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## Rediscovering the Walisongo, Indonesia: A potential new destination for international pilgrimage

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# Rediscovering the Walisongo, Indonesia: A potential new destination for international pilgrimage

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The current paper explores the tradition of Walisongo, the nine saints or nine friends of God, that according to tradition initiated the islamisation of Java in the XV and XVI centuries. Largely unknown outside of Indonesia, the Wali Songo pilgrimage remains unfamiliar in the archipelago as well.

Besides allowing a deeper understanding of the roots of Indonesian religious history and of the spread and acceptance of Islam, rediscovering the Wali Songo may help to reintroduce a peaceful image of the Muslim world. In such a way, reactivating the tradition of Wali Songo outside of the country but also inside, may support the idea of a peaceful religion of traders, of scholars and culture lovers open and able to integrate the traditions of other cultural groups. The Wali Songo are said to be at the origin of pesantren (Muslim religious schools) and largely used local arts and culture in their teachings.

In an area of Central and East Java where minority groups may tend to impose the views of a reformist not to say a rigorist Islam, the Wali Songo teachings may offer a 'new common vehicle', a synonym of understanding, peace and cultural respect.

If the development of international pilgrimage activity would suppose the setting up of proper infrastructures, to do so, may also boost new areas of services that would definitely support regional developments in the largest archipelago of the world and in a country that, besides being laic and governed by the principles of Pancasila, is before all the country worldwide with the largest number of Muslim citizens.

In a planet currently governed by globalization, the origins of the Wali Songo, which are still relevant, if discussed, would demonstrate that ideas and religions can be shared, peacefully, across the land and seas.

**Key Words:** Walisongo; Indonesia; pilgrimage; religious tourism, territorial development

## Introduction

The current paper explores the tradition of the Walisongo, the nine saints or nine 'Friends of God' that Islamised Java in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Largely ignored outside Indonesia, those pilgrims remain unfamiliar in the archipelago as well. We will detail the heritage of the Walisongo and examine if it could justify the creation of international pilgrimages. We will also question how those pilgrimages could affect the image of Indonesia and analyse the possible impacts at regional level.

### The South East Asian Mediterranean: a space for trade and cultural exchanges

Geographically, Indonesia, one of the largest archipelagos in the World, constitutes a natural barrier and the sole sea route between modern India and China. As stated by Coedes (1964:2)

*The ancient history of South-East Asian countries can be approached from two sides, the Indian and the Chinese, or better still from both at the same time.*

In territories rich with spices, camphor, various essences, precious woods and even gold, large Indianised kingdoms appeared starting from the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD in Funan (Cambodia) and between the 4<sup>th</sup> century to 6<sup>th</sup> century across the Malay states and Indonesia.

In Cambodia, Champa, the Malay Peninsula, Indonesia (Sumatra, Java, and Bali), Burma and Thailand, Hindu and Buddhist rulers took power and developed either inland-agricultural or coastal-trading states. Their capacity to integrate animist and local beliefs explains the success of Hinduism and Buddhism (Rahman, 2014) although 'most of the population preserved the essentials of their own culture' (Nicolas J.Krom in Coedes, 1965a:33). However:

*Hinduism has always been and still is the culture of the upper classes, but never became completely that of the masses, that were attached to Indonesian animism and to the ancestor cult (W.F. Stutterheim cited by Coedes, 1965b:33).*

When it comes to Islamic penetration in Indonesia, the picture is more blurred. During the colonial period and the early years of the Indonesian Republic, historical and archaeological research, probably influenced by political considerations, concentrated on Hindu and Buddhist heritages. The entry point of the religion and the process of Islamization, whether through conversion or adhesion, contact of traders with Arab, Persian, Gujarat traders or Chinese diplomats are still debated. Contradictions exist between Chinese and Marco Polo sources. Evidence of early Islamic presence remains questionable as gravestones might have been imported to Indonesia. For Geertz (1960), Islam came from India. However, a Chinese origin might not be excluded: Islamic faith is present in Canton starting from the 7<sup>th</sup> century. A Muslim admiral, Zheng was in command of the Chinese fleet that interacted with Indonesia (1405-1407). Muslims were also leading some embassies sent by the court of China to Malayu (Sriwijaya) in 1281 (Coedes, 1965c:202) or by the king of Samudra (North Sumatra) to China in 1282 (Ricklefs, 2008).

Without any doubt, the diffusion of Islam is related to the development of trade routes. Muslims controlled most of them: in the Middle East starting in 1250 by the Mameluke Sultanate and in South East Asia by Muslim Indians from Gujarat (Pringle, 2010).

Marco Polo (Polo, *et al.*, 1993:III, 284) confirms the proselytism of the Muslim traders:

*... This kingdom (Ferlec), you must know is so much frequented by the Saracen merchants that they have converted the natives to the law of Mahomet.*

The Dawa'h obligation requires any Muslim to propagate and spread the religion of Mahomet. The commercial interest of Hindu and Buddhist elites ready to convert to facilitate trade; the miscibility between Islam and local beliefs, in addition to the peaceful attitude of traders probably created fruitful conditions for the dissemination of Islam across the archipelago.

Besides a tombstone dated 1082 found in Leran, East Java and still considered with caution by scientists, the usually admitted first known Muslim kingdoms were Lambeh and Pasai (Basma, a land of animism for Marco Polo) in which were found the tombstones of Malik Al Shaleh (died 1292) and of his son Malik Al Dahir (died 1326). Both locations are close to the entrance of the Malacca Strait.

**Table 1: The nine Walisongo, names, aliases, place and date of birth (Work in progress)**

Spiritual name	Name	Alias	Born /In
Sunan Gresik	Maulana Malik Ibrahim	Syekh Maghribi Kakek Bantal	Gujarat / Turkey / Persia / Ouzbekistan ? According to J.P.Moquette (1912) and based on grave inscriptions origins from Kashan (Persia)
Sunan Ampel		Raden Rakhmat	?/1401
Sunan Giri	Maulana Abdul Yakin	Raden Paku Sultan Abdul Fakhir Joko Samudra	Blabangan (Banyuwangi) – East Java /1442
Sunan Bonang		Raden Makhdam Ibrahim	Surabaya/ ?
Sunan Drajad	Syarifuddin	Raden Qosim	Surabaya ?/ 1470
Sunan Kalijaga		Raden Mas Said	?/1460
Sunan Kudus		Ja'far Shodiq	?/?
Sunan Muria		Raden Umar Said	?/?
Sunan Gunung Jati	Syarif Hidayatullah	Muhammad Nurrudin Sayyid Kamil Syekh Nurullah Faletahan	Pasai (North Sumatra)/1448 ???

Recently, researchers have identified new Acehese tombstones from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The oldest one, dated 1007 AD was found in Kuta Lubhok, Lamreh, at the extreme North East part of Aceh. (Suprayitno, 2011). However, Pr Edwards Mc Kinnon stressed during a conference in Perlak, Aceh that local legends claim that Islam arrived during the 9<sup>th</sup> century (Center, 2012).

### Spread of Islam and modern politics

Three conferences on ‘The Coming of Islam to Indonesia’ (Medan 1963, Jakarta 1982 and Aceh 1983) challenged the studies of European scientists from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: they suggest that Islam reached the archipelago much earlier, probably during the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Arsyad, 2012). In discussing this, Azyumardi Azra (2006) suggests that Islamic penetration was not uniform.

In Indonesia, 87.46% of the population declares its faith in Islam. Also, despite being a laic state ruled by the Pancasila principles,<sup>[1]</sup> political concerns are never far from religious ones. When on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2017, President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) declared Barus in Central Tanapuli (West coast of Sumatra) as the entry point of Islam in the archipelago, Acehese scholars called for betrayal (Bakri, 2017). Supported by NU (Nahdlatul Ulama), the largest Muslim association in Indonesia and pro-Barus historians, Jokowi’s message was clear:

*It must be symbolically understood that Jokowi acknowledges that the kind of Islam that Indonesia needs is an Islam that embraces differences. Islam Nusantara is an Islam that celebrates the diversity of local traditions and global traditions as shown by Barus in the past (Halim & Gunawan, 2017).*

The image of Islam promoted is close to the Walisongo teachings. It aims at countering extremism and fundamentalism.

### The Walisongo: history and tradition

The arrival of Islam in Indonesia remains until today a topic for animated debates. Analysing the way the

religion spread across Java is even more hazardous. However, tradition recalls the particular place of nine saints or ‘Friends of God’ that by their actions converted a large number of Javanese: the Walisongo.

In the Suma Oriental, the Portuguese sailor Tome Pires reports that ‘*the king of Java is a heathen*’ (Pires, 1515a:174) and that the Vice-Roy, Guste Pate is always at sea fighting against the moors in particular from Demak sultanate. The dissemination of Islamic faith as represented in these reports appears far from idyllic and peaceful:

*At a time when there were heathens along the sea coast of Java, many merchants used to come, Parsees, Arabs, Gujaratees, Bengalees, Malays and other nationalities, there being many moors among them. They began to trade in the country and to grow rich. They succeeded in way of making mosque, and mollahs came from outside so that they come in such growing numbers that the sons of these said moors were already Javanese and rich, for they had been in these parts for about seventy years. In some places, the heathen Javanese lords turned Mohammedan, and these mollahs and the merchant moors took possession of these places. Others had a way of fortifying the places where they lived, and they took people of their own who sailed in their junks, and they killed the Javanese lords and made themselves lords; and in this way made themselves masters of the sea coast and took over power and trade in Java (Pires, 1515b:182)*

Pires presents the city of Demak as a stronghold for Muslim sea fighters. A sultanate that would remain through history and tradition related to Sunan Ampel, Sunan Giri, Sunan Bonang, Sunan Kudus and Sunan Kalijaga,

### The nine ‘Friends of God.’

To express sainthood, the word ‘Sunan’ is preferred in Java to ‘Wali’ (from Arabic wala, ‘that is near’ meaning a friend, a relative or protector). The word comes from ‘Suhun’ translated as ‘to do honour to’ (Ricklefs, 2008b:12). Hamka (1982) indicates that it refers to ‘Susunan’ a Javanese word describing the hands pressed together, palms touching and fingers pointed upwards and bowing. A position rather similar to the Hindu ‘Namaste’, also referred to as ‘sembah’ in Java and Bali, thus illustrating the porosity between cultures.

1. Pancasila is the official philosophical theory of Indonesia, based on five principles:  
 i) Belief in the one and only god  
 ii) Just and civilized humanity  
 iii) The unity of Indonesia  
 iv) Democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations amongst representatives  
 v) Social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia

In addition to the books of Marco Polo, Tome Pires and Odoric de Pordenone, the Indo-Malay tradition offers several texts related to the coming of Islam. (Ricklefs, 2008c:11-17)

Kasdi (2017:11) introduces the Walisongo as Sunni ‘guardians combination of syari’ah and tasawuf experts who have spread the peaceful and cultural Islam’. A first batch was sent to Java at the request of the Muhammad 1<sup>st</sup>, Caliph of the Ottoman Empire. The group was composed of:

*Maulana Malik Ibrahim, who came from Turkey, he was an expert in ruling a country, Maulana Ishaq came from Samarqand (near Bukhara-Russian South), Maulana Ahmad Jumadil Kubra from Egypt, Maulana Muhammad al-Magrabi came from Magrib (Morocco), Maulana Malik Israel came from Turkey, Maulana Muhammad Ali Akbar came from Persia (Iran), Maulana Hasanuddin from Palestinian, Maulana Aliyuddin of Palestinian, and Syekh Subakir came from Persia*

In his seminal book *A History of Modern Indonesia since 1200* Ricklefs (2008d:6) simply notes:

*An early Muslim gravestone dated AH 822 (AD 1419) has been found at Gresik, one of the most important East Javanese ports. It marks the*

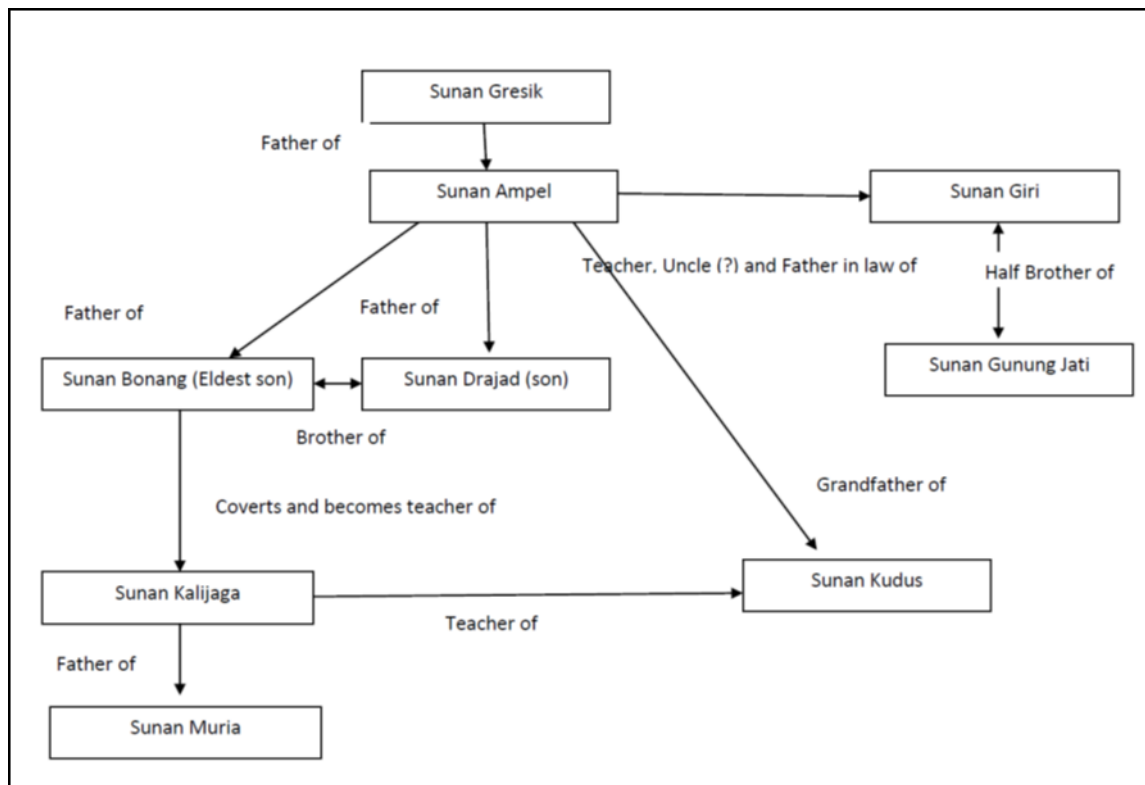
*burial of one Malik Ibrahim, but since this gentleman was apparently not Javanese it merely confirms the presence of foreign Muslims in Java and sheds no further light on the question of coastal Javanese conversion. Local traditions, however, say that Malik Ibrahim was one of the first nine apostles of Islam in Java (the Walisanga), a tradition for which there is no documentary evidence.’*

Dr HM Zainuddin (2019), wakil rektor of the Universitas Islam Negeri in Malang (also called Universitas Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang) wrote that the ‘mysterious’ Wali also the first ‘Islamic missionary’ or ‘father’ of the Walisongo was either from Gujarat, Turkey or Persia whereas the university website notes that

*Sunan Maulana Malik Ibrahim or Makdum Ibrahim As-Samarkandy (also known as Syekh Maghribi) was an Uzbek who arrived in Java in 1404 and worked at Gresik and Leran until his death in 1419.*

The origin of Maulana Malik Ibrahim remains a subject of conjecture. However, he created, during his ten years stay in Gresik, a Muslim community using ‘Sufi or Taşawwuf’ inspired teachings.

Figure 1 Relationships between the various preachers



(Author’s work in process)



Excluded from the main list proposed here, are some saints considered, by alternative traditions, as possible members of the group namely Sunan Prapen, Maulana Ibrahim Asmorokondi, Sunan Bejagung, Syekh Siti Jenar, Kyai Pandan Arang, KT Pusponogoro. Neither do we consider adequate to add, as proposed by Maskudi (2016), former President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) as WaliSepuluh, the 10<sup>th</sup>Walisongo.

### **Friends and relatives**

The Walisongo appear not as apostles of Islam preaching separately all over the archipelago but more as a group of preachers, linked by blood, marriage or spiritual heritage. Conversion takes place either peacefully (by meeting people of Hindu / Buddhist ruled communities, through social works, through trading, advice or marriage), or through military conquest. Creation of religious centres, mosque and pesantren (religious schools) represent a critical step in the conversion of the masses and the concretisation of successful actions towards rulers. Tan Ta Sen traces a Chinese origin for seven of the nine Walisongo and considers them as Sino Javanese Muslims (Sen, 2009:239)

Figure 1 - still a work in process - attempts to examine the relationships between the nine saints. It is based on tradition and information gathered across Indonesia.

### **Walisongo and Dawa'h**

The decline of the Indian kingdoms all over South-East Asia facilitated the dynamic of conversion. The rise of the Sultanate of Malacca strengthened the role of the Walisongo. Once the Strait, the Malay Peninsula, the Riau Islands and the East Coast of Sumatra were controlled, Malacca became a centre of influence for language (lingua franca), Malay culture and Islam. Table 2 attempts to identify the geographical areas in which the Walisongo conducted Dawa'h. It is based on tradition and extensive information gathering across Indonesia. We consider the place they used to live, they died, or they contributed to build as potential destinations for pilgrimages or, at least, in which religious tourism initiatives could be developed

### **Geopolitics, economy, internal politics and tourism**

In 2015, the four most populated Muslim countries in the World were located in Asia. Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, comprising 742,790,000 people representing 42.4% of the total. By 2060, they

shall totalize over 1 billion inhabitants (the World Muslim population shall reach 2,987,390,000). Currently, Indonesia remains the country with the largest Muslim population (219,960,000 in 2015) but soon shall be overtaken by India. (Pew Research Center, 2019) The centre of gravity of Islam has already shifted to Asia: the continent represents a vast market for Islam-related religious tourism.

With the development of a middle class since the early '90s, the abrogation of strict controls on the movement of the local population; affordable airfares and reliable transport means, Indonesian people started to visit and travel all over the country, thus discovering the archipelago. The effects have been of several types: a significant increase in the needs for mass transportation at local, regional and national levels; the development (sometimes chaotic and non-standardised) of tourism infrastructure, in particular hotels; the creation of food places and catering around the areas of interest; the setting up of permanent or non-permanent shops selling tourism / pilgrim souvenirs; and sadly, the degradation of the visited sites particularly tombstones. (Prihantoro & Yuristiadhi, 2016)

On the religion of Java, Geertz (1976:5-7) describes a Javanese society in which Muslims might be divided into three behavioural groups: Abangan, Santri and Prijaji. The latest refers to a minority group: the Hindu-Javanese aristocracy. The Abangan form of Islam corresponds to a syncretism between animist, Hindu and Muslim traditions. Reversely, Santri practice a pure form of Islam. Such a distinction is still used to divide the Indonesian Muslim community between Santri, close to the Muslim association Muhammadiyah (about 50 million members) and Abangan, now regrouped as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) (about 90 million members). We prefer the following terminology by Pringle (Pringle, 2010) who separates worshipers into reformists (influenced by the Middle East and Wahabism) and the more traditionalists (practicing what is called Islam Nusantara).

The decision of President Joko Widodo on Barus and the development of Walisongo-related pilgrimages, close to Nusantara Islam's position, may support, in and outside Indonesia, the image and worldwide dissemination of messages of moderation and peace.

The Walisongo tradition, linking together the legends, myths and history, reveals the deep roots of the Hindu and Pre-Islamic Indonesian civilisation. It questions the way Islam arrived in Indonesia, the period at which

Table 2: Geographical areas in which the different Walisongo conducted Dakwah (Work in progress)

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Sunan Gresik	Champa (Vietnam) Gresik (East Java) In Gresik he converted people of the low class and obtained from the King of Majapahit the possibility to settle in Gresik	Gresik April 7 <sup>th</sup> , 1419	Tombstone in Gresik	Arrives in Gresik in 1404 Probably brother of Maulana Ishaq and son of Syekh Jumadil Qbro or Kubro Maulana Malik Ibrahim is said to be a trader sent for Dakwah to Champa thus coming back to Java after having married a local princess and converted local people His brother Maulana Ishaq went to Pasai (North Sumatra)
Sunan Ampel	Surabaya (East Java) Said to be at the origin of the conversion of the Sultanate of Demak (Central Java) Builds the mosque of Surabaya in 1421 Said to have contributed to the construction of Demak Mosque in 1479	? 1481	Demak Masjid Agung Surabaya Masjid Ampel	Comes to Java in 1442 to visit a relative, princess of Champa married to the king of Majapahit Iraqi, Yemen or Chinese origins Mother said to be a princess of Champa (see above)
Sunan Giri	Rise of Mataram (Lombok) Dakwah to Lombok, Sulawesi and Maluku Founder of a religious school in Desa Sidomukti, Gresik	?	Grave in Giri-Kebomas (Gresik)	A legend states that the baby was abandoned at sea after his birth by his parents Maulana Ishaq and a princess from Blabangan. The coffin was rescued by sailors and brought back to Gresik where he received Sunan Ampel teachings Sunan Giri may have studied with Raden Patah, the first Sultan of Demak He travelled to Pasai to receive together with Sunan Bonang religious teachings from Maulana Ishaq thus meeting his father
Sunan Bonang	Bonang, Central Java (Close to Demak) Becomes the first Imam of the Great Mosque of Demak	?	Died in 1525 Grave in Tuban as the ship could not reach Surabaya due to rough sea	Travels to Pasai with Sunan Giri
Sunan Drajad	Jelag –Paciran later named Drajat (West Java) Gets a large number of followers and build a mosque in 1502 Develops social and charity works	?	Tomb and museum in Drajat	
Sunan Kalijaga	Presented by the tradition as a hero, magician, diplomat, artist, mystic, peacemaker and wise leader Said to have built the mosque of Cirebon (Central Java) A legend states that he also built in one day the Great Mosque of Demak (construction also attributed to Sunan Bonang)	? 1513	Grave in Kadilangu (Demak, Central Java)	Sunan Kalijaga is said to be the son of the regent of Tuban converted to Islam by Sunan Bonang His name comes from an orchard Sunan Kalijaga is presented as a Sufi
Sunan Kudus	Founded Kudus (Central Java) Kudus means holy city a former name of Jerusalem Creates Al Aqsa Mosque in Kudus using as entrance door the former doors of the Majapahit palace Sragi/Simo / Gunung Kidul (Central Java)	? 1550		Sunan Kudus has been taught by Sunan Kalija. He is said to be the son of Sunan Ngudung di Jipang.
Sunan Muria	Preaching in remote areas Pati/ Juwana/ Kudus/ Jepara	?	Tomb in Mount Muria (Central Java)	
Sunan Gunung Jati	Said to have converted West Java Said to have founded Cirebon	Cirebon 1570 ?	Tomb in Gunung Sembung	Said to have died at a very old age Travelled to Mecca where he lived for three years Returns to the services of the Sultan of Demak Marries the Sultan's sister Becomes military commander in West Java and conquers West Java and Banten Blocks the Portuguese at Sunda Kelapa (old harbour of Batavia the current Jakarta)

initial contacts were made and the communication Muslim preachers used, to convert at the same time low ranking animist people and high ranking Hindu Buddhist rulers. It expresses the essence of Islam Nusantara, as Indonesian elites call the particular Islam practised in the archipelago, tinted with indigenous beliefs, traditions and arts.

Promoting such a pilgrimage internationally makes sense, as it can demonstrate the openness and somehow peaceful way, which the 'nine Friends of God' used to spread Islam and realise Dawa'h. To anyone wishing to understand Indonesia, the Walisongo tradition is a revelation of the complexity of the world and culture they are living in. Many Indonesian politicians or foreign diplomats – such as the Australian Ambassador, Paul Grigson– are willing to show, by doing the 'tombstones tour', how strong the links are that they have with the archipelago.

Radical Muslims are conscious of the risk represented by promoting such tourism. As expressed by Irfan Arwas, head of the executive board of the Indonesian Mujahideen Council, an organisation inspired by Wahhabism and Salafism:

*Muslims are not allowed to idolise anyone ... (Pilgrims) pray to dead people. They idolise the Walisongo (Topsfield, 2016).*

Through the development of the Walisongo pilgrimages, as in the Wayang Golek theatre that explores the Kurukshetra War or Mahabharata War, a struggle takes place between the ideas and between the somewhat disparate visions of Islam.

### Tourism as a priority

Considered as a priority sector since Jokowi's election, (Fournié & Dou, 2018) tourism has been positively impacted by the Presidential Decree 21-2016, dated March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2016 creating Short Stay Visa Free facilities

for 169 countries, many of Muslim faith. Due to become the largest exchange currency contributor to Indonesia's revenue, tourism is thus, bypassing oil and gas contribution; direct, indirect and induced impacts of tourism are now strictly monitored in terms of contribution to GDP, creation of jobs, investments and foreign visitors figures. Instructions have been given to boost tourism-related projects and investments (Singgih & Rahadiana, 2018)

For Wall and Mathieson:

*tourism is a multi-faceted phenomenon that involves movement to and stay in destinations outside the normal place of residence (2006a:19).*

They consider that

*Religion has been a powerful force which has long caused people to travel to religious centres in many parts of the world (2006b:251).*

Jaelani (2017) confirms that religious tourism and Halal tourism are growing in Indonesia possibly allowing the archipelago to become one the leading country in the future for welcoming Muslims. Several Indonesian cities have the potential to welcome visitors as is the case in Gresik (Saputra, *et al.*, 2015) or Cirebon (Jaelani, 2016). Following the example of Malaysia (Bhuiyan, *et al.*, 2011), Indonesia has a huge potential to develop Islamic tourism.

This paper proposes that Walisongo related-tourism is at the crossroads of several forms of tourism: religious and spiritual; cultural, artistic and heritage tourism; historical tourism; ethnic tourism and; dark or thanatourism. This may add complexity when characterising and studying the demand; when preparing planning and managing the offer but would undoubtedly increase the potential market. Visitors might also be of a hybrid type between pilgrims and tourists.

Table 3. Tombs, mausoleum or mosques can be found mainly in two provinces: East Java and Central Java

Province	City	Wali	Remarks
East Java	Gresik	Sunan Gresik	Tombstone located in the city centre
	Surabaya	Sunan Ampel	Located in the west of Ampel Mosque, Surabaya
	Gresik	Sunan Giri	Located in the hills
	Tuban	Sunan Bonang	Tombstone located close to Tuban Great Mosque
	Lamongan	Sunan Drajad	Located in the village, A museum can be visited
Central Java	Kudus	Sunan Kudus	Located in the Great Mosque of Kudus dated 1549
	Kudus	Sunan Muria	Tomb located in Mount Muria, 45 km from Kudus
	Demak	Sunan Kalijaga	Mausoleum near Kadilangu
			The Great Mosque of Demak said to be built by Raden Patah is of interest
Cirebon	Sunan Gununglaji	Located 5 km from the city on a rock (formerly Hindu port of Caruban)	



## The heritage of Walisongo

The proselytism of the Walisongo had effects all over Java. However, their cultural heritage composed of tombs, mausoleum, or mosques can be found mainly in two provinces: East Java and Central Java. Both are well connected either by air or sea through international airports and large sea harbours offering to the development of international pilgrimage the needed logistics platforms: Surabaya for East Java and Semarang for Central Java

Said to be mystics, sometimes magicians, gifted with supra-natural powers, the Walisongo developed an extreme sensitivity and understanding of psychology, accepting to introduce into their teachings local beliefs, indigenous traditions and arts. Indeed the heritage of these wise and faith filled men still resonates to the present day in Indonesia:

- Considering his possible Persian, Turkish or Ouzbekh origins, **Sunan Gresik** was probably an adept of Sufism, a school of practices opened to mysticism and the inner research of God. The Walisongo missionary practices are close to the ones of Sufi in Kashmir where ‘persuasion, discussion and discourse’ were used (Malik, 2003). Interest in these philosophies and teachings is currently quite high.
- **Sunan Bonang** is said to have used Gamelan<sup>[2]</sup> to adapt traditional songs to Islam. Tombo Ati, a poetic and religious song, is associated with his name. **Sunan Drajad** also created melodies for Gamelan, in particular, the Gending Pangkur theme.
- **Sunan Kudus** is famous for adopting Wayang Golek, the Indonesian puppets usually used for the Sanskrit epics Mahabharata and Ramayana; for incorporating Hindu and Buddhist symbols in architecture; for teaching Tawhid, the central concepts of Islam, through stories.
- **Sunan Kalijaga**, besides also using Wayang and music, imposed Baju Takwa, a particular way of dressing for Muslims.
- **Sunan Muria** is known for using traditional instruments from the gamelan and an in-depth knowledge of Javanese culture.
- The Walisongo also initiated the opening of the first ‘Pesantren’. Existing Indonesian religious schools still trace their origins to that period.

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2. A traditional ensemble music of Java and Bali in Indonesia, made up predominantly of percussive instruments.

Thus, an extensive range of derived activities, services and small industries could be developed around the Walisongo traditions. Conscious of the potential, tour-operators have started to operate Walisongo organised trips. Local governments have launched festivities under the form of religious festivals or celebration days (Fealy & White, 2008).

## Managing the flows of tourists

Religion and spirituality take a significant place in the life of Asian people, more particularly of the Muslim ones. Worldwide, flows of pilgrims, of tourists or of a hybrid form of visitors grow significantly. With the Walisongo heritage, Indonesia possesses several sites (sacred shrines, mosques, historical places) of high interest for local and international, Muslim and non-Muslim visitors. However, the offer is still unstructured and is mostly based on individual initiatives.

No official communication promotes Walisongo-related tourism, and no coordination exists between provinces on the subject. Also, for all nine Walisongo, we consider as necessary: in the first instance to develop the proper tools that will allow a compilation and analysis of visitor statistics - origin, length of stay and motivation; to study the already existing infrastructures and services available and the ones that need to be developed. As a second requirement, the creation of the related products and services within and across provinces must be supported. This would allow offer and demand to match. In parallel, efficient communication towards local and international tourists should be developed. As a third phase, tourist experience should be enhanced. To succeed, such a strategy must be based on a mix of territorial development, competitive intelligence and tourism planning. Local and regional authorities must combine to universally support it.

## Conclusion

At the moment, Indonesia is at a crossroads (Fournié & Dou, 2017), a confrontation around the theme of Walisongo can be avoided between Traditionalists and supporters of Reformist Islam. If adequately monitored by the Indonesian authorities, the Walisongo heritage represents a unique opportunity to develop Islamic-related tourism in the country, support local and regional development, promote Indonesian culture worldwide, and, spread a message of peace and openness. By touching religious, spiritual, cultural, artistic, ethnic aspects but also history and heritage, Walisongo-related tourism represents a large market, probably undervalued until today. To go further, data (mostly absent) on tourists and pilgrims absolutely need to be collected and analysed. The graves, tombstones and traditional monuments need to be protected from time and tourists impacts. The development of infrastructure, products and services must be properly planned. If correctly implemented, such a strategy could be developed in other regions across the archipelago and progressively integrate the different parts of Nusantara Islam's puzzle.

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