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## Tuan guru and social change in Lombok, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

This article discusses the role of *tuan guru* as Islamic leaders among Sasak society on the island of Lombok. Although there are several traditional criteria for calling someone a *tuan guru*, there remains debate about which features are most important and which aspects are optional. *Tuan guru* play various cultural roles in society, including not only educator and guardian of traditional culture but also social mediator. The place of this category of traditional leader has been shifting over the past several decades though, in response to both general trends of modernity and the specific context of Lombok and Indonesia. The article discusses both the direction of the trends (towards loosening the requirements for ascribing the title *tuan guru*) and some of the specific factors at play.

### KEYWORDS

Islam; Lombok; religious authority; Sasak; *tuan guru*

### Introduction

The title *tuan guru* on Lombok has a long history, dating back to well before Indonesia was formed as a state. The origins of *tuan guru* as a categorisation also has connections to the introduction of Islam on the island of Lombok. The title developed further in the context of traditional Sasak society, which was still hierarchical with castes (Jamaludin 2011: xxi, xxii), wherein the *tuan guru* functioned as a special minority class of religious functionaries, with social norms not only to teach religion but also to help downtrodden individuals.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, since Indonesia's return to open democracy and the implementation of regional autonomy, the concept of *tuan guru* has drifted further and further away from its previous, specific meaning. Now everyone feels free to apply this title to themselves in public spaces, especially because the *tuan guru* title has become a political commodity to seek or retain power and influence. This status which was previously sacral has now become secularised and cheapened.

Nevertheless, *tuan guru* have to be recognised as key actors in Lombok society. They have been hailed as leaders in the nationalist movement, in education, in social transformation, and now in government. This has been elevated by the recent recognition of one of the archetypal *tuan guru* of the twentieth century as the first National Hero (*Pahlawan Nasional*) from West Nusa Tenggara province (Sukmana 2017). Understanding the role

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<sup>1</sup>This is in line with the conception of the Iranian scholar Ali Shari'ati about the role of Islamic functionaries in a feudal society; see Syari'ati (2001). In the interest of disclosure, the author of this article was educated in the pesantren milieu led by *tuan guru* and comes from a religious family with several family members who have been *tuan guru*. His status, however, is as an academic.

and position of *tuan guru* in Lombok historically and today helps to lay bare the dynamics of Sasak society within the context of Indonesia. Furthermore, understanding the changes to this class of religious leaders highlights some of the recent dynamics of religious change in the country.

This regional study falls within the broader context of changes to religious authority in Indonesia and the Islamic world more widely (Kingsley and Feener 2014). As Kersten and Olsson (2013: 5) note, 'The question of authority is one of the major intellectual issues in the contemporary Muslim World.' More than that, it is a major social issue, too. In Indonesia, recent authors have discussed the changing position of gender (Kloos 2016; Smith and Woodward 2014)<sup>2</sup> and celebrity (Hoesterey 2016) in relation to religious authority, but there is room to put these studies in the long-term trajectories of religious authority in order to show the current changes in their broader context. There have been broader studies of the position of religious leaders in Indonesia, particularly in relation to political power and including Lombok specifically (Burhanuddin 2012; Jamaludin 2011), but these historical studies do not extend to the present day to look at the most recent developments. The topic of changing ideas about Islamic authorities is salient across the Islamic world today, though, from West Africa (Leichtman 2014) and the Middle East (Eikelman 2015) to diaspora communities in the West (van Bruinessen and Allievi 2011).

The focus here on changing religious authority also fits with many broader social changes in Sasak society on Lombok. Alongside the political opening up and decentralisation since 1998 (Kingsley 2012), there have been increasing levels of formal education, shifts in the position of women (Bennett 2007), modifications in marriage practices (Platt 2012), an ebb and flow of vigilantism (MacDougall 2003; Telle 2013), and heightened ethnic and community tensions (Budiwanti 2014). In such a time of intense social transition, it is no surprise that the key category of Islamic authority is also up in the air.

This article seeks to document the traditional position of *tuan guru* as a social title of religious authority on Lombok and discuss the changes that have happened in recent years. These changes are in part a reaction to external political and social changes in broader Indonesian life, but they also reflect changes among the people who traditionally hold Islamic authority on the island. To compile a broader understanding of how the category of *tuan guru* is deployed on Lombok between 2009 and 2017, the author interviewed 30 informants, mostly individuals who use the title *tuan guru* themselves but also ranging to everyday individuals like farmers and fishermen. These interviews are placed in the context of historical literature and direct observation of changing circumstances to examine the development of this category of religious authority.

### What is a *tuan guru* in Sasak society?

Like many other titles for Islamic authorities across Indonesia, including *kyai haji* (Java), *ajengan* (Sunda), *buya* (Minangkabau), *syekh* (Tapanuli), and others, *tuan guru* is a local term connected to the broader category of *ulama* (Raharjo 1996: 688). This term, which is uniform across the Islamic world, comes from the Arabic (sing. *ʿālim*, pl. *ʿulamāʾ*) and derives from the word for knowledge or knowing. In Islamic societies, though, *ulama*

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<sup>2</sup>This parallels similar scholarship on the Islamic world more widely; see Bano and Kalmbach (2012).

are not only considered to be experts in religious knowledge, but also figures deeply committed to moral and social values (Hasan 2000: 187). The Indonesian theologian Nurcholish Madjid (1997: 33) identified *ulama* not just by their knowledge, but by those who are truly pious, whose morals, behaviour, and ethics are models for others.

It is important to note that the category of *ulama* or *kyai* is not a category of religious clerics as found in other religions, with a formal governing body that ordains or authorises individuals to use the title or perform the social function. As Siregar et al. (2013: 142) note, ‘no organization can defrock a *kyai* or remove him from his position. The reason is that a *kyai* has his position and authority because people listen to what he says’ (cf. Lukens-Bull 2005: 96–97). These categories are also not strictly correlated to educational achievement. For example, an individual of the same educational credentials could be hailed as a *tuan guru* or *kyai* if he is well respected by society, or downgraded to merely a teacher (*ustadz*) if he loses society’s trust or fails to fulfil other social or religious functions. For *ulama* across Indonesia, it is their individual qualities that allow them to gain their position, influence, and authority within Islamic society.

The Indonesian case even differs with the context in nearby Malaysia, where the government plays a role. Shiozaki and Kushimoto (2014) have documented the position of religious leaders in Malaysia called by the title *tok guru*, a title that grants full authority in the religious sphere, and specifically in field of formal education. The strategic role of *tok guru* in the religious sphere is actually not as free and independent as the role of *tuan guru* on Lombok, though, because *tok guru* in recent decades have not been permitted to deviate from the line set by the government (Shiozaki and Kushimoto 2014). This is quite different from the context of Lombok, or Indonesia more generally, where *tuan guru* have the freedom to pursue their own vision for society and religious teachings in ways that are not limited by formal guidelines from the state.

In Sasak society, the terms *kyai* and *tuan guru* function slightly differently than in other parts of Indonesia. Indeed, the term *tuan guru* is in some way equivalent to the term *kyai* on Java, while the term *kyai* for the Sasak carries a different, distinct meaning. On Lombok, *kyai* ranges from those who are marriage officiants to those who are invited to religious ceremonies such as marriages, burials, or memorial services for the dead to offer Islamic invocations, such as repetitions of the Islamic profession of faith (*tahlilan*) or prayers of thanksgiving to God (*syukuran*); these occasions are known in Sasak society as *roah*. According to Ahmad Abd. Syakur (2006: 6), among the heterodox Wetu Telu community of Lombok the word *kyai* also carries a special meaning, denoting their religious leaders who play an intermediary or even messianic role connecting the believers to God.

The term *tuan guru* is distinct, not just from the term *kyai* as used on Lombok, but also from the other terms used across Indonesia. Traditionally, there have been several requirements for being classified as a *tuan guru*, even though there was no formal system for accrediting someone in this position. These prerequisites can be broken down into religious requirements and social requirements, as follows:

### **Religious knowledge and expertise**

As with other local concepts of *ulama*, local informants interviewed on Lombok, mostly themselves *tuan guru*, emphasised how *tuan guru* must be experts on Islamic knowledge.

This knowledge should ideally be wide-ranging and comprehensive, so as to navigate various enquiries from local people and their followers about the proper Islamic approach to both theological and practical questions. Informants said that Sasak Muslims expect a *tuan guru* to be able to answer the Muslim community's questions, such as those about Islamic law (*shari'a*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*). To this end, the *tuan guru* must have a deep understanding of the sources of religious teachings: the Qur'an and hadith, but also the Islamic literature, or *kitab kuning*.<sup>3</sup>

Expertise in religious knowledge is the aspect most emphasised by the current governor of Lombok, Dr Tuan Guru Haji M. Zainul Majdi, MA – also known in society as *Tuan Guru Bajang* or 'Young *Tuan Guru*', a term that emphasises his religious roots. Zainul Majdi believes that a *tuan guru* 'is a prominent figure who is central to the religious affairs of society, therefore the *tuan guru*'s [religious] capability must be high, especially in terms of understanding Arabic books and the classical texts of Islam'.<sup>4</sup> Given his own impeccable intellectual pedigree – up to the doctoral level – from al-Azhar University in Cairo, it is perhaps unsurprising that the governor would emphasise traditional religious knowledge, but many others also agreed that knowledge is the key characteristic of *tuan guru*<sup>5</sup> (cf. Fahrurrozi 2015).

This emphasis from the informants in this study differs from the findings of Kingsley (2014: 662), who argues that *tuan guru* do not need to have a high level of religious knowledge or strong expertise in the *kitab kuning*; he instead says that the most crucial aspect is the recognition of local people of a leader who acts as a kind of 'social glue'. In part, this reflects Kingsley's focus on *tuan guru* who are active in Sufism, where the leaders of Sufi brotherhoods may not have the same kind of scholarly, textual knowledge of religion. In part, though, the different emphasis of informants for this research may reflect a change in response to the social conditions of Islam on Lombok.

Based on interviews with venerated *tuan guru* on Lombok, it was found that there is a strong concern today that *tuan guru* should reclaim their credibility and legitimacy as Islamic religious scholars with robust and deep knowledge. Informants emphasised that *tuan guru* as a title for *ulama* is not just based on descent or the social role played in society, but on knowledge of Islamic religious teachings and their own studies of the Islamic literature. Many informants felt that, among other reasons for the decline in esteem for *tuan guru* on Lombok in recent years, there was the appearance of many self-identified '*tuan guru*' who did not have strong knowledge of Islamic scholarship or close familiarity with Islamic law, and only had the ability to give speeches or exhortations in front of crowds. Perhaps in reaction to this trend, informants placed a strong emphasis on the importance of knowledge as a requirement for *tuan guru*, so they can fulfil their essential social function as a religious reference point for society on aspects of Islamic ritual, law, and appropriate interpersonal relations.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup>For more on *kitab kuning*, see van Bruinessen (1990).

<sup>4</sup>Interview with M. Zainal Majdi, office of the governor of West Nusa Tenggara, Mataram, 14 April 2009. In addition to his political role, M. Zainal Majdi is the leader of the Nahdlatul Wathan Diniyyah Islamiyyah and Nahdlatul Banat Diniyyah Islamiyyah *pesantren* founded by his grandfather in Pancor, East Lombok, and runs the Pancor faction of the mass Islamic organisation Nahdlatul Wathan.

<sup>5</sup>Interviews in 2009 with Sahri Ramadhan of Narmada, West Lombok, 5 July; Inak Sinaref of Keruak, East Lombok, 9 August; M. Habib Thantawi of Praya, Central Lombok, 10 August; Anas Hasri of Montong Kirik, Sakra Barat, East Lombok, 20 September; Darmawansyah of Mataram, 12 November.

<sup>6</sup>All interviewed in 2017 are respected *tuan guru* on Lombok: Shabri Azhari of Desa Persiapan Seribaye Lingsar Narmada, West Lombok, 12 September; Mustamin Khaffi of Montong Gamang, Central Lombok, 16 December; Muzayyin Shabri of Gelanggang Sakra Timur, East Lombok, 17 December; M. Yusron Azzahidi of Anjani, East Lombok, 17 December; Iskandar

## Devoutness

In addition to their knowledge, *tuan guru* are expected to be pious and devout in their own Islamic faith. This deep sense of devotion to God is called *al-khashah* or *khashat Allah*. This has been a concern of Islamic societies for their leaders since the beginning, well encapsulated by the classical scholar al-Ghazali's categorisation of *ulama* between the *su'* (worldly or wicked) and *ghairusū'* (otherworldly or good) (Ghazali 1415: 37). The expectation of *tuan guru* on Lombok, though, is not to become otherworldly as ascetics or to retreat from society; instead informants expected a *tuan guru* to actively participate in the Muslim community through teaching, leading prayers, leading fasting, and other traditions such as public recitations of the Qur'an. This particular conception of devotion, in which asceticism is not sufficient, sets apart the *tuan guru* of Lombok from many other indigenous categories of Islamic authority in Indonesia.

Numerous respondents interviewed about the concept of *tuan guru* spoke of the need for this piety to be actively used in society.<sup>7</sup> TGH Shafwan Hakim said that the primary requirement to be a *tuan guru* is a coherence between knowledge and its application. This means that an expert on religious teachings and their practical dimensions must be willing to teach those who need religious guidance as a sign of his devotion.<sup>8</sup> TGH Lalu Anas Hasry listed several aspects of piety that should be found in a *tuan guru*, including *siddiq* (honesty), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *tabligh* (a spirit of proselytisation), and *fathanah* (intelligence).<sup>9</sup> TGH Sibawaihi Mutawalli even emphasised devoutness above Islamic knowledge, saying that a good attitude and a willingness to be a role model and to direct the community on religious matters were important characteristics of *tuan guru*. The concomitant knowledge or charisma could be revealed by God himself to the *tuan guru* if his devoutness was assured.<sup>10</sup>

The expectations of piety are not strictly limited to the *tuan guru* himself, either. There are also expectations of piety and support incumbent on his family, especially his wife (Wardatun et al. 2015). This is part of the broader gendered expectations of Muslims in Lombok society (Bennett 2007).

## Completion of the pilgrimage to Mecca

The word *tuan* in the Sasak language has long connoted someone who has completed the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca that is obligatory on all Muslims who are able to make the journey. Thus, as H. Lalu Shaimun Faishal noted, *bapak tuan* is a generic Sasak term of address for any man who has completed the hajj (not necessarily those with special religious knowledge), and the Sasak term *songkok tuan* for the pilgrim's headgear does not

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of Narmada, West Lombok, 17 December; Ahmad Thanthowy of Paok Tawah, Central Lombok, 19 December; Ahmad Syarqawi of Gunung Rajak, Sakra Barat, East Lombok, 20 December; Mashur Rajab of Praya, Central Lombok, 28 December; Abdussyakur and Edy Usman of Puyung, Central Lombok, 29 December.

<sup>7</sup>Interviews in 2009 with Saribaye Sarawan Sukadani of Desa Persiapan Seribaye, Lingsar Narmada, West Lombok, 12 September; Asnawi in Mataram, 19 September; Amiq Ajar in West Praya, Central Lombok, 25 September; Muhammad Sa'i in Montong Are, West Lombok, 22 October.

<sup>8</sup>Interview with Shafwan Hakim in Kediri, West Lombok, 15 September 2009. He is the leader of *pondok pesantren* Nurul Hakim, Kediri, West Lombok.

<sup>9</sup>Interview with Anas Hasry, 20 September 2009 in Montong Kirik, East Lombok. He is leader of the *pondok pesantren* Darul Abrar, Sakra Barat, East Lombok.

<sup>10</sup>Interview with M. Sibawaihi Mutawalli, at Jerowaru, East Lombok, 19 September 2009.

connote any special authority for the wearer besides his status as a pilgrim.<sup>11</sup> Although some respondents did not believe that completing the hajj was strictly necessary for a *tuan guru* (ibid.), others held that a *tuan guru* must have completed the hajj before being entitled to this position in society.<sup>12</sup> It is noteworthy, though, that the honorific title in its common usage today is Tuan Guru Haji, implying that the status of having completed the pilgrimage to Mecca might not be included in the core of *tuan guru* for modern Sasak. General patterns in Sasak society, though, require completion of the hajj before ascription of the title *tuan guru*. No matter how deep a religious leader's knowledge, how good his recitation, and how established his leadership in the community, those who have not yet completed the pilgrimage are still usually called *ustaz* or simply *guru*.

### **Pedigree**

In traditional Sasak society, with its heavy hierarchies and caste divisions, an individual possessed certain special rights and privileges because of his familial relations or lineage. Although this has faded over the centuries, some echo of it lingers on in the social expectation for a *tuan guru* to have a kind of pedigree. While anyone can be a *tuan guru* if society acknowledges him as such, and anyone can open a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) if students want to study in it, still the ideal type of a *tuan guru* has either an ancestral or personal link with another leading *tuan guru*. The most obvious means of demonstrating this pedigree is direct descent from a *tuan guru*. This is in keeping with other traditions of Islamic authority across the archipelago, and Steenbrink (1994: 110–114) has explained that the children of religious figures are treated with special reverence in society, making them more likely to inherit the father's respect and charisma.

It is possible, though, to earn one's pedigree by means other than direct descent. The most obvious ways are through marrying into an appropriate bloodline (by marrying the daughter of a respected *tuan guru*) or by being a beloved student of a respected *tuan guru* – and these two methods usually go hand-in-hand as the teacher's daughters are very likely to be married off to his students. It is also very common for a *tuan guru* to seek out someone to continue teaching in his religious school if he does not have any sons to carry on the work, and taking on the mantle of a venerable *pesantren* leader is an acceptable way to establish a pedigree.

### **Experience outside the village**

The expectation that a *tuan guru* has spent time away from his home village is fulfilled, at the most basic level, by the completion of the pilgrimage to Mecca, which definitionally takes him abroad. However, the social conception of the *tuan guru* usually includes some expectation of time outside the village community that goes beyond just the pilgrimage. Most commonly, this entails a distant education, ideally in the Arab world. Lukman Hakim, for example, believes that the title *tuan guru* should be limited to those who have

<sup>11</sup>Interview with Lalu Shaimun Faishal in Mataram, 20 August 2009. He is a former lecturer at IAIN-Mataram, a board member of the West Nusa Tenggara branch of Nahdlatul Ulama, and the leader of a *pondok pesantren* in Tanaq Awu.

<sup>12</sup>Interviews in 2009 with Amaq Mariani at Keruak, East Lombok, 11 September and Shafwan Hakim in Kediri, West Lombok, 15 September.

lived in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.<sup>13</sup> Generally, those who are graduates of the Middle East are accepted more quickly by society as *tuan guru*, but this is not an absolute requirement for all those who carry the title. There is no dearth of *tuan guru* whose knowledge is recognised by society but who have not studied outside of Indonesia.

### **Students or followers**

As there is no formal process for the accreditation of individuals as *tuan guru*, the title must be ascribed through popular usage in society. This is most commonly associated with an individual's students or followers, who begin using this title for their teacher or leader before the rest of society follows suit. Thus, it is only natural that an Islamic authority on Lombok is expected to have followers, usually in his own *pesantren*.<sup>14</sup> For some respondents, there was also an expectation that the number of students or followers be large, with some unnamed number being 'enough' but with a belief that too few students or followers would not entitle an individual to the status of *tuan guru*.

### **Married man**

In traditional Lombok society, in which patriarchal values remain strong, there are also two demographic characteristics that are unspoken prerequisites for a *tuan guru*. Firstly, *tuan guru* are men, and it is almost unheard of for a woman to function as a religious leader in Lombok society.<sup>15</sup> One informant said he expected *tuan guru* to be men because the work imitates the Islamic tradition of the prophets, perceived as inherently masculine.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, Sasak Muslims also think that it is not appropriate if a *tuan guru* is unmarried, although this requirement is more flexible. A *tuan guru* gains additional influence and charisma if he is already married, because this is perceived as a sign of the completeness of his faith and the maturity of his soul. If there is a *tuan guru* who is still young and unmarried, he is sometimes assigned the title *tuan guru bajang* (meaning 'young *tuan guru*'). This title is also sometimes applied to religious leaders between the ages of 25 and approximately 40 years old, even if they have already married.<sup>17</sup>

### **Social roles of *tuan guru***

In Sasak society, *tuan guru* have traditionally played several key social roles. Understanding these roles is crucial for a complete understanding of the nature of the *tuan guru*'s authority in society and the changes affecting Lombok's Muslim community today.

<sup>13</sup>Interview with Lukman Hakim in Mataram, 22 September 2009. He is the former rector of IAIN-Mataram and the former Vice-Chair of the West Nusa Tenggara branch of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia.

<sup>14</sup>Interview with Lalu Shaimun Faishal in Mataram, 20 August 2009.

<sup>15</sup>The major exception to this is Ummi Siti Raehanun, leader of one of the contested branches of the organisation Nahdlatul Wathan. For more on her position, and the controversy surrounding leadership and her gender, see Smith and Hamdi (2014).

<sup>16</sup>Interview with Hilmi Najamudin, 30 September 2009 in East Lombok. He is the leader of *pondok pesantren* Raudhatut-thalibin Nahdlatul Wathan, Paok Motong, East Lombok.

<sup>17</sup>Interview with Zaini Abdul Hanan in East Lombok, 2 October 2009. He is the leader of *pondok pesantren* Syaikh Zainuddin, Anjani, East Lombok.



## Teacher

As Kingsley (2010: 84–85) has noted, a *tuan guru* on Lombok does not have to be restricted to teaching at a *pesantren*, unlike a *kyai* on Java. However, the majority of *tuan guru* are connected to a local *pesantren*, and teaching is one of their most important social roles, as suggested by the *guru* element of their title. Not only do *tuan guru* usually teach at *pesantren*, they usually reside in or very near their schools, and the highest ranking *tuan guru* will also own these institutions. Kingsley (2014: 670) has further elaborated on the strategic position of *tuan guru* within their wider societies with regards to religious education. The influence of *tuan guru* may be first and foremost on the current students under their instruction, but it extends to graduates, parents, and the nearby community.

Teaching is not limited to the *pesantren* context, however. *Tuan guru* also teach in mosques and in other social spaces. The role played by *tuan guru* as an instructor for society can be seen in the places where *tuan guru* teach. At the end of the 19th and beginning of the twentieth century, there emerged a class of religious leaders who were active in teaching in society, such as Tuan Guru H Umar Kelayu, of East Lombok. He lived in Mecca for ten years, and after his return to the island he taught on religious principles using the system of *ngamarin*, or travelling around to nearby villages. In the teaching sessions, he still used the method of *ngaji tokol*, in which the *tuan guru* provides religious guidance seated on the floor facing his followers. Many other *tuan guru* took up this same model into the twentieth century, including TGH. Musthafa Sekarbela in West Lombok; TGH. Amin Sesela and TGH. Abdul Hamid around Kediri; TGH. Mas'ud Kopang in Central Lombok; and TGH. Ali Akbar Penendem in East Lombok. These teachers were active in teaching both in social spaces and in their own homes (Fahrurrozi 2015: 324–345).

## Religious functionary and guardian of traditional culture

Since the establishment of the Indonesian state, there has been an official position of religious functionary under the Republic's Ministry of Religious Affairs. Even before this, though, *tuan guru* were needed to play certain key roles in society as religious functionaries. This included especially leading prayers, conducting marriages and burials, and delivering Friday sermons. In these roles, the *tuan guru* also guarded and built up their networks and thus acted as a kind of conservative bulwark against certain social changes. For example, a close-knit network of *tuan guru* would invite each other back and forth for lectures at each other's *pesantren*, which would prevent any one school in the network from changing too much from the norm. These networks fundamentally protect the power of the *tuan guru* and perpetuate traditional culture.

Today, being religious functionaries and guardians of traditional culture usually happens in the context of a mass Islamic organisation. Most *tuan guru* on Lombok are affiliated to either Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia which is based in Java, or Nahdlatul Wathan, a similar organisation that is based in East Lombok (with two rival factions). Some are also affiliated to the quasi-governmental Majelis Ulama Indonesia, which is best known for issuing juridical rulings. Many religious functionaries are also now employed by the Indonesian state, although Kingsley (2010: 80)

has recognised that this confers less prestige than the social status that *tuan guru* have traditionally held in society.

As locally respected individuals, religious leaders across Indonesia play a crucial role as cultural brokers, agents capable of selecting and directing the cultural values of their communities (Horikoshi 1975: 35). As religious functionaries and guardians of traditional culture, *tuan guru* also work to fortify the vulnerable points in the fabric that connects their society together.

### **Proselytiser**

*Tuan guru* are religious missionaries, in the sense that they seek to uphold or deepen the Islamic social systems in their rural societies, seek to produce more religious cadres of future *ulama*, and promote Islamic piety in their communities. *Tuan guru* see themselves as engaging in proselytising in word (*da'wa bi al-lisān*), in deed (*da'wa bi al-hāl*) and less commonly by the pen (*da'wa bi al-qalam*), all aimed at increasing public awareness of Islam and religious piety. These methods all contribute to teaching in the *pesantren* context, but the first two also extend to preaching and leading prayers in society, speaking at study circles, and living pious lives in the public eye. This religious missionary role is shared with *ulama* across Indonesia and throughout the world (Horikoshi 1975: 35). The proselytising work is fundamentally transformative, unlike their work as guardians of traditional culture which is fundamentally conservative (Nurdin 2003). Thus, alongside their role guarding traditional culture, it is also important to remember that *tuan guru* actively seek to change culture on Lombok by making it more Islamic and to intensify the practice of Islam in their communities. The proselytising mission of *tuan guru* has some minor tension with the tendency, described above, to protect the status quo in an effort to ring-fence their power.

### **Social mediator**

Kingsley (2010) states that these religious leaders serve as social stabilisers and mediators for Sasak Muslims in many tense situations and conflicts, including defusing political conflicts. In contemporary conflict management, *tuan guru* are often more effective than the state apparatus, such as police, attorneys and other formal leaders. This is because the state lost its authority upon the fall of the New Order regime (Kingsley 2010: 208). Suprpto (2015) agrees that *tuan guru* play an important role in conflict resolution on Lombok. Their role can be seen in a number of different ways. Internally within their own religious and ethnic communities, they try to create conditions of peace. Externally across society's dividing lines, they also convey religious messages containing peace and harmony. In addition, these religious leaders also work to build public opinion that conflict is not rooted in religious matters (Suprpto 2015: 248). Kingsley also supports this view, noting that *tuan guru* are exceptionally powerful in society, especially among the middle and lower classes. Their prominent strategic role can be clearly seen when conflict emerges in local communities. *Tuan guru* emerge as mediators to navigate the disharmony within their communities. *Tuan guru* act as unifiers in at least two ways. Firstly, they bring groups together for community meetings (*musyawarah*) to seek an end to issues. Secondly, *tuan guru* are active in teaching the importance of social harmony (Kingsley 2012). *Tuan*

*guru* can also act as social mediators of other kinds, unrelated to social conflict. They are crucial intermediaries for students or followers who want to seek higher education or spiritual blessing at national or Middle Eastern Islamic centres (Siregar et al. 2013: 143). They often mediate between provincial or national forces and the local or village structures. Their social position allows them to perform this connective role. The position of *tuan guru* is as a spiritual and social leader in society, who has gained trust from the community and is ascribed authority, generally non-formal authority, often exceeding governmental or bureaucratic leaders. *Tuan guru* are generally respected and obeyed (Ecklund 1979: 253; Kingsley 2014: 657).

### Social change and *tuan guru*

As society on Lombok has developed, the social meaning of the title *tuan guru* has changed, and the social position of those who claim the title *tuan guru* has changed. These changes are natural given the tectonic shifts in Indonesian culture over the past several decades, but understanding their dynamics will help to explain the evolving nature of religious authority in this Indonesian context.

First, since Indonesian independence the Muslims on Lombok have had to reconcile themselves to the broader Indonesian context for Islamic practice. This means that they often follow the trends of national religious life, both responding to major issues and following certain guidance or models from Java so as to stay current with the times and retain access to state authorities.

Of course, *tuan guru* from Lombok have been interacting with Islamic leaders from other parts of Indonesia from well before recent decades. Tuan Guru Umar Kelayu, whom scholars have recognised as seminal in the establishment of modern patterns of *tuan guru* in the early twentieth century, studied for many years in Mecca and was influenced by prominent figures from other parts of the archipelago, such as Sheikh Khatib al-Minangkabawi (Faris 2016: 98–100). In that era, however, there did not seem to be any effect on the role of Islamic scholars back on Lombok.

The most famous *tuan guru* of Lombok in the twentieth century accommodated himself to Indonesian norms by using not only the title Tuan Guru but also adding Kyai Haji, making his titles more understandable to those from outside the island. Tuan Guru Kyai Haji Muhammad Zainuddin Abdul Madjid had traditionally been called ‘Tuan Guru Pancor’, a toponym after the village of his headquarters, but around 1975 he was invited to preach in Jakarta by the venerable Betawi cleric Kyai Haji Abdullah Syafii. When the host called Muhammad Zainuddin by the honorific Kyai Haji, the new titles stuck, and were consistently attached to his formal name after that.<sup>18</sup> The additional titles, conforming to national Indonesian practice, have also been included in the documents inaugurating him as a National Hero.

Among the community of religious scholars on Lombok affiliated to Nahdlatul Ulama, one of the consequences of increasing national connections in recent decades has been to bring the idea of an Islamic scholar more in line with Javanese conceptions. Thus, although scholars on Lombok have continued to use the title *tuan guru*, the expectation has increasingly been that this title would be a perfect analogue to the Javanese use of

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<sup>18</sup> Author’s notes from when he studied directly under TGKH M. Zainuddin Abdul Madjid in 1996.

the title *kyai*, without taking into consideration local customs related to the pre-conditions and social expectations of a *tuan guru* (Faris 2016: 98–100; Mansur 2008: 25).

Secondly, and in part pushed by the modernising mentality of the Indonesian state, there has been a drift towards the formalisation of titles, especially academic and bureaucratic ones. This trend began during the New Order, when individuals with formal education titles began to take on positions of leadership in Islamic groups on Lombok. These men, such as Drs. H. Mustamiuddin Ibrahim, SH; Drs. H. Abdul Hayyi Nukman; Drs. H. Ahmad Hamid; and Drs. H. Mahrudin Abdul Ghani, were almost never called *tuan guru*, but rather were called by their formal, academic or bureaucratic titles. Although their religious knowledge was quite impressive, informal or traditional titles were seen as backward and academic titles were seen as more prestigious.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps most surprising in this respect were the two sons-in-law of TGKH Muhammad Zainuddin Abdul Madjid who at different times served as the head of the mass Islamic organisation he founded, Nahdlatul Wathan. Both H. Jalaluddin, SH, and Drs. H. Lalu Gede Wiresentane were heads of Nahdlatul Wathan (Pengurus Besar NW), but neither was ever popularly known as *tuan guru* (Nu'man 1999). Their position as government bureaucrats, where traditional titles would not have carried much weight, and their subservience to their father-in-law weighed against adding the title *tuan guru*. Academic titles thus became the norm.

This pattern has now ingrained itself in Lombok's academic circles. Today, in institutes of higher education (and particularly notable at Lombok's Islamic universities, the State Islamic University of Mataram, Universitas Nahdlatul Wathan and Universitas Hamzanwadi), the title *tuan guru* is rarely found. Lecturers who are alumni of the Middle East, who would have been called *tuan guru* in previous eras, are now addressed by their academic titles. This is also a reflection of how lecturers in these formal university settings are less dependent on a societal title like *tuan guru* for status. According to Nashuddin, the former Rector of the State Islamic Institute (now State Islamic University) of Mataram, a lecturer's academic titles are greater than the title of *tuan guru* that is given by society to a respected figure. A doctorate provided to a lecturer or academic from a Middle Eastern university is already a sufficient sign that the individual is a religious leader. Alongside this, the decline of addressing scholars as *tuan guru* in university settings is not just because of their formal degrees, but also because they are seen as a new type of Muslim intellectual that is not dependent on the ascription of a title by society.<sup>20</sup>

In the past two decades, with the increase in local autonomy and the renewed strength of Islam as a major force in society and politics, the local and religious cachet of the title *tuan guru* has become more desirable. Unlike academic or bureaucratic titles, though, which are also important but also more tightly regulated, the flexibility of socially ascribed titles like *tuan guru* opens the possibility for opportunistic ascription. This has led to the third trend: a significant rise in the number of individuals called *tuan guru*, especially those who do not meet the traditional expectations.

<sup>19</sup>The author draws this conclusion from many different personal experiences and documents from the Nahdlatul Wathan organisation in the 1990s. Most notable, perhaps, were the anniversary celebrations every year for the founding of the Nahdlatul Wathan Diniyyah Islamiyyah school, when these individuals would be introduced by their academic titles, not with the title *tuan guru*.

<sup>20</sup>Interview with Nashuddin, 2 September 2016 in Mataram.

From Indonesia's independence to the end of the New Order, not all religious scholars or leaders were called by the title *tuan guru*; this honorific was saved for only the most prominent, knowledgeable, and influential. In fact, Ecklund (1979: 253) reports that in the 1970s, Nahdlatul Wathan actually published guidelines to restrict who could be considered a *tuan guru*. Thus, highly qualified individuals such as TGH Abdul Hafiz Sulaiman Kediri, TGH Saleh Ahmad Kalijaga, or TGH Najamudin Mukmun – who had educational experience in the Middle East and took an active role in local society – were agreed as *tuan guru*.<sup>21</sup> To some extent, this continues today in Nahdlatul Wathan circles. In its tradition, ascribing the title *tuan guru* to an individual would follow the usage of the leadership of the organisation. So, if an organisational figure like the central, provincial or regional leader, called someone *tuan guru*, that gave legitimacy to the individual's use of the title and that usage would be followed by Nahdlatul Wathan's loyal members. The authority of Nahdlatul Wathan leadership to ascribe the title for ulama in the organisation's orbit limited the number of individuals who could use it, but only among organisational loyalists. The sparsity of *tuan guru* can further be demonstrated by the fact that they were often just known by the name of their village, such as Tuan Guru Bengkel (TGH M. Saleh Hambali) or Tuan Guru Sakre (TGH L. Zainal Abidin Sakra) (Fadli 2016).

Whereas previously it was very hard for society to legitimate someone as *tuan guru*, now the term is granted and claimed much more loosely. This does not reflect a change in the position of the old gatekeepers, like the leadership of Nahdlatul Wathan, but rather a greater assertiveness of individuals outside the traditional organisational spheres in using the title. Today, as long as a person can deliver a good sermon and has performed the hajj, society tends to call that person *tuan guru*, regardless of his concern for improving his society in practical ways or his educational background with classical Islamic texts. This means a proliferation of opportunistic '*tuan guru*', individuals claiming the title – or, more commonly, encouraging others to ascribe the title to them – without fulfilling the traditional requirements. This is often done in the quest for temporal power.

The new kinds of *tuan guru* who do not fulfil the classical requirements for this position are different from their predecessors. Many of them merely pass on the traditions and teachings of former scholars without further developing the knowledge (*muhāfazhah*). This has lowered the intellectual or scholarly standards of the *tuan guru* and, in turn, engendered the re-emphasis on scholarly knowledge as a prerequisite for a proper *tuan guru*, as discussed above. Additionally, whereas *tuan guru* traditionally took seriously the social obligation to empower marginalised people, the new model of '*tuan guru*' tends to make coalitions with elites. They may take the title into politics, entrepreneurship and business, or mass media – but they are not playing the roles long expected of *tuan guru* (cf. Nasir 2006).

Thus, today we see sectors of society according someone the title *tuan guru* not because of his knowledge or charisma, but because of his proficiency in making speeches in front of large crowds. One example is H. MM,<sup>22</sup> a retired civil servant with a family line of several *tuan guru*. He is now styled as *tuan guru* by many in society based on his public speaking,

<sup>21</sup>These examples have been drawn from the speeches of the Mukhtamar Kilat of Nahdlatul Wathan, as documented by Katib Dewan Mustasyar PB NW Ust. H. Afifuddin Adnan, dated 30 January 1977 and held by the Nahdlatul Wathan leadership. Note that even the secretary of the governing committee was not called *tuan guru*, but merely *ustadz*.

<sup>22</sup>Full name redacted for his privacy.

leading prayers, and giving advice to the family of a recently deceased individual at the burial service. H. MM has claimed this title in an attempt to channel the legitimacy of his father as a spiritual leader and to benefit himself. One key consequence is that in each election season, candidates come to seek his favour and support in the upcoming polls. With the additional title, H. MM also benefits from increased invitations to social and religious events, from which he can draw an honorarium.

Another individual, H. HA,<sup>23</sup> who has actually worked for some time as a marriage officiant, is also often called upon to give sermons at funerals, and so over time has come to be called *tuan guru* even though he does not fit the classic criteria. He had long been called *tuan haji* and seen as a normal – if especially pious – Muslim, and he was rarely called to give religious instruction. However, as soon as he began to claim the title *tuan guru*, he became more socially prominent and was frequently invited to preach at funerals and on major holidays. The new title allowed him to branch into more instruction, rather than ritual. His newly claimed status has brought more work (and thus payment) in addition to added prestige.

A growing trend is embodied in TG. M,<sup>24</sup> who began to be called *tuan guru* only in the political campaign season, when he dressed up to look like a traditional *tuan guru* and announced his support for a specific candidate and party, although he does not perform the social functions of a *tuan guru* in society. This phenomenon is found more commonly among the lower strata of society who do not question or view critically the role of *tuan guru* in society, and so do not have strict criteria when applying the title *tuan guru*.<sup>25</sup>

The 2018 gubernatorial elections for West Nusa Tenggara province provide an interesting case study. One of the candidates, the former mayor of Mataram, has been approved by the provincial election commission to appear on the ballot as ‘TGH. Ahyar Abduh’, although he never previously used the *tuan guru* title on his posters or on the ballot when he ran for lower office. Some sectors of society in Mataram called him *tuan guru* because of his status as an alumnus of a traditional Islamic school, but he does not have the higher scholarly qualifications of a traditional *tuan guru*. As he runs for governor, it seems to have been a strategic choice to add ‘TGH’ before his name, to increase his popularity and electability among voters who would like a religious figure as governor. One can contrast this with the lieutenant-governor candidate on another ticket, TGH. Lalu Gede Sakti, who has long been identified as a *tuan guru*. As the grandson of the founder of Nahdlatul Wathan, a leader in the Anjani faction of the organisation, and an alumnus of Islamic institutions in both Mecca and Jordan, he fulfils the traditional requirements, and his selection for the ticket was certainly connected to his position in society. So, one can see how the status of being *tuan guru* has loosened in its popular usage yet remained important in the political arena.

The loosening of the social and religious requirements to earn the title *tuan guru* is not uniform across the island, though. Informants agreed that it was applied much more strictly in East Lombok and relatively loosely in West Lombok. In East Lombok, with its many Islamic institutions and higher number of graduates from Middle Eastern

<sup>23</sup>Full name redacted for his privacy.

<sup>24</sup>Full name redacted for his privacy.

<sup>25</sup>The author has witnessed this directly in Kecamatan Jerowaru, East Lombok; Kecamatan Gerung, West Lombok; Kecamatan Janapria, Central Lombok; and Kecamatan Pemenang, North Lombok.

schools, the title *tuan guru* is only given when someone's knowledge and service in society has been tested. The strategic position of Nahdlatul Wathan in East Lombok is also very influential in the legitimisation of an individual as a *tuan guru*, because this title usually acts as an indicator of their religious status in the eyes of Nahdlatul Wathan organisational leadership. In West Lombok, so long as the individual has already undertaken the pilgrimage to Mecca, can give a good speech in public, and knows how to recite the scriptures, he is easily accorded the title *tuan guru*. Some informants worried about this trend as cheapening the status of *tuan guru*, and even erasing the difference in traditional social roles between *tuan guru* and *haji*.<sup>26</sup>

The title *tuan guru* is not the only one losing its traditional meaning on Lombok. There are also some accusations in society of individuals claiming the old title of Sasak nobility, *lalu*, without the lineage that would entitle them to it. There are a few *tuan guru* with high caste heritage who are greatly respected by Sasak society, especially other individuals of noble lineage, such as TGH Lalu Anas Hasry, TGH Lalu Turmuzi Badaruddin, and Dr TGH Lalu Muhyi Abidin, MA. There have also been a number of *lalu* who have held prominent positions of authority in Lombok's twentieth century history, such as TGH Lalu Muhammad Faishal (leader of the *pondok pesantren* Manhalul Ulum and leader of Nahdlatul Ulama on Lombok in the 1960s) and Drs H. Lalu Gede Wiresentane (the previously discussed leader of Nahdlatul Wathan who used the title *lalu* but not *tuan guru*). However, in recent decades, with increasing geographic mobility and less social regulation of titles, there have been some individuals who claim the title *lalu* in daily social interactions hoping that it will increase their profile within society.<sup>27</sup> Although there are a few highly traditional communities (e.g. Bonjeruk, Batujai, and Central Praya in Central Lombok) where society demands that the prayer leader and preacher in the local mosque must have noble lineage, i.e. be titled *lalu*, in most cases the title merely accords an individual easier acceptance among the Sasak elite. Individuals who use the title *lalu* without a family tradition of feudal status – and specifically those who claim both *lalu* and *tuan guru* titles – believe that it will allow them to play a dual role in society, respected both religiously and culturally. For both *lalu* and *tuan guru*, the existence of these unregulated social titles alongside the more regulated educational and bureaucratic titles has led some to take advantage of the flexibility of local tradition. The increase in the use of these titles reflects both their renewed salience in Sasak society and the significant loosening of standards for their use.

Finally, there is another sea-change facing *tuan guru* that is also facing all figures of religious authority in the modern world: rationalisation. This challenge was put forward by the great social theorist Max Weber, describing how society became increasingly rational in its thinking, less influenced by 'magical' or 'enchanted' explanations for phenomena, and how modernity bureaucratises religious life alongside other facets of social life (Kalberg 1980). Some aspects of this process can already be seen in Lombok's Muslim society. For example, the shift of religious scholars to formal university settings might be seen as an aspect of bureaucratisation. In line with international trends, 'mass education and forms of new media have contributed to further undermining the authority

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<sup>26</sup>Interviews in West Lombok in 2017 with Nurkholis Muslim at Dasan Tapen, 24 December; Fathurrahman in Berembang Sekotong Barat, 25 December; Lutfi Arsyad, at the Religious Affairs Office, Lembar, 26 December.

<sup>27</sup>Interview in Mataram on 1 December 2017 but the informant chose to be unattributed.

of traditional Islamic scholars' (Kersten and Olsson 2013: 11), as some of the knowledge and networks that were once unique to *tuan guru* are now available in society more widely. For *tuan guru*, though, the key question is whether they will be able to maintain their charisma as religious leaders in local society. To this extent, followers' belief in a *tuan guru*'s charisma is a key element of the *tuan guru*'s legitimacy. As followers are less and less under the sway of this charisma, either in the context of the *pesantren* or in the village context more broadly, religious leaders will cease to have the influence of traditional *tuan guru* with all the cultural positions and social roles that involves.

The impact of rationalisation and the decreasing influence of *tuan guru* can be seen in their fates on the political stage. Although the outgoing governor of West Nusa Tenggara province has been able to successfully mobilise votes through his religious support, many other *tuan guru* have failed in politics because they do not have definitive influence over society as they once did. Whereas *tuan guru* were once very strong candidates for office, courted even by secular parties in the Suharto era (Ecklund 1979), society has now shifted its political paradigms and does not trust *tuan guru* for political leadership in the same way, even when they follow them on religious matters. For example, TGH Mukhlis Ibrahim, the leader of *pondok pesantren* Ishlahuddiny Kediri in West Lombok, lost the election to become a member of the national Regional Representative Council (Dewan Perwakilan Daerah). Similarly, TGH Muharrar Mahfuz, leader of *pondok pesantren* Nurul Hakim also failed to win a seat in the national parliament. Despite the large religious following both men command, they have not been able to transfer that influence to the rationalised world of politics. Most surprising, perhaps, was TGH Dr Lalu Muhyi Abidin, the secretary-general of one of the Nahdlatul Wathan factions, who thus commands great respect in religious matters and holds a very prominent position in society, but was unsuccessful in his candidacy for the provincial legislature. These are all signs that the charisma of *tuan guru* and their position as leaders in all aspects of Sasak society have changed (Fahrurrozi, 2017). The aforementioned 2018 gubernatorial election will be the next test of this trend.

The role where *tuan guru* are least likely to lose their position in society is as spiritual guides for the Muslim society of Lombok. In this position, they will continue to be respected by their followers. Unlike education, where *tuan guru* can be replaced by any educator with the requisite competence in the subject field, or conflict resolution, where government or other outside forces might intervene, providing spiritual leadership requires the combination of knowledge and legitimacy that *tuan guru* uniquely hold among the Sasak. Islam remains a central cultural touchstone on Lombok, and its importance seems to be only increasing amid the current religious wave in Indonesian society, meaning that *tuan guru* still have an important role to play, even if it is not the same as their traditional role.

## Conclusion

As discussed above, the social category of *tuan guru* has undergone major distortions and changes that have led to a social shift in the way *tuan guru* function in society. The new generation that has come of age in the last few decades have brought progressive change to Sasak society that can be seen both physically (in new school buildings) and psychologically (in changing attitudes towards the concept of *tuan guru*). In the context of Lombok's



society since political decentralisation at the beginning of this century, some of the roles traditionally played by *tuan guru* have been taken up by governmental players, such as village head, sub-district head, or *bupati* (district head). Other roles have disappeared as the new generation re-orient itself towards the digital world and a new, alternative lifestyle.

With the changing position of *tuan guru* in Sasak society, there have been both positive and negative outcomes. Today, *tuan guru* are not ashamed to reach out to the Muslim community in all aspects of their lives – as politicians, economic or business leaders, academics, leaders in security forces, farmers, and every other possible role they might play. In some ways, this makes *tuan guru* more dynamic as a class of social actors. In other ways, their religious authority has become more diffuse, such that it becomes very difficult to differentiate a *tuan guru* from any other person respected in society and by the religious community. The practical consequences of this diffusion of authority are yet to be seen.

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