Sasak Muslims also use the terms of *bake’ bera’* and *beboro*. These terms reflect the Sasak’s belief in the supernatural. *Bake’ bera’* and *beboro* may be assumed as polytheist beliefs.

³⁵Interview, August 25, 2015

³⁶Interview, August 25, 2015.

³⁷Interview, August 25, 2015.

However, *bake' bera'* and *beboru* are the Sasaks' beliefs regarding disruptive ghost or unseen things.³⁸ *Bake' bera'* is used to refer to the spirit that occupies a haunted place or tree while *beboru* is the spirit that wanders between *magrib* to *isba* time.³⁹ The *beboru* concept has a high religious message for the Sasak community. When a parent says, "*Ndak mengke dek sendikale, ye luek beboru*" (Do not go anywhere in the time before *magrib* and *isba'* because many *beboros* wander). The religious message of this concept for children/parent in Lombok is avoiding from going out at *magrib* and *isba* because they are times for remembering God. Children are told to go to the mosque or stay at home to learn the Qur'an. In *Wetu Lime Islam*, *beboru* means that day is time for meeting daily needs and night is time for resting and approaching God as near as possible.⁴⁰

- d. *Ketemu'* (meeting the dead) is a term used for a condition in which a dead's spirit comes to greet a living person because of his or her anger, longing, or merely reprimanding. A person, who is greeted by the dead (*ketemu'*), usually feels dizziness and taking medicine is not the solution. The solution is *pertu'*, which means calling the dead's spirit and doing *ndak sapak banggak*⁴¹ (pulling the hair of the sick person).⁴² If his or her hair sounds when it is pulled, it is believed that the dead's spirit greets him or her. The sound also indicates that the *pertu'* is successful, and the dizziness is healed. If there is no sound when his or her hair is pulled, it is believed that his or her dizziness is not caused by the dead's spirit. Many people feel better after doing the ritual of *pertu'*. A religious value in this belief is that a Muslim should

³⁸Interview, August 25, 2015.

³⁹Interview, August 25, 2015.

⁴⁰Papu' Wasar (50 years old) said that old Sasak Muslims acknowledged that *beboru* is jinn (*al-jinnu*). Jinn are believed as one of God's creatures that start their activity at night (*maghrib*), Therefore, people are asked not to go out at that time. Anybody greeted by jinn will feel sick or dizzy. In the Sasak tradition, that occurrence is called *ketemu'*. It is also widely believed that jinn can see humans and not vice versa.

⁴¹Interview, July 23, 2015.

⁴²Interview, July 23, 2015.

remember God by remembering the dead (*dbikerullābi bidbikeri al mauti*). Forgetting death is a disease and erodes religiosity. The *pertu'* concept is not a polytheist, but a reflective way to always remember the Almighty. The concepts of *ketemu'* and *pertu'* have existed till today. Some people believe that illness or misfortune is often associated more with spiritual things rather than natural ones. Many people may consider those concepts irrational. However, *ketemu'* and *pertu'* show their rationality when the sick person feels better after doing *pertu'*. The believers of *ketemu'* and *pertu'* argue that they are not polytheism or animism because a spirit (*ruh*) remains alive when a physic dies. Theologically, they also believe that Allah decides anything and the dead's spirit (*ruh*) is just a means of communication with God, who asks the living person to be good to the dead. Based on those reasons above, David states that religion also explains why do things happen in the present? Why do we get sick? Why do bad things happen to us? Why do we die? In some societies, sickness or misfortune is attributed to spiritual rather than natural causes.⁴³

The Oneness of God within Sasak Rituals

A ritual is a behavior observed in religious practices. According to Tambiah, a ritual is a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. According to Bell, the essence of the ritual is the "action" that distinguishes the myth or symbol. In this case, Bell describes a ritual as an action and distinguishes it from conceptual aspects of religion such as beliefs, symbols, and myths. Ritual is then described as particularly subject to thoughtless action routinized, habitual, obsessive, or mimetic and, therefore, the purely formal, secondary, and mere physical expression of ideas logically prior.⁴⁴

Ritual is essentially an act or behavior undertaken by certain considerations. By using a functional point of view, rituals were classified based on their functions. Bell's classification of rituals by function is rites of passage rituals or life crisis; calendric or

⁴³Jack David Eller, *Introducing Anthropology of Religion* (New York And London: Routledge, 2007), 10-11.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 111.

commemorative rituals; rites of exchange and communion; rites of affliction; rites of feasting, fast, and festivals; political rituals. Norbeck, as described, by Agus says that rite is done to get a blessing or in abundance. There are rituals to treat the disease (rites of healing) and ceremonies for a change or cycle in humans' life (rites of passage, cyclic rites) from birth to death.⁴⁵ Those classifications of rituals are used here to understand Sasak rituals and then to search for God behind them.

Rites of passage or life crisis rituals.

In the Sasak Muslim society, a rite of passage is conducted from the process of birth (*gawe urip*) to death (*gawe mate*).

First, there are several rites associated with the birth. *Bretes* is a ceremony performed after seven months of pregnancy with a wish for safety for mothers and their babies.⁴⁶ The next ritual is *molak malik* (throwing away catastrophic events) performed on the seventh day after the birth. This ritual is associated with the term of *perakapi*, which means turning off the fire. The *perakapi* tradition is then followed by *ngurisang* (cutting baby's hair). Those traditions aim to show gratitude for having a descent. This rite is begun with prayers such as *roah* and *dbiker* (remembering God) as the manifestation of spiritual value. The ritual is then followed by *begibung* (eating together) of families, relatives, and friends as the manifestation of social value. Parents believe that the ritual save their baby from *bulu panas* (hot/bad hair). Another Sasak term referring to *ngurisang* is *mersi*, which means the purification of baby's hair brought from the birth. Technically, important religious figures in the community cut a small amount of the baby's hair while they are standing and reading the *salawat* (blessings for the Prophet Muhammad). Beside this ritual, there is *nyumatang* (circumcision) held for boys to differentiate them from non-Muslims. In the Sasak language, the circumcision ritual is called *tepe selam* (being a Muslim).

Second, there are several rites regarding death in the Sasak Muslim tradition. *Tepong gumi* is digging the grave and giving

⁴⁵Agus, *Agama*, 96-97.

⁴⁶Lalu Ratmaja, *Bahan Ajar Muatan Lokal Budaya Sasak* (Bagik Papan-Pringgabaya: CV Gumi Sasak, 2011), 69.

andang-andang (money and other stuff) for the digger. There are also some feasts after the funeral (*gawe mate*) such as *nelung* (the feast on the third day), *mitul* (the feast on the seventh day), *nyiwak* (the feast on the ninth day), *metangdase* (the feast on the fortieth day), *nyatus* (the feast on the hundredth day), and *nyiu* (the feast on the thousandth day). All the rituals are conducted through *roab* or *dhiker* and eating together (*begibung*) involving the community and religious figures.

Third, there is a rite for the provision of the next eternal life after death called *pelampak*. It is based on the belief that life is *abiru sabil* (crossing the way). *Pelampak* is something or many things such as cloth, food, or other daily stuff given by the family of a dead to a *penghulu/Kyai* (a religious leader). It is believed that life is a journey requiring provision/preparation. Death is not the end of life but the beginning of the next life. There is nothing useful for a dead except *pelampak* (alms).

Calendric or commemorative rituals

In this article, three rituals namely *mulut*, *eid topat*, and *maleman* are elaborated.

First, *mulut* is the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. Based on the interpretive paradigm,⁴⁷ *mulut* is not merely a symbolic ritual, but it also has a spiritual and social meaning. Spiritually, *mulut* is the grandeur reminiscent of the Prophet Muhammad as *uswatun hasanah* (a good/ideal model) for his people. The prophet Muhammad is believed to intercede his people later. The Prophet's birthday celebration also shows a sense of togetherness, sincerity, *silaturrahmi*, gratitude, and tolerance. Frequently, the Prophet's birthday celebration is combined with other events such as *ngurisang* (baby's hair cut) and *nyunatang* (circumcision).

Historically, the Prophet Muhammad's birthday was first celebrated when the Muslims' mentality was deteriorated after the fall of the Abbasids. The Mongols defeated and destroyed the Abbasids. The Muslims lost their spirit and creativity. The Muslims, who were used to be the subject (*fa'il*), eventually turned into the object (*maf'ul*). They were disunited. They

⁴⁷Segal, *Selected*, 17.

needed something to reunite them. An expected leader to reunite Muslims arrived. He is Salahuddin al-Ayyubi, who reunited the divided Muslims (*umma*) by celebrating the Prophet Muhammad's birthday as a moment when people gathered and unified.

Some people argue that there has been no Islamic evidence for the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. It is considered heretic and prohibited in Islam. Nonetheless, in the al-Quran, Allah suggests Muslims remember the Prophet Muhammad by reading *salawat*:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا صَلُّوا عَلَيْهِ وَسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا

Allah and His angels send blessings on the, O ye that believe, send ye blessings on him and salute him with all respect. (al-Abzab: 56)

Mulut (the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday) consists of the ritual of *salawat* reading. It also has a social value of maintaining the relationship among Muslims. The Prophet Muhammad said:

مَنْ أَحَبَّ أَنْ يُبْسَطَ لَهُ فِي رِزْقِهِ وَيُنْسَأَ لَهُ فِي أَثَرِهِ فَلْيَصِلْ رَحْمَتَهُ (رواه البخارى ومسلم)

Whoever wants to get greater fortunes from God and to lengthen his or her life span, build a good relationship with others! (H.R. Bukhari and Muslim)

Second, *lebaran topat* is a ritual conducted a week after *Eid al-Fitri*. *Topat*, which is mandatorily provided in this festival, is a type of dumpling made from rice packed inside a diamond-shaped container of woven palm leaf pouch. This festival is held after fasting for six days during Shawwal after *Eid al-Fitri*. *Lebaran topat* has spiritual and social values. The spiritual value lies in the religious activity in which religious leaders such as *kyai* and *tuan guru* are invited for doing prayers in the morning or a day before the *lebaran topat*. The social value is maintained when the Sasak Muslims go together for spiritual tourism. They visit various destinations such as the cemetery of religious leaders and figures.

Third, *maleman* is a ritual at night in the fasting month of Ramadhan. In the *maleman*, the Sasak Muslims put a *dilejojo*, a traditional lamp made from the fruit of *jamplung* and bamboo. *Maleman* is held to pursue *lailatu al-qadr*, which is believed as the night better than one thousand months. It is believed that *lailatu al-qadr* takes place on the odd dates of *ramadan* month. The Sasak Muslims do *maleman* with a wish for getting a shined house in the heaven. There is no written history of how the *maleman* tradition started. It has been passed from generation to the other in different Sasak Muslim communities, be they *Wetu Telu* or *Wetu Lime* community.

Rites of Healing

First, *bongar* means expelling jinn.⁴⁸ *Bongar* is a ritual conducted at the beginning of a building establishment. Borrowing Ellar's phrase, religious leaders or figures are involved in this ritual. Some puritan Muslims may consider this ritual polytheist. In fact, it is a kind of recognition of the existence of jinn as one of unseen God's creatures. For Sasak Muslims, *bongar* is done as a soft communication to expel jinn from a building. It is expected that the jinn will go away, find another place to stay, and not disturb the building's owner in the future.

Secondly, *tablilan/roab* is done as a prayer for achieving an intention easily or an expression of gratitude for a success. For instance, if a Muslim starts his or her study in a college, starts a new business, or is going overseas, he or she conducts *tablil/roab*. *Roab* may be done routinely or incidentally. In the *roab*, a religious leader leads several prayers consisting of a) *qirāatu al-Fātiha* addressed to the Prophet Muhammad, or a dead family member, and the host (*ṣāhibu al-hājah*), b) *al-Ikhlās*, *al-Falaq* and *al-Nās*, c) *al-Fātiha* and *alif lām mīm*, d) *tasbīḥ*, *takebīr*, and *tabmīd*. The Sasak Muslims particularly who live in Narmada call this tradition *qulbu fatebe*. This ritual ends with having a meal together (*begibung*). Many Muslims also start the *roab* by burning

⁴⁸Interview, June 23, 2015.

incense (*bakar kemenyan*).⁴⁹ For some people, this is a syncretism of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. However, Sasak Muslims believe in angels and consider them like perfume. Burning the incense will make a prayer heard easily. This shows that *roab* has transcendent and profane meanings.

Third, *sikir* and *serakalan* are done to remember God. *Sikir* is similar to *roab*. *Sikir* derives from the Arabic word *dhikr* (remembering God). Sasak Muslims say *sikir* for an easier pronunciation. In Narmada, *sikir* is usually done at night. Sometimes, *sikir* is conducted with *serakalan*. It derives from the Arabic word of *asyraqa* in the phrase *asyraqa al badru 'alaina*.⁵⁰

Fourth, *belian* derives from *beli* with a suffix *an*. It means buying or boughtstuff. Terminologically, *belian* is a person who can heal through prayers. Some Sasak Muslims visit a *belian* and bring an *andang-andang* consisting of rice, money, and betel leaf. According to Papuk Ayi (a Sasak traditional leader),⁵¹ etymologically, *belian* is bought stuff from or for someone. In a different perspective, *andang-andang* is regarded as *sereat* (*shari'a*) of healing because a person will not be or less sincere without receiving *andang-andang* (a symbol of price). Some puritans consider those practices *shirk*. Nevertheless, in the anthropological-interpretive approach, people ask for the help from a *belian* as an intermediary (*washīlah*) or *sereat*. Indeed, they still and always believe that it is God the Almighty who heals humans. This ritual is *tawassul*⁵² or *tabarruk*.⁵³

⁴⁹It is commonly observed in the Sasak *roab* ritual in several villages such as Golong, Lembuak, Suranadi, and Darmasaba around Narmada District.

⁵⁰Interview, April 26, 2015.

⁵¹Interview, April 26, 2015.

⁵²*Tawassul* is putting something/someone that has higher spirituality such as *Kyai* and *Tuan Guru* as an intermediary between humans and God (*al-mutawaṣṣalib*). For more detailed study about this, see TIM FBMP Kediri, *Meluruskan Buku Putih Kyai NU* (Surabaya: Bina Aswaja, 2011), 91.

⁵³TIM FBMP defines *waṣīlah*

قال الجوهرى الوسيلة مايتقرب به إلى الغير، والجمع الوسيل، والوسائل، والتوسيل والتوسّل واحد وفي حديث الأذان اللهم أت محمد الوسيلة هي في الأصل ما يتوصّل به إلى الشيء ويتقرب به

Al-Wasīlah is something that can make someone closer to the other. Its plural forms are *al-wusul* and *al-wasā'il*. *Al-tausil* and *al-tawassul* are one. In the

Based on the explanation above, Nusantara Islam can be viewed as a universal message of Islam in spreading blessings for all people over the world (*rahmatan li al-'ālamīna*), not for a particular world (*'ālam*). Some puritans regard Nusantara Islam as a kind of aberration in Islam: as *shirk* and *bid'ah*. The controversy whether Nusantara Islam is a polytheist and heretic practice can be solved by the theological-anthropological-interpretive approach. In the Theo-anthropological approach, theology is more practical among different religions' adherents, especially Muslims. The interpretive paradigm encourages people to be tolerant and avoid stereotyping of different religious rituals and concepts. In fact, the interpretive paradigm leads to a study of what is behind a fact or what is behind a phenomenon.

Conclusion

God is only one, but ways of approaching “the One” vary. The oneness of God is seen not only in sacred texts but also in local traditions such as Muslim Sasak traditions.

There are several conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, it is difficult to find the oneness of God behind the Sasak Muslim traditions merely through the positivistic approach or the theological perspective. The Theo-anthropological perspective and interpretive paradigm are required. Second, in the interpretive or phenomenological approach, some Sasak Muslim traditions show *tawhīd*. This approach is different from the positive approach that sees Sasak Muslim traditions as they are without looking for their meanings. The Sasak Muslim traditions described above are not polytheist or syncretic, but a result of their religio-socio-cultural interaction while maintaining Islamic essentials. In fact, Sasak religious concepts and rituals enrich Nusantara Islam. Those concepts and rituals function without any consensus of each element of the Sasak Community. In the future, the phenomenological approach is more required in the study of religion in Indonesia and

hadīts about *ādẓān*, it is stated that Allah gives the Prophet Muhammad *al-wasīlah*. It refers to anything that can make someone closer to the other. Ibid., 92.

particularly Lombok to achieve more comprehensive research result. Fourth, *tawhīd* is more than just the oneness of God; it is a worldview manifest in either spiritual or socio-cultural relationship. Within this perspective, local religious traditions are based on *tawhīd*. Fifth, the study of Sasak religious traditions requires cooperation between religious scholars such as *Kyai* and *Tuan Guru*, who usually use the theological approach, and researchers, who usually use the phenomenological approach, to deeper understand the unique religious traditions in Lombok society. *Wa al-Lāh a'lam bi al-ṣawāb*.

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