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Some 100 kilometres west of Jakarta, not far from Old Banten, stands the tomb of Sheik Muhammad Sholeh, an early preacher of Islam in the region. The tomb is at the summit of Gunung Santri, a tree-clad hill overlooking the rapidly developing harbour town of Bojonegoro. Gunung Santri is a modestly popular place of pilgrimage for Indonesian Muslims. As pilgrims approach the saint’s tomb, and even inside the mausoleum itself, they have to negotiate a series of alms boxes. Slipping money into the slot on an alms box, or giving something to a tomb custodian (kuncen or juru kunci), brings merit to the pilgrim and an income to the local community. But many pilgrims, especially poor ones, face a problem. There are so many alms boxes, and so many less than subtle invitations to make a donation, that to relinquish a banknote— even the smallest denomination banknote—is more than many can afford.

Fortunately there is a convenient solution. On the path that winds up the hill to the sheik’s tomb, dozens of rickety stalls feed off the passing flow of visitors. Among them is a microscopic money-changing operation—an amoebic ‘bank’. Standing beside a rough wooden table two women offer cash-strapped pilgrims a simple but essential financial service. They replace banknotes with coins, taking a 20 per cent commission on each transaction. If a pilgrim lays a Rp 1,000 banknote on the table (the smallest denomination of Indonesia’s banknotes, currently worth about ten US cents), he or she receives back a pile of eight Rp 100 coins. These go one by one into alms boxes or into the hands of tomb staff, buying merit for the pilgrim, saving them money, and generating a tiny but valuable income for the women of the ‘single-cell’ bank.
1 THE GROWING POPULARITY OF LOCAL PILGRIMAGE

Money and pilgrimage go together. In fact, it is the central argument of this chapter that not only is pilgrimage an increasingly significant component of the domestic travel economy in Java, but commercial transactions in the marketplace of pilgrimage are also metaphorical actions that parallel devotional ritual and illuminate the relationship between believer and God.

Over the last two decades there has been an explosion in the number of Indonesian Muslims undertaking the hajj pilgrimage to the Holy Land in Saudi Arabia, though for the moment the number is capped by the Saudi government at 205,000 a year.1 In tandem with this, there has also been a remarkable leap in the number of Muslims making visits to local places of pilgrimage in Java and Madura. There are well over 100 significant sites of Islamic pilgrimage across the two islands, ranging from the mausoleums of Java’s renowned Nine Saints (Wali Songo) through the tombs of lesser saints, revered Muslim clerics, Muslim monarchs and local officials, to the graves of powerful women and the founding fathers of Islamic communities.

Evidence of the increase in pilgrim numbers is mostly anecdotal; reliable statistics that permit comparison of numbers over extended periods are difficult to come by. To my knowledge the best—though still not comprehensive—account of visitor numbers to pilgrimage sites appears in a report by Armstrong (2006). The report confines itself to sites administered by the Archaeological Service (Dinas Purbakala) of East Java. It records a startling rise in the number of people visiting Islamic gravesites over the last two decades. Armstrong (2006:6) finds that between 1988 and 2005 visits to such sites rose by 873 per cent, from a total of less than half a million for the province in 1988 to three and a half million in 2005 (see Figure 4.1).2

The report also records figures for visits to other kinds of ‘archaeological’ sites, most notably pre-Islamic temple monuments (candi), museums and caves. Interest in most of these sites has declined significantly by comparison with interest in Islamic gravesites. In 1988 only 49 per cent of visits to all categories of archaeological sites administered by the East Java Archaeological Service were to Islamic gravesites, but by 2005 this had risen to 89 per cent (Armstrong 2006:6).

1 'Quota Haji Mungkin Naik, Ongkos Tidak' [The Quota for Pilgrims May Rise, but the Cost Will Not], Tempo Interaktif Ekonomi Bisnis, 18 May 2005.

2 I am grateful to David Armstrong for providing the data on which Figure 4.1 is based.
Drajat, located halfway between Tuban and Surabaya, rose from 26,381 in 1988 to 696,858 in 2005. In the most dramatic increase, visits to the tomb of Ibrahim Asmorokondi just east of Tuban rose from 11,886 in 1988 to 467,896 in 2005, close to a forty-fold increase (Armstrong 2006: 65).

Pilgrimage sites in other parts of Java claim similar increases, though the figures are decidedly rubbery. When I visited the Great Mosque in Demak in 2000, custodial staff told me that in 1987 a total of 341,385 people had visited the mosque with its adjacent holy graves, but that by 2000 this had jumped to 606,918 people. A million visitors a year were claimed for the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati in Cirebon in 1997. When I visited the site in 2002, staff assured me that visitor numbers were far above the 1997 figure.

2 REASONS FOR VISITING LOCAL PILGRIMAGE SITES

Why this relatively sudden spike in numbers? Clearly it is much more than a backward-looking, traditionalist response to rapid social change. Increasingly self-confident displays of Islamic identity and piety are a major factor. For many Muslims, whether followers of purist orthodoxy or those prepared to make accommodations with local beliefs and practices, visiting the tomb of a revered saint is an act of piety sanctioned by tradition and explicitly urged on Muslims by verses in the Qur'an as well as by the words of the Prophet recorded in Hadith.

The Qur'anic verse which has most often been cited to me in justification of pilgrimage is Al-Ma'idah verse 35, which reads:

> Do all you can in His cause, and if you do so you will prosper. (Q5:35)

This is interpreted as permitting believers to seek tawassul, that is, intermediation by the Prophet or by another figure ‘close to God’ on behalf of the believer. In order to accomplish this, pilgrims say, believers may petition God and the Prophet by way of prayers to a local saint.

On several occasions pilgrims have also quoted to me the well-known and well-authenticated Hadith from the Sahih Muslim in which the Prophet is reported to have said ‘Visit graves, for that makes you mindful of death’ (Sunah Ulama). Pilgrims often say that the Shafi'i school of law, which dominates almost totally in Indonesia, categorises the visiting of graves as ‘recommended’ (mandal, mustahabb), though religious scholars in Indonesia sometimes add conditions to this recommendation, especially with regard to visits by women.

The steady rise in the number of pilgrims undertaking the hajj to the Holy Land seems to be having a flow-on effect into local pilgrimage. Before and after performing the hajj, many Indonesians make visits to the tombs of local saints as part of the totality of the hajj experience. With a current cap on the number of Indonesians permitted to undertake the hajj, it is also possible that some pilgrims who miss out—estimated at more than 30,000 during the 2006 hajj season—may make a local pilgrimage as a substitute for the ‘real thing’. Certainly for some of the many millions of Indonesians who cannot afford to undertake the hajj, local pilgrimage may be a kind of lesser pilgrimage (umrah).

Muslims may also emphasise the vitality and respectability of travel other than the hajj for the purpose of invigorating faith. Said Agil Siraj, a leading religious scholar (ulama) in Indonesia’s biggest Islamic organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), cites the great figures of the past imam.
Bukhari, Ibn Khaldun, Imam Syafii and Ibn Battutah as examples of Muslim intellectuals whose travels were driven not only by curiosity about the world at large but also by their understanding of the Qur'an. This, Said Agil says, 'impels for understanding of what is invisible to our eyes' (Said Agil Siraj 2003).

Rising incomes and improvements in economic infrastructure are other important factors. Over the past three decades access to pilgrimage sites has become far easier. Roads, even to remote sites, are now sealed and often served by public transport. Many places now boast spacious parking areas, eateries and nearby hotel accommodation. In the early 1990s the beautiful holy place of Kahyangan in the hills south of Tirtomoyo in Central Java had no vehicular access.12 Pilgrims could only reach it after a two-kilometre walk along a rough, steep track. Long-stay visitors (apart from those who were fasting during their stay) had to bring their own food or return along the track to a nearby village to buy it. Today a sealed road runs right to the site's entrance, where there is also a parking area. Inside the compound there is a small eatery as well as a bathroom and simple overnight accommodation.

As part of this infrastructure improvement, some local governments are encouraging, or even directly investing in, the development of holy places as tourist attractions in the hope that the sites will attract sightseers or casual day-trippers as well as religiously motivated pilgrims.

3 PILGRIMAGE SITES AS SOURCES OF REVENUE

Today, an increasingly diverse array of revenue-raising practices and commercial interests are attaching themselves to local pilgrimage, feeding off the rising tide of visitors and at the same time investing in the system to further augment pilgrim numbers and boost turnover. Pilgrimage sites have always relied on pilgrims to fund their growth and their maintenance.13 Income from pilgrims provides a livelihood for site custodians, their families and surrounding communities. It also sustains the educational and charitable functions that all major sites have. There are three main ways by which pilgrims make direct contributions to the revenue and assets of a site: direct donations; promissory undertakings (wakaf) or charitable cash endowments (zakat).

At most sites, it is proper etiquette for visitors to report to the site office or to a supervising site custodian. Visitors record their name, place of origin, purpose of visit, number of persons in the group and other details. They also make a donation of cash, often recording the amount in a special column in the guest book. The donation is invariably small — perhaps Rp 1,000 (about US$1) even for a group, though donations of up to Rp 100,000 are not unusual. At most sites there are also alms boxes placed strategically along thoroughfares, in rest pavilions or in the burial chamber itself. Because donations made at alms boxes are more anonymous, they are usually much smaller — donations of Rp 100 (1 cent) are very common. Often alms boxes are manned by attendants who draw attention to them as pilgrims stream past, sometimes physically blocking their path. At the tomb of Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin, Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa and other members of their family at Old Banten, there are seven alms boxes in the narrow confines of the burial chamber, each manned by an attendant who will often gesture aggressively at his alms box as pilgrims pass by. At the tomb of Sunan Bonang in Tuban, attendants draw attention to the alms boxes by tapping on them loudly with sticks. It is common for pilgrims to make a vow (tadar or kauf) to 'repay' a saint in some fashion if a wish is granted. The repayment may be in the form of a cash donation to the site, but very often it is 'in kind' in the form of repairs to the site or a gift of valuable appliances or decorations. The burial chamber at the tomb of Mbah Jugo and Imam Sujono on Mount Kawi near Malang (East Java) is lined with more than a dozen grandfather clocks donated by recipients of the saints' largesse, and at least half a dozen glittering chandeliers hang from the ceiling. Outside the burial chamber, stainless steel railings donated by a grateful pilgrim run along the walkway leading to the entrance. A special office near the Mount Kawi tomb will arrange performances of shadow plays — including the special Chinese-style potehi shadow play — for pilgrims seeking to repay the generosity of the two saints. At the mausoleum of Ki Ageng Balak near Solo in Central Java, the custodial staff will arrange (tadar or kauf) and special endowments, whether land endowments (wakaf) or charitable cash endowments (zakat).

13 The site commemorates a meeting between Panembahan Senopati and the spirit queen of the southern ocean. Senopati founded the central Javanese state of Mataram some time in the 1580s.

14 But not entirely. In the past, and to some extent even today, holy places were given perifitan status; that is, they were protected by royal and freed from normal tax obligations. Today some sites are supported financially by government agencies such as the Archaeological Service in East Java.

15 Mbah Jugo and Imam Sujono are the main figures in a devotional cult centered on their twin graves in a mausoleum high on the slopes of Mount Kawi. The site is famous for its power to bestow wealth on devotees. The origins of the cult are obscure but many pilgrims believe that Mbah Jugo and Imam Sujono fought with the messianic Prince Diponegoro during the Java War (1825-30).

16 Ki Ageng Balak is a legendary figure believed by pilgrims to have been a prince of the old Javanese state of Majapahit. He is famous for his power to help people in trouble with the law.
for thanksgiving meals (slametan) to be served to all who happen to be present in the tomb's antechamber. So popular and so frequent are those meals that local villagers have complained about them, claiming that they attract free-loaders who eat better than they do.17

Some sites—though probably only a small minority of them—receive or manage wakaf and the collection of the Islamic tithe (zakat). The Prince Kuningan Foundation (Yayasan Pangeran Kuningan), for example, manages the tomb of Prince Kuningan in Jakarta and plays a principal role in the administration of a wakaf fund—the Al-Muqietu Land Endowment Fund (Wakaf Tunai Al-Muqietu). This allows people with limited financial means to buy cash shares in the fund. Eventually the proceeds of the fund will be used to buy land that will be donated to the Prince Kuningan Foundation as a collective wakaf endowment. 18

Outside the burial chamber of most popular pilgrimage sites, and in some cases right by a saint's graveside, vendors sell the requisites of pilgrimage. These include flowers and flower petals (especially kenongko, kantil and mawar blossoms) that are scattered on a grave to honour the saint. Also sold are perfumed oil, incense, envelopes for cash donations, and bottles of water that are placed near a holy grave. In many places, Islamic music and sermon also proliferate, not to mention colourful wall calendars focusing on the religious observances of the Islamic year.

19 The 36th sura of the Qur'an, also written Ya Sin, often considered the most appropriate sura to read at someone's deathbed or graveside.

Invariably there are stalls selling clothes, not just explicitly Islamic garments like scarves, jilbab head coverings, collarless shirts, black peci caps and white skullcaps, but also everyday attire, often secondhand, and footwear too. At restaurants and eateries pilgrims can usually buy local delicacies and other souvenirs foods to take home to their families and neighbours. At the tomb of Sunan Drajt, for example, they can purchase the local sticky-rice and coconut cakes known as wengko babat. At Sunan Bonang's Prostration Place in the village of Bonang near Lasem, they go home with pungent-smelling locally dried fish. At the Gunung Kawi site near Malang, it is locally processed yams (abi) that are prized, and at the Great Mosque in Demak, star fruit (blending). At some sites, 'Islamic' foods such as dates and Middle Eastern sweetmeats are on sale.

Many of the busiest sites are surrounded by small hotels and home-stay accommodation. At Gunung Kawi, for example, there are at least a dozen small hotels within walking distance of the main tomb. Especially if they arrive on their own or in small groups, as pilgrims approach the sites, 'Islamic' foods such as dates and Middle Eastern sweetmeats are on sale.

In the vicinity of the busiest pilgrimage sites, paths and streets are filled with stalls and small shops selling souvenirs, books, clothes, food and drinks. Souvenirs may include locally made prayer beads, amulets, wall clocks with pious messages on them, portraits of saints, framed verses from the Qur'an, locally made ceramics, prayer mats and bottles of perfume. Religious books are on sale—the Qur'an, the Surat. Many pilgrimage sites also attract beggars, although officially begging is almost always frowned on. Notices around the tomb of Sunan Girî in Gresik and at Gunung Priing in Muntian, for example, explicitly forbid begging, but there are nevertheless significant numbers of beggars along the approaches to the tombs—most of them women and children. In a small number of holy places there are even significant numbers of prostitutes. Pangeran Samodro—a prince of the early Islamic state of Demak—is honoured as one of the first disseminators of Islam in the interior of Central Java. His tomb, and that of his lover and stepmother Nyai Ontrowulan, is at Gunung Kemukus on the shores of the Kedung Ombo Reservoir north of Solo. The site has become controversial for its numerous prostitutes and a regiment of devotions that requires pilgrims to engage in promiscuous sex.20

Improvements in transport infrastructure and steadily rising income levels have triggered a burgeoning services sector, generally called pilgrimage tourism (wisata ziarah) or spiritual tourism (wisata spiritual). A majority of pilgrims now travel to pilgrimage sites by chartered bus.

20 Not all visitors to Gunung Kemukus engage in promiscuous sex, but a recent study describes the site as 'at a glance more resembling Jakarta's Kajisho prostitution complex', adding that the thousands of visitors who come every month are the principal source of income for the local community (de Guzman 2006).
Most of these trips are organised at village level by local clerics, officials or school teachers. Each pilgrim in a party pays a contribution towards the hire of the bus. Food is very often the responsibility of each individual, and in many instances pilgrims will sleep in the bus or (where it is allowed) in a mosque or rest pavilion at a pilgrimage site. Java and Madura do not have widely recognised standard pilgrimage routes, so there is considerable freedom in determining an itinerary. Pilgrimage tours can be quite strenuous. One privately organised group is reported to have set out by chartered bus from Mojokerto in East Java, taking in the tombs of Sunan Dufel (in Surabaya), Sunan Giri (Gresik), Sunan Drajet (Lamongan), Sunan Bonang (Tuban), Sunan Muria (near Kudus), Sunan Kudus (Kudus), Sunan Kaflaja (Demak) and Sunan Gunung Jati (Cirebon). The group then stopped in Jakarta where the pilgrims visited Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (a nationalistic theme park) and the giant Istiqlal Mosque before heading for the tomb of Sultan Hasanuddin in Banten. This was followed by visits to the holy tombs at Parjalu (near Ciamis), Pamijahan (south of Tasikmalaya), Gunung Pring (Muntulak) and Bayat (near Klaten). The tour culminated with prayers in the Great Mosque in Solo. More often, though, pilgrimage tours are shorter, extending only for as long, or as far, as the money lasts—which may not be very far at all.

Increasingly, tour operators are offering pilgrimage packages specially tailored to the tastes of middle-class city dwellers, who expect their travel to be well organised, comfortable and even luxurious. Java Tours of Surabaya, for example, offers a 'Nine Saints of Islam Pilgrimage Tour' lasting six days and five nights. Travelling in an air-conditioned bus, pilgrims start out from Surabaya, staying overnight in Tuban, Kudus and Cirebon. The tour takes in each of the tombs of the Nine Saints, with a stop to shop for batik in Pekalongan. The tour includes accommodation in three-star hotels, all meals, entry tickets, baggage handling and the services of a guide. For groups of 15 or more, the cost is US$206 per person twin share. Shorter tours and tours for smaller groups are also available.

Other companies offer variations on this itinerary. Linda Jaya of Surabaya, for example, offers what looks like a gruelling four-day tour-conditioned bus, pilgrims start out from Surabaya, staying overnight in Tuban, Kudus and Cirebon. The tour takes in each of the tombs of the Nine Saints, with a stop to shop for batik in Pekalongan. The tour includes accommodation in three-star hotels, all meals, entry tickets, baggage handling and the services of a guide. For groups of 15 or more, the cost is US$206 per person twin share. Shorter tours and tours for smaller groups are also available.

Other companies offer variations on this itinerary. Linda Jaya of Surabaya, for example, offers what looks like a gruelling four-day tour starting from Surabaya, taking in all the Nine Saints tombs, and ending with visits to Borobudur and the royal palaces in Yogyakarta and Solo. It also includes an opportunity to go shopping in Solo. A number of companies offer pilgrimage tours to Java from Indonesia's outer islands and there are now several Malaysian companies offering pilgrimage packages to Java for Malay Muslims.

Decentralisation is placing pressure on district administrations to maximise local sources of revenue, the so-called regionally raised revenue (PAD). As part of this process, pilgrimage sites are being targeted. Some now have box offices at their entrance. Visitors are required to buy entry tickets, the revenue from which may go largely, or entirely, to the local government. There are now government-operated ticket boxes at, among others, the tombs of Sunan Bonang (in Tuban), Sunan Bayat (near Klaten), Gunung Kawi (near Malang), Ki Ageng Balak (near Solo), Gunung Sandhi (near Cilacap), Gunung Remus (north of Solo) and the burial ground of the Great Mosque at Demak.

The district government of Gresik has poured money into the development of an annual celebration of Maulana Malik Ibrahim's birth. Taking place in the town square adjacent to the saint's tomb, the Birthday Fair (Cebayor Maulidi) highlights the traditional Islamic arts of Gresik— especially the drumming known as bedak teter—and promotes the sale of local goods. A similar strategy is in place in Demak, where the district government has invested heavily in revenue-generating celebrations linked to the holy graves at the Great Mosque and the mausoleum of Sunan Kaflaja at nearby Kadilungu. These include commemoration of the death of Demak's founding king Raden Patah (Haul Akbar) and an annual religious festival and procession (Grebeg Besar) held in the Javanese month of Besar that climaxes with the ritual washing of Sunan Kaflaja's revered relics at the Kadilungu mausoleum. The proceeds can be considerable. By one report, the district government of Demak receives an average of Rp 10 million (US$1,000) a day in receipts.
from the mausoleum of Sunan Kalijaga, and well over Rp 200 million (US$20,000) from the Grebeg Besar festival (Turyanto 2007).

The intrusion of government revenue raising into the pilgrimage process has not been without its problems, however. For example, in 2001, when local government charges were introduced at the tomb of Maulana Malik Ibrahim, each party of pilgrims was hit with two different payments: Rp 10,000 levied by the Transport Infrastructure Service (Dinas Perhubungan) of the Gresik district government, and Rp 8,000 levied by the village of Gapuro Sugololo where the tomb is located. When the Gresik government proposed yet another charge of Rp 500 per person for entry to the site, both pilgrims and site management protested. The negotiations that then took place resulted in a consolidation of payment arrangements and a discount for groups of 30 or more.26

4 DEVOTION AS A COMMERCIAL TRANSACTION

I have tried to paint a picture of the variety of commercial activities that characterise local pilgrimage in Java. The commercial facets of pilgrimage—indeed, of religious devotions in general—are sometimes seen as a corruption or diminution of the pilgrimage process. Ideally pilgrimage should be money-free and otherworldly, so it is often said. But for many pilgrims in Java, devotions at sacred places are in fact like commercial practices—the pilgrim enters into a transactional or contractual relationship with the supernatural, with a saint or with God.

In Islam, the supreme transaction involving a believer’s person and possessions is the one in which God purchases the believer’s soul, person and goods in exchange for eternal bliss. The Qur’an assures believers that God will abide by His promises—His contractual undertakings. This is made explicit, for example, in Fathir verses 29–30, which read:

Be assured, those who recite the Book of God, perform the prayer and spend what We have provided for them—whether it is spent secretly or in full view of the public—they make an investment that will return bountiful dividends. He will reward them generously and bestow His blessings upon them. (Q35:29–30)

In the same vein, As-Saff verses 10–12 show believers the way to a profitable transaction.

26 ‘Retribusi Ziarah Makam Segara Ditertibkan’ [Charges Levied on Holy Tomb Pilgrims to be Regularised], Kompas, 18 April 2002; ‘Ditutup Tidak Pantas, Memungut Retribusi dari Peziarah Makam’ [It’s Not Right, Asking Pilgrims to Pay an Entry Fee when They Visit Tombs], Kompas, 4 April 2002.
cial success, come from God, and God's power is accessed by way of the intermediaries at certain sites. It is also possible that the allure of sacred sites as sources of commercial success derives in part from a lack of familiarity with the workings of cash-based commerce. For some, the huge wealth that some individuals acquire apparently 'effortlessly' can only be supernatural in origin.27

It is true that many Muslims look on the practice of ngalap berkah with suspicion, even horror. Some regard it as idolatrous (syirik). The purpose of religious devotions is to praise God, or simply to obey His laws and commandments, or, for a few, to seek mystical union with God. But to approach God or His saints with the intention of enriching oneself is a violation of God's laws.

But many Indonesian Muslims disagree. During a visit a few years ago to Goa Langse, a holy cave near Parangtritis on the south coast of Java, I asked one pilgrim whether, according to Islam, it was idolatrous to ask God or God's saints for material blessings. With some vigour he told me that all good things come from God, and the truly devout Muslim must acknowledge this. Not to acknowledge it—to claim that the material good things of life come from oneself and not from God—is to act idolatrously and give oneself God-like powers. Therefore, it is only proper that the devout Muslim ask God—or one of God's saints—for whatever it is that he or she needs or wants. It would be arrogant, even idolatrous, not to do so.

Behind the practice of ngalap berkah lies a theology that I will call the theology of distance and proximity. With the exception of certain Sufis, most Muslims would agree that there is a qualitative contrast or 'distance' between God and believer in line with the orthodox notion that God and humankind are utterly different. That the two are different in essence is widely given a metaphorical cloak in which the notion of difference is translated into the notion of distance. But this distance is not unbridgeable. People can get close to God, or to put it another way, there are degrees of proximity to God.

27 Several observers have noted the belief among Javanese traders that ascetic practices of one kind or another are just as or more essential to business success than the conventional basics of business practice and acumen. Brenner (1998: 192) notes that, traditionally, batik merchants in Laweyan (Solo) regarded self-denial and ascetic austerities (laba) as the main keys to business success. The same point is made by Suwardi Endraswara (2006: 250), who also lists the following pilgrimage sites as important to Javanese businessmen: Gunung Kemukus, Gunung Kawi, Makam Sewu and Parangtritis (Suwardi 2006: 289).

In most parts of the world and in most religious traditions, God is perceived as being closer to humankind in certain places and at certain times, and there are certain individuals who have succeeded in getting close to God. These places may be called 'holy places'; the times may be called 'auspicious times'; and the people may be called saints or the beloved of God—in Java widely called sakti. The pilgrim's effort to get close to God, then, takes him or her to a holy place, especially at an auspicious time, to petition God directly, or to get as close as possible to God through tawassul—the mediation of a prophet or saint. And the closer one can get to God, the closer one gets to the source of all benefits, including the benefit of material wealth.

The twin ideas of transaction and proximity go a long way towards explaining the integration of commerce into the local pilgrimage phenomenon in Java, and make it possible—in fact essential—to discard the narrowly romanticised view of pilgrimage as ideally a (temporary) reproduction of commercial worldliness.

6 A PROTECTION AGAINST RADICALISM?

There is, I believe, yet another important facet to the connection between money and sacred places. The increasing commercialisation of pilgrimage plays a part in protecting pilgrimage sites and the Muslims who visit them against radicalisation. One of the extremist arms of Islam, Wahhabist or Salafist extremism, pits itself with particular viciousness against tombs and saint veneration. In parts of the world where this variant of extremism has flourished, most notably Saudi Arabia and, more recently, Malaysia, saint veneration and pilgrimage to holy tombs has largely been wiped out.28 Amrozi and his brothers, the 'Bali bombers', are reputed to have vandalised gravesites in Lamongan after adopting Salafi practices in Afghanistan.29

But where local pilgrimage and saint veneration are significant components in the economy—a source of income for Muslims who might otherwise be struggling to make a living—it becomes more difficult to garner support for the kind of radicalism that might put an end to that
source of income. This does not mean, of course, that pilgrimage to holy tombs is ipso facto a protection against radicalism. In some parts of the Islamic world—even in Java—some holy places have been incubators of rebellion or radicalism. Nevertheless, on the whole there is reason to believe that the commercialisation of holy sites is a moderating factor in the contentious competition between radical and liberal in Indonesian Islam. Even extreme ‘modernists’ who have been scathing about local pilgrimage and saint veneration, often seeing it as ‘superstition’ or backwardness and (with its visions and miracles) irrational, may be placated if sacred sites are seen as sources of business enterprise—or at least as acceptably exotic ‘tourist attractions’.

7 THROWING MONEY AT THE HOLY DOOR

In the humid mid-morning warmth, pilgrims are sitting in packed ranks on the floor before the Prostration Door at the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati on the outskirts of Cirebon, West Java. The door is massive. It is made of wood darkened by incense smoke and the passage of time since it was built perhaps as long as 400 years ago. It is set in a high, yellowish-white plaster wall inlaid with ancient tiles, ceramic dishes and other decorations. To the left and right of the door stand large porcelain jars from China—probably also hundreds of years old—and on the two steps in front of the door stand iron incense burners. Their heads reverently bowed, the pilgrims intone the tahlil chant: Lá illah i1a’lah, ‘There is no god but God’.

The gentle rhythms of the tahlil chant swell and die to the intermittent accompaniment of metallic jingling. Coins are being thrown at the door. They bounce off and fall ringing to the tiled floor. Several women rise from the floor and approach the door. One produces a fistful of banknotes and presses several of them into the crevices in the door. She wipes the remaining notes across the face of the door and returns them to her sash. The money that she leaves behind in the door is her side of a transaction—she has paid the special power that comes from the proximity of the door—and of the saint who lies buried behind it—to the infinite power of God and the supernatural.

As the pilgrims finish their devotions and leave the chamber, tomb orderlies—young men wearing ankle-length batik sarongs, neat white jackets and batik headcloths—remove the notes and sweep up the coins, throwing the money into a brass bowl that is already overflowing with cash. Their livelihoods, and those of the surrounding community, not to mention the continuing vigour of the holy place itself, get the cash injection that guarantees their continuity.

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