

THE LOCAL POLITICS OF ORTHODOXY

The Majelis Ulama Indonesia in the Post-New Order Banten¹

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Abstract: The Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) has played an important role in guarding the Sunnī orthodoxy in contemporary Indonesia. As it has chapters in almost parts of Indonesia in the provincial, district and municipality level, this role has been also translated into the local context. The strength of the MUI stems from “semi-officiality” and “semi-representative” nature of the organisation. This article is aimed to analyse this role in the post-New Order period, after the establishment of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) of Banten province in 2001, especially in dealing with deviant beliefs or sects and *shirk* (polytheist) and *bid'ah* (religious innovation) practices. It is to show that orthodoxy and heterodoxy is not purely religious, but also political, as this is related to the problem of authority and power.

Keywords: Majelis Ulama Indonesia, local politics, Banten, Orthodoxy.

Introduction

The collapse of the Indonesia's New Order regime in May 1998 led the Bantenese people to see it as political opportunity to separate

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from West Java province and establish an independent province, a demand which was finally granted in 2000, during the era of President Abdurrahman Wahid.² This endeavour was driven mainly by the previous unfair policies made by both central and the West Java provincial government towards Banten.³ Since then there had been local euphoria in various aspects of life, including religious one. As a widely-known religiously Islamic society or to use Bruinessen's term a "self-conscious" Muslim region,⁴ due to existence of Banten Sultanate in the past and the fact that Muslims occupy majority (more than 94%) of population, the issue of implementation of *sharī'ah* was part and parcel of the formation of the new Banten province.⁵ However, the concept of *sharī'ah*, as in any other regions, was not clearly defined by its supporters. Some understand it as *fiqh* (Islamic law) and some other as a comprehensive way of life. Some understand it culturally as Islamic practices so far implemented by society and support cultural Islamisation through education and various cultural approaches and some others understand it structurally through state intervention in the forms of *sharī'ah*-inspired bylaws (Peraturan Daerah/Perda) and other Islam biased decrees and policies.

It is widely acknowledged that '*ulama'* (religiously learned men) have central role in Bantenese society. However, their importance could not be generalised, depending on what kind of '*ulama'* they are. Individual '*ulama'* can be classified into four: 1) educational ulama who

² Based on Law No. 23/2000 on the Creation of Banten Province, issued on 17 October 2000 by President Abdurrahman Wahid. On 18 November 2000, Banten was formally declared as the 30th province.

³ The marginalisation of Banten dates back in fact to the Dutch colonial period, especially since the famous 1888 rebellion. Sartono Kartodirdjo, *The Peasants' Revolt of Banten in 1888: Its Conditions, Course and Sequel*, 'S-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966.

⁴ Martin van Bruinessen, "Shari'a Court, Tarekat and Pesantren: Religious Institutions in the Banten Sultanate, *Archipel*, 50 (1995), pp.165-199; Martin van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren dan Tarekat: Tradisi-tradisi Islam di Indonesia*, 3rd ed., Bandung: Mizan, 1999, p. 246.

⁵ The number of religious population in Banten in 2004 was as follows: Muslims 8,617,950; Protestants 157,707; Catholics 92,253; Hindus 8,051; Buddhists 110,280; Confucians 2,072; others 15,213; no indication 124,397. The number of Muslims in 2004 was 94,4% of the total population. Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Banten, *Banten Dalam Angka/Banten in Figures 2005*, Banten: Badan Perencanaan Daerah dan Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Banten, 2005, p. 123.

teach at *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) or madrasah, 2) organisational ulama of Islamic organisations (Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama [NU], Mathla'ul Anwar, al-Khaeriyah and Persatuan Islam [Persis]), 3) political ulama who are involved in political parties; 4) activist 'ulama' of new Islamist movements, and 5) semi-official 'ulama' of the MUI.⁶ This category is not clear-cut, however, some 'ulama' fall into more than one category. Some semi-official 'ulama', for instance, are also members of Islamic organisations or new Islamist movements, or teach at pesantren. In certain context, some 'ulama' may claim to represent certain Islamic organization, for instance, rather than other membership. However, apart from the individual 'ulama', there are also 'ulama' institutions, such as Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI—Indonesian Council of Ulama) and 'ulama' institutions as part of bigger Muslim organisations (as sub-organisations), such as Majelis Tarjih of Muhammadiyah, Lembaga Bahtsul Masa'il of NU and Dewan Hisbah of Persatuan Islam (Persis).

The Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) is one of the most important 'ulama' institutions in Banten. The MUI is a gigantic 'ulama' council which has a central headquarter in Jakarta and has provincial and district branches in all over Indonesia, especially in Muslim majority regions. The role of MUI in Banten is well reflected in some fields, such as in representing and coordinating the cooperation between Islamic organisations and movements, in performing official politics in the region, and in guarding Sunni orthodoxy. The present article is aimed to analyse the role of the MUI of Banten province in the in guarding Sunni orthodoxy in the post-New Order period, especially after its establishment in 2001, especially in defending Orthodoxy from

⁶ Hudaeri classified "kiyai" into "kiyai kitab", the 'ulama' who master textual religious knowledge, and "kiyai hikmah", the 'ulama' who master the Islam-based spiritual and magical knowledge. On the role of *kiyai* (local 'ulama) in Banten, see M.A. Tihami, "Kiyai dan Jawara di Banten," unpublished MA Thesis, Universitas Indonesia, 1992; Mohamad Hudaeri et al, "Tasbih dan Golok: Studi tentang Karisma Kiyai dan Jawara di Banten," *Istiqro'* 2:1 (2003), pp. 57-87; Abdul Hamid, "The Kiai in Banten: Shifting Roles in Changing Times," in Ota Atsushi, Okamoto Masaaki, and Ahmad Suaedy (eds.), *Islam in Contentment: Rethinking Islam and State in Indonesia*, Jakarta: Wahid Institute, Center for Southeast Asian studies (CSEAS) and Center for Asia-Pacific Area Studies (CAPAS), 2010, pp. 421-443. I will not study individual 'ulama, but MUI as 'ulama council or as an organisation containing membership of various backgrounds. The term "MUI 'ulama" refer to those represent MUI leadership or membership.

deviant beliefs or sects, from *shirk* (polytheist) practices and in some cases also from *bid'at* (religious innovation) practices.⁷ This article, therefore, seeks to get some answers to the question: how does the MUI play role in the protection of Islamic orthodoxy in Banten after the collapse of the New Order? I will also argue show that orthodoxy and heterodoxy is not purely religious, but also political, as this is related to the problem of authority and power.

The MUI of Banten: Local Guardian of Orthodoxy

The establishment of the Banten province in 2000 was followed by the establishment of the MUI in the provincial level in 2001.⁸ There was one MUI chapter at provincial level and were four district MUI chapters at in Serang, Pandeglang, Lebak, and Tangerang, and two municipal MUI chapters in Kota Tangerang and Kota Cilegon—later two other two municipality MUI chapters were formed following the creation of Kota Serang and Kota Tangerang Selatan in 2008.⁹ The board members of the MUI of Banten were representatives of the district and municipal MUIs and the “representatives” of some Muslim organisations.¹⁰ The former general chairperson of MUI of Serang

⁷ The discussion on Shari'a-inspired bylaws (Perda) is excluded from the scope of this paper. On the role of the MUI in the discourse of Shari'a-inspired bylaws, see Rohman, “Mediating the Interests: The Study of the Council of 'Ulama' Indonesia of Banten Province's Roles on the Discourse of the Implementation of *Syari'ah* in Banten,” *Alqalam*, 28: 1 (January-April 2011), pp. 35-63.

⁸ On the MUI in the national level during the New Order, see M. Atho' Mudzhar, *Fatwas of the Council of Indonesia Ulama: A Study of Islamic Legal Thought in Indonesia 1975-1988*, Jakarta: Indonesian-Netherlands Cooperation in Islamic Studies (INIS), 1993; Nadirsyah Hosen, “Behind the Scenes: Fatwas of Majelis Ulama Indonesia. (1975–1998),” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 15, no. 2 (2004): pp. 147–79; and on the MUI after the New Order, see Moch Nur Ichwan, “Ulama', State and Politics: Majelis Ulama Indonesia after Suharto,” *Islamic Law and Society* 12, 1 (2005), pp. 45-72; Moch Nur Ichwan, “Towards a Puritanical Moderate Islam: The Majelis Ulama Indonesia and the Politics of Religious Orthodoxy,” in Martin van Bruinessen (ed.), *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the 'Conservative Turn'*, Singapore: ISEAS, 2013 (forthcoming), pp. 60-104.

⁹ I maintain the term “Kota”, which in this context signifies municipality, in order not to confuse municipality with district, because there are districts and municipalities which have similar name, such as Serang and Tangerang.

¹⁰ I added quotation marks to the word “representatives” to emphasise that the representativeness of Islamic organisations is actually informally, because there is no formal appointment from each organisation.

district, Prof. KH Abdul Wahab Afif, MA,¹¹ was appointed as the first general chairperson of the Banten MUI for the period of 2001-2006.¹² Before this appointment, he was the general chairperson of MUI Serang for two periods (from 1990-2001). He was re-elected later for the second period of 2006-2011.¹³ The MUI of Banten, like other MUI in other provinces, depends financially on the government support in each structural level (province, municipality, district, and sub-district). The amount of grants differs from region to region and from year to year, depending much on the political will of the government and the parliament in respective region. Because of this, the MUI could not separate itself from the grip of the state and has been always perceived as “official” institution. Government, police, judges and media have treated the MUI as if it is part of state institution.

In its statutes formulated after the New Order, the MUI has some roles formulated in its statutes: 1) as inheritor of the prophet (*warathat al-anbiyā*); 2) as *fatmā* giver (*muftī*); 3) as guide and servant of Muslim

¹¹ Before this appointment, Prof KH Abdul Wahab Afif was the general chairperson of MUI Serang for two periods (from 1990-2001). He was also a leader of al-Khaeriyah, a local Muslim organization, and university-based scholar, graduated from the Al-Azhar university, Egypt, and he was also the Dean of State Institute for Islamic Studies (IAIN) Sunan Gunung Djati in Serang (now IAIN Maulana Hasanuddin Serang) and professor of Islamic law at the same institute, and rector of Banten Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIB). Abdul Wahab Afif was a renowned figure of Golkar, the ruling party during the New Order, in Banten. He was a member of Provincial Board of Golkar in West Java Province. In 1980, he was a member of the Advisory Council of Golkar in Serang District. Later he also became one of the members of Dewan Pimpinan Pusat (National Board) of Satkar Ulama, an `ulamā sub-organisation of the Golkar. (Tihami 2006: 25, 158; Hamid 428, n. 4,5). On his biography from his birthday in 1936 to 1966, see M.A. Tihami et al. *Refleksi Pemikiran Fiqh: Menyukuri 70 tahun Prof. K.H. Abdul Wahab Afif, MA*, Serang: Yayasan SengPho Banten, 2007, 1-38.

¹² In order not to confuse the readers, it should be noted that the MUI leadership contains one “general chairperson” and some “chairpersons”. The chairpersons usually represent commissions within the MUI as well as represent Muslim organisations.

¹³ The MUI Regional Congress in 2006 re-elected KH Wahab Afif as the general chairperson for the period of 2006-2011. However, this was not easy that he came to his second period, because there was a demand for reforming the MUI by young board members. Ustadh Yasin Muthohar, the leader of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) of Banten, was among this critical group. After a long negotiation, however, this critical group agreed on his appointment with a condition that he should reform the MUI so that it actively endorse Islamic *shari’u* in Banten. Interview with Yasin Muthohar, leader of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) of Banten, 6 June 2008.

community (*ra'ī wa khādīm al-ummah*); 4) upholder of the commanding to the known good and forbidding the reprehensible (*al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*); 5) as pioneer in the reform movement (*tajdīd*) in Islamic thought; 6) as pioneer in the reconciliation movement (*iṣlāḥ*) among the *ummah*.¹⁴ This self-portrayal has given the MUI strong confidence and justification to claim the rights to deal with Islamic and Muslim affairs and to protect Sunni orthodoxy. This is not only the case of the central MUI but also some local branches, including the MUI of Banten province. The latter has been actively engaged in responding to Islamic religious issues emerging in the region and in issuing *fatwās* in line with Sunni orthodoxy.

As a matter of fact, there is no single orthodoxy in Islam, because there is no Church and pope in Islam. From the early period of Islam, Muslims have been divided into two major schools of theology (*madhhabs*): Sunnism and Shi'ism. This means also that there are two major orthodoxies, viz., Sunnī orthodoxy and Shi'ī orthodoxy. Since Sunnism is the majority in almost all Muslim lands, except in Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan and Bahrain, it has become, as Ayubi calls it, "state Islam" in those countries. As state Islam, the Sunni orthodoxy dominates the interpretation of Islam and defines which interpretation is acceptable (*ḥalāl, shar'ī, mu'tabar*) and unacceptable (*ḥarām, bid'ah, ṣandaqah, riddah, kufr*), and uses the hands of the state to enforce it.¹⁵ In this sense orthodoxy and heterodoxy are not merely religious issue but also political one. This is what happens also with Sunnī orthodoxy in Indonesia. The Sunnism has become the "state Islam" adopted, despite informally, by the state and guarded by the MUI, including the MUI of Banten. The following discussion on deviant beliefs and sects, polytheist practices, and *bid'ah* (religious innovation) will show this position. We shall see also that the MUI has realised about the power of being *perceived* as "official", or "semi-official", and "representative" body, despite the fact that it is actually "societal" and "semi-

¹⁴ Majelis Ulama Indonesia, *Himpunan Keputusan Musyawarah Nasional VII Majelis Ulama Indonesia tahun 2005*, Jakarta: Sekretariat Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2005, pp.24-6.

¹⁵ Nazih N. Ayubi, "State Islam and Communal Plurality," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 524, Political Islam (Nov. 1992), pp. 79-91.

representative”, if not “pseudo-representative”.¹⁶ It has consciously used them to endorse its agendas and interests.

Against Deviant Beliefs and Sects: Orthodoxy and Deviancy

Heterodoxy has been always seen by the holder of Orthodoxy as potentially subversive.¹⁷ The MUI has long history of challenging heterodoxy, which is viewed as threatening the very heart of orthodoxy, that is, the pure faith. In the post-New Order era, the MUI has issued some *fatwās* on allegedly deviant beliefs and sects, such as *fatwās* on Ahmadiyah in 2005 (revising the *fatwā* on the Qadiyan Ahmadiyah in 1980), on religious liberalism, secularism and pluralism (2005) and on Al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah (2007). There are many similar *fatwās* issued by local MUIs. Confronted with many allegedly deviant beliefs and sects, and the challenge of the opponents of the *fatwās*, the central MUI issued later the “Guide for Identifying Deviant Belief Streams” (*Pedoman Identifikasi Aliran Sesat*) on 6 November 2007. The Guide consists of “ten criteria of deviancy”, which include:

1. Rejecting the pillars of faith (*rukun iman*) and pillars of Islam (*rukun Islam*).
2. Believing and/or following a belief (*‘aqīdah*) incompatible with Shari‘a.
3. Believing that there is revelation (*wahy*) after the Qur‘ān.
4. Rejecting the authenticity and/or the truth of the contents of the Qur‘ān.
5. Interpreting the Qur‘ān without relying it on the (correct) principles of interpretation.
6. Rejecting the prophetic tradition (Ḥadīth) as a source of Islamic teachings
7. Disrespecting, disgracing and/or downgrading the Prophets and Messengers (of Allāh)
8. Rejecting Muḥammad as the final Prophet and Messenger.

¹⁶ It might be considered as “pseudo-representative”, because the procedure of the recruitment of its members from various Muslim organisations is actually informal, and its *fatwās* and decisions are not automatically binding upon other Muslim organisations.

¹⁷ Martin van Bruinissen, “Transformations of Heterodoxy,” *ISIM Newsletter* Vol. 7:1 (2001), 5.

9. Changing the principles of devotion (*ibādah*) established by *sharī'ah*.
10. Charging other Muslims as “unbeliever” (*kaḥfīr*) without proper basis of *sharī'ah*.¹⁸

The above criteria reflect perfectly Sunni doctrines, which are set up as standard for measuring the “Islamness” of Muslim minds, bodies and institutions. These criteria have been used by many local MUI to claim certain beliefs, behaviours and sects as deviating from Islam or even committing infidelity.

The MUI of Banten has been aware of its function as the guardian of Islamic belief against heresy, blasphemy, polytheism, and religious innovation. In the last years, there were some issues on “deviant sects”, such as Kunci Suci, Kandang Rosul, Wahidiyah, and Ahmadiyah—to mention some.¹⁹ Some of the *fatwās* were issued by district or municipal MUIs, and some others by the provincial MUI. The procedure of *iftā'* (issuing a *fatwā*) stipulates that if a case found only in a certain district or municipality, the MUI of that area is responsible for responding it by issuing or not issuing a *fatwā*, and if the same case is found in more than one district or municipality, the provincial MUI is responsible for responding it. Below are some cases dealt with by the MUI of Banten.

Kunci Suci

A new sect called Kunci Suci emerged in Baros, Pandeglang, in the mid of the 2000s. It was located in the pesantren Miftahul Huda, led by Nursyahidin Salim.²⁰ He preached that human can see God in this world by conducting certain ritual of “mi'raj” under the guidance of *murshid* (spiritual teacher). His understanding of mi'raj is different from the general Sunni's understanding of it, Mi'raj was actually Prophet Muḥammad's spiritual experience of spiritual journey from Aqṣā mosque in Jerusalem to Sidrat al-Muntahā (utmost sky) to receive

¹⁸ Majelis Ulama Indonesia, *Mengawal Aqidah Umat: Fatwa MUI tentang Aliran-aliran Sesat di Indonesia*. Jakarta: Sekretariat Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2008, 7-8. These criteria are included in Chapter VI of the Guide.

¹⁹ There are some other allegedly deviant belief groups, such as Hakekok, Pengajian Nurul Yaḥin and Islam Sejati. But I could not include all of them in this short article.

²⁰ It was said that the headquarter of this sect was actually located in Padepokan Esa, Bintaro, Tangerang, another district of Banten. *Kompas*, 14 December 2007.

directly from God the obligation of *salah* five times a day. Nursyahidin Salim's teaching is based on the books written by Abu Irsyad (Kuswanto), such as (1) *Menyingkap Rahasia Shalat & Puasa sebagai Sarana Menemui Allah*; (2) *Bunga Rampai Hikmah Tasawuf*; (3) *Kunci Memahami Ilmu Ma'rifatullah*; (4) *Mi'raj Rohani Menemui Nur Ilahi*. All of them are neo-Sufi books, published by Institute for Tasawwuf Study Az-Zukhruf, Jakarta, or Pustaka Aladdin, owned by Kuswanto himself.²¹

According to Nursyahidin, *mi'raj* is not exclusively the Prophet's experience. Everybody can see God through the mediation guided by the *murshid*.²² The ritual is conducted on the white cloth, on which some rice and money are put. The person should close ears, eyes, nose, and mouth with his fingers. This act would form the word "Allah" in Arabic. After sometime, the *murshid* would ask the disciple whether he/she sees the light. If he/she affirms, the *murshid* would say that this light is the light of God and even God himself.²³ This new teaching had disturbed surrounding community. The MUI of Baros took necessary actions by observing the sect, and making dialogue with Nursyahidin and his members in Baitul Iffah mosque, Baros, in the MUI office of Serang, and in the hall (*pendapa*) of Serang. The head of MUI of Serang, KH A Sjafei AN did not want to declare directly that the Kunci Suci was deviating. KH Sjafei saw that the *fatwā* should be issued by the MUI of Banten province, because this sect did not only exist in Baros, but also in Tangerang.²⁴ Being unsatisfied with the result of the dialogue at MUI chapter of Serang conducted that day, unknown crowds attacked Nursyahidin pesantren and burned it on 13 December 2007. With the belief in mind that the sect was deviating, and not because of MUI's *fatwā*, the people attacked the *pesantren*.

Because of such unintended violence, the Banten MUI then issued a *fatwā* No. 1/2008, dated 16 January 2008, declaring that

²¹ I would like to thank Mohamad Hudaeri for making these books available to me.

²² According to Abu Irsyad, one can meet or see God in this world. Abu Irsyad, *Menyingkap Rahasia Shalat & Puasa sebagai Sarana Menemui Allah*, Jakarta: Pustaka Aladdin, 2006, especially chapters 15-20.

²³ Interview with KH Drs A Sjafei AN, the general chairperson of the MUI of Serang, 10 June 2008.

²⁴ Interview with KH Drs A Syefei AN, the general chairperson of the MUI of Serang, 10 June 2008.

Nursyahidin's teaching deviated from Islam and requested the government to ban the group and close all centers of their activities.²⁵ The *fatwā* also demanded that those who believe in the teachings to return to Islam based on the Qur'ān and the Prophetic traditions (*hadiths*).²⁶ The *fatwā* was read by KH Aminudin, Lc, one of the chairpersons of Banten MUI at Baitul Iffah mosque of Baros on 23 January 2008. However, the fact that the violence happened before the issuance of the *fatwā*, this indicated that when "generalized belief" has accumulated MUI's *fatwā* or other authorities' opinion is not needed.²⁷

Kandang Rasul

Kandang Rasul is a local sect appeared in Karanganyar, Lebak. It emerged actually for the first time in 2005, but did not get wide attention until March 2008, when they show up in public. The name of the sect provoked Muslim criticism, since the word "kandang" which means "house of animal" is meant to be the house of the Rasul (Prophet). In addition, what is peculiar of this sect is that the members of Kandang Rasul should vow in the name of Allah, Jesus, Sanghyang and other god's names that they would be loyal to the Kandang Rasul. They are not asked to pay or donate some amount of money, but instead they got promise from their leader that they would receive monthly financial support of IDR 30 million (about USD 3200) in undecided time in the future. It is a great amount of money, which even university professors or the highest rank of civil servant could not get it. The leader of the Kandang Rasul, coming from Tangerang, claimed that he had a great amount of money saved in a Swiss bank.

The MUI of Lebak invited some of its members to the MUI office for interview and interrogation. From the data gathered from this interrogation, the MUI concluded that the Kandang Rasul is not an Islamic sect, but "Aliran Kepercayaan" (belief stream), which is beyond MUI's authority. It was under the aegis of the Bakorpakem

²⁵ The Banten MUI actually asked that the case was isolated in Baros or Serang, but the MUI of sub-district Baros and of district Serang could not overcome it properly. Interview with Prof Abdul Wahab Afif, Serang, 9 June 2008, and Drs H Maftuh Abubakar, SH, MH (head of Commission of Fatwā of Banten MUI), 3 June 2008.

²⁶ Interview with Drs H Maftuh Abubakar, SH, MH (head of Commission of Fatwā of Banten MUI), 3 June 2008.

²⁷ Neil Smelser, *Collective Behaviour* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), pp. 15-18.

(Badan Koordinasi Penghayat Aliran Kepercayaan—coordinating institution for followers of the belief streams), which is responsible specially for dealing with belief streams.²⁸ Therefore, the Lebak MUI's leadership board submitted the case to the Bakorpakem (Badan Koordinasi Penghayat Aliran Kepercayaan) and to the Police.²⁹ The MUI did not issue a *fatwā* but advised the members of the Kandang Rosul to leave the group and join the mainstream Islam. Unlike the Kunci Suci, there was no violence against the group. It seems that this was caused by the fact that the MUI directly overcame the case and Muslim people were satisfied with it.

Wahidiyah

The Wahidiyah is an Islamic spiritual organisation founded by KH. Abdoel Madjid Ma'roef of the pesantren Kedunglo, Kediri (East Java), in 1963.³⁰ He founded the Wahidiyah after getting inspiration from the angel through three times dream between 1959 and 1963. Unlike *tariqah* which emphasises on *dhikr* (memorising God),³¹ the Wahidiyah promotes *ṣalāwah* (prayer of honour for the Prophet Muḥammad), called "Salawat Wahidiyah". The *salawat wahidiyah* was composed by the founder in 1964. The *salawat* constitutes an important part of Wahidiya's ritual, apart from other ritual obligations, such as performing salat, fasting, paying zakat, and going pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*). Most Muslim organisations, including Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the Sufi order association, Jam'iyah Ahlu 't-Tariqah al-Mu'tabarah an-Nahdiyyah, reject to acknowledge the existence of the Wahidiyah as

²⁸ Bakorpakem is an institution established during the New Order era to deal with the so-called "belief streams" (Aliran Kepercayaan) and authorised to consider whether or not certain belief stream is harmful for social harmony, especially in relations with the religious communities.

²⁹ Interview with KH Ahmad Hudhori, secretary general of the MUI of Lebak, 18 June 2008; and KH Ichwan Hadiyin, member of *fatwā* commission of the MUI of Lebak, 17 June 2008.

³⁰ On further study on Wahidiyah, see Sokhi Huda, *Tasawuf Kultural: Fenomena Shalawat Wahidiyah* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2008).

³¹ The publication of *Penyiar Sholawat Wahidiyah* states that the Wahidiyah is not a Sufi order in the sense of *jam'iyah thariqah* (tariqah order) which is known today, but a way (jalan) or means (sarana) to the realisation of Allah and His Prophet Muhammad. *Penyiar Sholawat Wahidiyah, Risalah Penjelasan mengenai Sholawat Wahidiyah dan Ajarannya*, 5th ed. (Kedunglo Kediri: Penyiar Sholawat Wahidiyah Pusat, 1978), p. 7.

a *ṭarīqah*, because of the absence of its authenticated, unbroken spiritual chains normally owned by a *ṭarīqah* from its founder to the Prophet Muḥammad. As pointed out by van Bruinessen, because of this reason and of the founder's clemency towards his followers' poor conformity with the *sharī'ah*, this movement is frequently charged with heterodoxy. Most of the followers of Wahidiyah are *abangan* (nominal Muslim), including ex-communists and their children.³²

After the death of its founder in 1989, the Wahidiyah split into three groups: First, Pengamal Wahidiyah whose headquarter is located in Kedunglo Kediri; second, Jamaah Wahidiyah Miladiyah also in Kedunglo Kediri; and third, Penyar Sholawat Wahidiyah in Pesantren al-Tahdzib Rejoagung, Jombang. All three have many branches, especially in Java,³³ including Banten. This movement was not widely known in Banten until the beginning of 2008, when they wanted to organise its national congress in the region on 11 June. When the committee requested the permission from the provincial police department, the latter consulted the MUI of Banten province. The Commission of Research of the MUI started to do some study and observation. The MUI viewed that the Wahidiyah is deviant sect that should be banned. The MUI found that, although the Wahidiyah was well accepted by people when it conducted *pengajian* (religious gathering) in Carita, in which thousands of people attended, it is deviant. One of the reasons of the deviancy is that its adherents regard their founder as “*ghauthu badbaḥ-ḥaman*” (guide of this century). According to Wahidiyah, there is a *ghauth* (guide) in every century, and the *ghauth* of the 20th century was KH. Abdoel Madjid Ma'roef.³⁴ In this sense, according to Prof KH Wahab Afif, the community is

³² Martin van Bruinessen, “Saints, Politicians and Sufi Bureaucrats: Mysticism and Politics in Indonesia's New Order,” in Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell (eds), *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. 98.

³³ According to Moh. Ulumuddin, Penyar Shalawat Wahidiyah has its branches in almost all provinces, but mostly located in Java, Madura, Bali, West Nusa Tenggara, Sumatera, and Kalimantan, and even in some foreign countries. Moh. Ulumuddin, “Syari'ah dan Tasawuf Lokal : Studi Tentang Perdebatan Legalitas Wahidiyah,” <http://www.staia.net/2012/10/syariah-dan-tasawuf-lokal-studi-tentang.html>; accessed 23 February 2012.

³⁴ On “*ghauthu badbaḥ-ḥaman*”, see Muhammad Ruhan Sanusi (ed.), *Kuliah Wahidiyah untuk Menjernihkan Hati dan Ma'rifat Billah wa Rosulillah SAW* (Kedunglo Kediri: Penyar Sholawat Wahidiyah Pusat, n.d.), pp. 129-37.

deviating from the Islamic orthodoxy.³⁵ Despite this view, the Banten MUI did not issue a formal *fatwā* concerning the Wahidiyah,³⁶ but gave recommendation to the provincial police department that the Wahidiyah should not be allowed to organise the national congress or other religious gatherings in Banten. The MUI also requested the High Prosecutor General of Banten to proceed the ban of the Wahidiyah.

Ahmadiyah

The most controversial national issue concerning Islamic sects since 2005 is that of Ahmadiyah. Like in other countries, the Ahmadiyah is divided into the Qadiyan Ahmadiyah, lead by *khalifat al-masih*, the successors of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, and the Lahore Ahmadiyah, led by Muhammad Ali, who has tried to bring the Ahmadiyah closer to Sunni tradition. In Indonesia, Jamaah Ahmadiyah Indonesia (JAI) is a Qadiyan organization, while Gerakan Ahmadiyah Lahore Indonesia (GAI) is the Lahore Ahmadiyah.³⁷ People are often confused about the two organizations assuming that both are the same. The central MUI issued *fatwā* on Ahmadiyah twice, in 1980 and in 2005; the former was issued against the Qadiyan Ahmadiyah, whereas the latter against both.³⁸

A hostile crowd led by the *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI - Islamic Defenders Front) and the *Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengkajian Islam* (LPPI - Islamic Research and Study Institute) attacked the campus of the *Jamaah Ahmadiyah Indonesia* (JAI—Indonesian Ahmadiyah Congregation) in Parung, Bogor, West Java, on 15 July 2005, demanding the dissolution of this organization. The second *fatwā* on Ahmadiyah was issued less than two weeks after the FPI attack. According to this *fatwā*, Ahmadiyah does not only deviate from Islam

³⁵ The MUI chapter of Tasikmalaya issued *fatwā* on the deviancy of Ahmadiyah in 2007 with the same reason. <http://news.detik.com/read/2007/09/27/125752/-835078/159/tersulut-fatwa-menyesak>.

³⁶ Interview with Prof. KH A Wahab Afif, 9 June 2008.

³⁷ On Ahmadiyah in general, see for instance Spencer Lavan, *The Ahmadiyah movement: a history and perspective* (Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1974); and on Ahmadiyah in Indonesia, see Iskandar Zulkarnain, *Gerakan Ahmadiyah di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2005).

³⁸ Majelis Ulama Indonesia, *Himpunan Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Jakarta: Sekretariat Majelis Ulama Indonesia 2010), pp. 41-2, 101-18.

but also it is no longer part of Islam. It is considered “non-Muslim”. Since then, demands on the ban of Ahmadiyah have occurred in many places, some of which accompanied by the use of violence. In the so-called Monas Tragedy, the Nationalist Alliance for Religious Freedom and Belief (Aliansi Kebangsaan untuk Kebebasan Beragama dan Berkeyakinan—AKKBB) which defended the existence of the Ahmadiyah was attacked by FPI and Komando Laskar Islam (KLI).³⁹ A number of the members of FPI and KLI were arrested by the police, including their leader, Habib Rizieq Shihab. The leader of KLI, Munarman, disappeared from public during the arrest. From his hide he sent a videotape to some television stations, stating that he will surrender only if that Ahmadiyah is dissolved. Munarman did surrender later after the Ministry of Religious Affairs announced that Ahmadiyah should not operate publicly. There were a number of protests organized by *Garda Bangsa* and *GP Ansbor*, attached respectively to *Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa* and *Nabdlatul Ulama*, against the violence in Monas, and demanded the dissolution of the FPI.

However, there were other groups countering these protests, demanding the dissolution of *Ahmadiyah*, the release of Habib Rizieq and rejecting the ban of the FPI. There were three important events in Banten relating to the demand to ban the Ahmadiyah. First, the MUI of Kota Serang issued a “Positional Statement (*pernyataan sikap*) of the MUI and Muslim Community” against *Jamaah Ahmadiyah Indonesia*, on 1 June 2008. Second, five days later, the MUI of Banten and some other Muslim organizations issued a press conference at the Mosque of the Old Banten on 6 June, in which KH AS Hassan, one of the chairpersons of the MUI of Banten, called people to support the MUI’s *fatwā* on Ahmadiyah, because Ahmadiyah is “deviating” and “out of Islam”. He also commented that the Monas tragedy was because the Government was too slow in responding Muslims’ demand to ban Ahmadiyah. In addition, because of the conflict of internal Muslims concerning the Munas tragedy (between supporters

³⁹ Komando Laskar Islam is a coordinating command of a number of Islamic paramilitary groups led by Munarman, an ex-activist of human rights and legal advocacy. KLI is a new institution under the coordination of Forum Umat Islam (FUI), led by Muhammad al-Khaththath, a leader of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). “Laskar “Pembela Islam Akui Serang AKKBB,” *Tempo Interaktif*, 1 June 2008, www.tempo.co/read/news/2008/06/01/057124089/Laskar-Pembela-Islam-Akui-Serang-AKKBB; accessed 23 February 2012.

of Gus Dur and of Habib Riziq), he called Muslims to be aware of the possible *divide et impera* (*adu domba*) between Muslim community themselves. The head of the Forum Ukhuwah Islamiyah (FUI) of Pandeglang, KH M. Abduh, emphasised that both conflicting groups are of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) members. He said that Habib Riziq is also NU member.⁴⁰

Third, mass demonstration in front of the Banten parliamentary building on the day that the government planned to issue the Joint Decree on Ahmadiyah on 9 June 2008. Joint The demonstration supported the FPI and demanded the dissolution of Ahmadiyah. They were about 500 Muslims from various groups organised by Aliansi Masyarakat Banten (Banten Society Alliance). Some of those present at the press conference showed up, in the demonstration, such as KH M Abduh, the head of the FUI of Pandeglang, and KH Tb Fathul Azim, one of the leading young societal ulama.⁴¹ Abduh said again that Habib Riziq is also NU member, so that NU members should also support him and defend his organisation FPI, and he emphasise that between NU members should not be in conflict. It seemed that most of the demonstrators were of NU background, although no NU flag was unseen there. The demonstration was closed with *Istighasab*, a common prayer for asking God's help, which is common in NU religious tradition. The general chairperson of the MUI of Serang, who is also board member of NU, gave a short "tausiyah" (advice) and closed the demonstration with prayer. As expressed in their banners, the demonstrators demanded four points: 1) The unity of all Muslims in Nusantara [Indonesia] and resolution of all conflicting groups (*islāh*); 2) Dissolution of the Ahmadiyah; 3) Support of the FPI to continue fighting against the groups that violate faith (*'aqīdah*); 4) The release of Habib Riziq and his followers from prison.⁴² The Joint Decree between the Ministers of Religion, of Interior Affairs and of High

⁴⁰ Fieldwork note, 6 June 2008.

⁴¹ Some Islamic activists were actually suspicious of what they called "ex-NIP" for possible violating the consensus to push their own "more radical" agenda, because in the coordinating meeting held on 4 June 2008, the "ex-NIP" was not satisfied with the result of the deliberation. Interview with one of Islamist activist, on 6 June 2008.

⁴² Fieldwork note, Serang, 9 June 2008.

Attorney, was finally issued on that day stating that Ahmadiyah should stop its activities, but did not ban it.⁴³

The demonstration was followed by public hearing with the Commission I of the Banten parliament. The major figures of MUI did not show up. One of the demonstrators told me that it is “the job of the youth”. This implies that they consider the MUI as “the elderly” and Islamic pressure groups are “the youth”. Some MUI’s leaders who had “youth spirit” did actually appear in the demonstration, but not in the public hearing with the legislators. They left the MUI because they need to give strong pressure on the parliament. The discussion was “hot” from the beginning and sometimes the audience shouted “Allahu akbar!” Most of the representative of the factions, including the nationalist Golkar and Demokrat factions, supported the demonstrator’s demands and promised to endorse the dissolution of Ahmadiyah. The above events indicated that the MUI’s *fatwā* on Ahmadiyah had been advocated by most Islamic movements as well as most factions in the parliament of Banten.

The most violent attack on Ahmadiyah community in Banten happened more than two years later in Cikeusik, Pandeglang, on 6 February 2011. About 1500 people attacked the community and three Ahmadiyah people were killed and some other injured. Although the police said that the attackers were ordinary Muslims from surrounding villages, the fact was that the attackers were well organized since they used green and blue ribbons on their arms. The attack was motivated by the belief that Ahmadiyah is not only deviant but also infidel, departing from Islam, referring to both 1980 and 2005 MUI *fatwās* on Ahmadiyah. Although the second *fatwā* forbid violence, the MUI could not predict what would happen with its *fatwās* in praxis. The Cikeusik case has shown that mob did their own violent way. Police who were present did not do anything to prevent the violence.

Because of this tragedy, some ulama were arrested for being allegedly involved in organizing the brutal mob attack. However, after the protest of Islamist ulama and students, they were released because

⁴³ Joint Decree No 3/2008, KEP-033/A/JA/6/2008, and No 199/2008 on Warning and Order to the Adherences, Members or Board Members of the Indonesian Ahmadiyah Community (JAI) and Society, dated 9 Juni 2008.

of, as the police said, the “lack of evidence”.⁴⁴ Twelve attackers were later sentenced from 3-6 months in jail.⁴⁵ However, the most surprising was a victim, Deden Sujana, the former head of security for the Indonesian Ahmadiyah Congregation (JAI), was also sentenced to six months in jail.⁴⁶ The reason given by the judge was that Sujana was found guilty of violent attack against the mob and refuse to comply with police chapters who had ordered him and other Ahmadis to leave Cikeusik a day before. The judge put the blame of the killing of his fellow Ahmadis on him. If he did comply with the police order, the murder would not happen.

Against Polytheist (*Shirk*) Practices: *Debus* and Statue of Sultan Hasanuddin

Polytheism or shirk is belief or practice which assumes that God is more than one or that there are other than God who can be worshiped or asked for help. Ulama across the ages have protected the *ummah* from being entrapped in polytheistic beliefs and practices. The MUI of Banten is part of this endeavour. In this case, there are two important issues related to *shirk*, viz., *debus* (invulnerability performance) and the plan to erect a statue of Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin, the sultan of Banten in the pre-modern period.

Debus: between Sufism and Local Tradition

The MUI of all Java and Lampung chapters met in the coordinating meeting (rapat koordinasi) in Serang on 11-12 Agustus 2009. It issued a controversial recommendation (tausiyah) that the traditional martial performance of *debus* is *haram*, if it uses the *shirk* (polytheistic) practices, such as using *satun*, jinn and magic spells. It was controversial because the meeting was held in Serang, Banten, and

⁴⁴ *The Jakarta Post*, 11 February 2011, www.thejakartapost.com/news/2011/02/11/police-release-religious-leaders-linked-cikeusik-attack.html, accessed 2 February 2012.

⁴⁵ Setara Institute, "Catatan atas Peradilan Kasus Penyerangan Ahmadiyah Cikeusik Banten," 8 August 2011, www.setara-institute.org/en/content/catatan-atas-peradilan-kasus-penyerangan-ahmadiyah-cikeusik-banten; accessed 2 February 2012.

⁴⁶ Heru Andriyanto, "Ahmadi Victim of Cikeusik Attack Jailed for 6 Months," *The Jakarta Globe*, 15 August 2011, www.thejakartaglobe.com/news/ahmadi-victim-of-cikeusik-attack-jailed-for-6-months/459531, accessed 2 February 2012.

debus is one of Bantenese traditional performances. It is even found also in some other regions, such as Aceh and West Sumatra.

Debus (from Ar. *dabbus*, “needle”) is invulnerability cult or a performance of invulnerability by using sharp metal objects.⁴⁷ According to Martin van Bruinessen, debus is derived from practices usually associated with Rifa’iyya Sufi order (*tarekat*) and, in the context of Banten, Qadiriyya.⁴⁸ This is also acknowledged by the research team of the MUI of Banten in their research in 2004.⁴⁹ The influence of the tarekat can be seen in three aspects of debus: First, *wirid* or certain words, formulas or prayers which read regularly in certain times, usually but not exclusively after obligatory prayers (*shalat*), which are believed to having spiritual power. Second, *tamassul* (mediation) and *rabitbah al-syaikh* (relation with the *sheikh*), meaning using the murshid (spiritual guide) and his former *murshids* as mediation to approach God and presenting the sheikh or imagining the presence of the sheikh and the spiritual predecessors of the sheikh before beginning *zikir* (remembering God). Third, *bai’a* (pledge), *ijaza* (authorization) and *kebilafa* (deputy of *murshid*), meaning that disciple should plea for loyalty to the murshid, and if he/she receives *ijazah*, he/she became the deputy of the *murshid*. The debus has all of these elements so that the research team categorized these as part of “Islamic tradition”.

However, the research team also found that there are also other elements of “local tradition”, which are pre-Islamic. The most important element is *jangjawokan* or formulation to be read which is believed to having spiritual power other than *wirid*, which is usually in old Javanese or Sundanese languages. The *jangjawokan* is now “Islamized” by chanting *bi-smi-llahi r-rahmani r-rahim* (in the name of Allah the Compassionate and the Merciful) or *la ilaha illallah* (no god but Allah) before reading it. The other elements are *silat* (traditional fighting performance), in which invulnerability is shown, and

⁴⁷ Further study on Debus, see Ayatullah Khumaeni, *The Phenomenon of Magic in Banten*, Unpublished MA Thesis Leiden University, 2009; Rohman, “The result of a holy alliance: Debus in Banten province,” *Alqalam* 29:2 (May-August 2012), pp. 369-390.

⁴⁸ Martin van Bruinessen, “Kurdish Ulama and their Indonesian Disciples,” *Les Annales de l’Autre Islam* 5 (1998), pp. 83-106.

⁴⁹ Team Peneliti, *Laporan Akhir Penelitian Debus di Masyarakat Banten* (Serang: Majelis Ulama Indonesia Provinsi Banten, 2004), pp. 17-18, 27-31.

accompanying music. The invulnerability is believed to be the result of the spiritual exercises of both Islamic and local traditions.

The research team did not actually recommend whether *debus* is *haram* (not allowed), but simply offered that the *debus* can be seen in two perspectives. The first is symbolic perspective, which sees the phenomena of *debus* as indication that Islam is merely a symbol and trivial whose essence remains Hindu-Buddhist, animistic, dynamistic pre-Islamic tradition. The second is essentialist perspective which views Islam as being absorbed deeply into the hearth of local culture. The report even implies that it is better to view in the second perspective, by positioning it at the concluding paragraph.⁵⁰

However, the recommendation of the MUI on *debus* did not adopt this position. It rather adopted the symbolic perspective by saying that *debus* contains pre-Islamic elements. This recommendation socked many *debus* practitioners, who are mainly *jawara* (local tugs), in the region, because it means direct attack on them. This symbolises further contestation between the reformist ‘*ulamā*’ and “*kiyai kitab*” on the one hand and *debus* practitioners, *jawara* and the “*kiyai hikmah*”, ‘*ulamā*’ who teach spiritual and magical power to the *jawara* or *debus* practitioners on the other hand which has taken place so far. Traditionally there have been mutual relations between *jawara* and *debus* practitioners and “*kiyai hikmah*” and contestation between the former with “*kiyai kitab*”. *Jawara* need “*kiyai hikmah*” to gain spiritual and magical knowledge as well as religious legitimacy of their spiritual power; whereas the “*kiyai hikmah*” need the *jawara* for social influence in certain layers of society, apart from possible economic gift they find from the *jawara* because of the spiritual and magical power they gave.⁵¹ A *jawara* and leader of *debus* performance group in Lebak suspected that the recommendation was influenced by “‘*ulamā*’ of Saudi”, meaning the Wahabi puritan ‘*ulamā*’.⁵² Although it is not necessarily

⁵⁰ Team Peneliti (2004), 86. This has been also acknowledged by one of the members of the research team, Mohamad Hudaeri, then chairperson of the Research Center of the State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN) of Banten. Interview with Mohamad Hudaeri, June 2008.

⁵¹ Hudaeri (2003), pp. 81-2. On the relations between *Jawara* and Islamic parties, especially PKS, see Andi Rahman Alamsyah, *Islam, Jawara and Demokrasi: Geliat Politik Banten Pasca-Orde Baru* (Jakarta: Dian Rakyat, 2009).

⁵² Interview with Romly, a leader of *debus* group in Lebak, September 2009.

true, this allegation reflects the long conflict between *jawara* and *debus* practitioners on the one hand and the reformist ‘ulamā’ on the other hand, which is believed to be influenced by the Salafi-Wahabi movement. The MUI is representation of the “kiyai kitab” of both reformists and traditionalists which has undergone some puritanisation in the last decade. Indeed the MUI has been hegemonised by representatives of the widely known “traditionalist” Muslim organizations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama and, in the case of Banten, al-Khaeriyah, there has been development to puritanisation since the 2000 National Congress and more intensively since 2005 when a number of conservative *fatwās* were issued, including *fatwās* on magic power (*kahānah*) and prediction (*‘irāfab*).⁵³

Statue of Sultan Hasanuddin

The government of South Tangerang planned to create the statue of Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin, the sultan of Banten ruling from c. 1552 to 1570, at a Pamulang traffic circle. They wanted to make the statue a symbol of local pride. However, idea was challenged by the MUI of Kota South Tangerang, which declared on 20 December 2009 that the erection of a statue of Banten Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin is forbidden (*ḥarām*). According to KH. Saidi, the local MUI chairperson, the statue violated Islamic teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Although it would be built for educational purpose, they feared that people would worship the statue. There are stories of Ibrahim (Abraham) who destroyed the idols worshiped by the ruler and people, and Muḥammad who destroyed the idols around the Ka’aba. Saidi suggested that it is better to build the *menara* (tower) of the old Banten Mosque, the *Asmaul Husna* (beautiful names of Allah), or the logo of Kota South Tangerang, or that the budget be allocated for other public purposes.⁵⁴

⁵³ On the puritanisation of the MUI, see Ichwan (forthcoming, 60-104). The Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) of Banten has different religious orientation from that of the NU in Central and East Java, which dominate the national board. This is evident in the case of Ahmadiyah discussed in this article, in which the NU of Banten supported the release of Habib Rizik, the leader of Front Pembela Islam, who was arrested by the police, and the dissolution of Ahmadiyah, whereas the central board of NU was silent about the case, although former NU chairperson, KH Hasyim Muzadi later suggested that the Ahmadiyah establishes itself as independent religion.

⁵⁴ *The Jakarta Post*, 21 December 2009, www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/12/21/-local-mui-bans-banten-sultan-statue.html; accessed 1 February 2012.

The South Tangerang government took MUI protest into consideration seriously and withdrew the project. Although this cannot be generalised, by and large, the MUI voices concerning public policies, especially those which have religious impacts, have been heard by the local government. Despite the importance of Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin in Banten history, there has no such a proposal in other districts or municipalities. Statue is sensitive in Muslim communities. The vandalism of the statues happened in other Muslim majority regions, such as Bangkalan,⁵⁵ North Sumatra,⁵⁶ and Solo,⁵⁷ where some statues of Buddhism and Christianity were destroyed. While the latter happened to non-Muslim religious symbols, the case of Hasanuddin statue had nothing to do with religious symbol of Islam. However, the exaggerated assumption that the statue would be worshiped implied the growing “puritanisation” and “conservativisation” of the MUI in the region.

Against *Bid'ah* Practices: Abusing the “Fake” NU ‘Ulamā’s *Fatwā*

Most MUI chapters, both central and local, including MUI of Banten province, prevent themselves from touching upon the controversial issues (*ikhtilāf*) between Sunnī schools (*madhhabs*) of law and theology. However, the MUI of Serang was exceptional, because it issued a Letter No 122/MUI-Srg/XI/2007, dated 21 November 2007, informing about the “*fatwā* of NU ‘ulamā’ of Jombang”, East Java, which forbids some religious practices so far conducted by NU (Nahdlatul Ulama) community, such as chanting *nīyah* (intent) of prayer loudly, *qunū* during *ṣubḥ* (dawn) prayer, *tablīlan* (reading a number of verses and prayers), *istighasab* (asking God’s help trough

⁵⁵ Three Buddhist statues were destroyed, allegedly by Islamists. <http://www-tempo.co/read/news/2011/02/02/180310724/Situs-Mincal-di-Bangkalan-Dirusak-Warga>; accessed 1 February 2012.

⁵⁶ The Islamist groups demanded the removal of the Budha statue at Vihara Tri Ratna, Tanjung Balai, North Somatra. This was supported by the local MUI and the Minister of Religious Affairs. <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/home/sumatra-buddha-statue-must-go-ministry/433018>; accessed 1 February 2012

⁵⁷ The statue of Mary at the Sendang Pawitra Mary Cave of Tawangmangu, Solo, was destroyed by Islamist groups; her head was cut off. <http://www.harianjogja.com/-baca/2011/12/16/gua-maria-di-tawangmangu-dirusak-orang-tak-dikenal-151693>; accessed 1 February 2012

certain prayers) and visiting *wali* graves. “The *fatwā* of NU ‘ulamā’ of Jombang” was spread by Mahrus Ali, who claimed himself as “ex-NU” scholar in his book *Mantan Kiyai NU menggugat Tablilan, Istighosaban dan Ziarah Para Wali*.⁵⁸ The MUI letter triggered protests amongst NU leaders and members in district Serang and in Banten in general. Some NU members prepared to demonstrate to the MUI of Serang. However, the chairperson of NU of Serang, KH Matin Syarkowi, forbade the demonstration and asked them to entrust the NU leadership board to overcome the problem in peaceful way.⁵⁹ KH Matin Syarkowi and the head of *shūrīah* (NU consultative board) of Banten, KH. Ahmad Syatibi, then sent a letter demanding the general chairperson of MUI of Serang, KH A. Sjafe’i AN, to withdraw the MUI Letter and to apologise to NU members. They argued that the *fatwā* was fake and meant to discredit NU. The Central Board of NU has checked the validity of the *fatwā* and found that most of the ‘ulamā’ mentioned in the *fatwā* did not know about the *fatwā* and some of them even already passed away long time before the *fatwā* was written.⁶⁰

KH A. Sjafe’i AN did comply with the demand. He apologized to NU members and stated that he did not know that the *fatwā* was fake.⁶¹ As leader of Persatuan Islam (Persis), an puritanical Muslim movement, KH A. Sjafe’i AN, has puritanical orientation. Persis is one of the most consistent puritan Muslim organisations that promotes the purification of Islam from religious innovations (*bid’ah*) and superstitions (*keburāfah*). During the colonial and early post-colonial period, Persis was the main critic of NU’s religious practices, including that mentioned in the *fatwā*.⁶² The *fatwā* was very famous in the last few years amongst the puritan ‘ulamā’, because it is in line with their orthodox views. For them this *fatwā* could be used to defeat their “old

⁵⁸ Mahrus Ali, *Mantan Kiyai NU menggugat Tablilan, Istighosaban dan Ziarah Para Wali* (Jakarta: La Tasyuk, 2006).

⁵⁹ Interview with KH Matin Syarkowi, the chairperson of NU of Serang, June 2008.

⁶⁰ *Republika*, 25 January 2008.

⁶¹ Interview with KH Drs A Syafei AN, MSI, the general chairperson of the MUI of Serang regency, 10 June 2008.

⁶² On Persatuan Islam (Persis) and its theological conflict with NU, see Howard M. Federspiel, *Persatuan Islam: Islamic Reform in Twentieth Century Indonesia*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Modern Indonesia Project, 1970), pp. 69-83.

enemy”. This was seen by NU leaders as Persis’ continuing effort of criticizing NU through MUI by using the alleged “*fatwā* of NU ‘ulamā’ of Jombang”. Some NU leaders suspected that it was actually an effort to “purify” the MUI of Serang, and Serang society in general.⁶³

Conclusion

The last decade has witnessed MUI’s realisation of the power of being perceived as “official” and “representative”, and of using them to endorse its Sunni-isation agendas and political interests. Although the MUI has proclaimed to be the “servant of *ummah*”, the relationship between MUI and government of Banten has been almost unchanged since the New Order, and even been more developed. Like in the New Order, the MUI played its “traditional” role as semi-official, institution which mediates between the government, parliament and Muslim society. Its political power stems mostly from government and parliamentary perception that the MUI is the representative of all Muslim organisations, or at least that taking side with the MUI is the safest way to deal with Muslim community, compared to taking side with other Islamic organisations. Moreover, many Muslims groups also view that the way to approach the government or the parliament to endorse certain interests and policies is through the mediation of the MUI. Due to this, the MUI plays distinctive role in Banten. It has something which is not owned by other Muslim organisations, that is, the “semi-officiality” and “representativeness”, if not “pseudo-representativeness”. Established in 1975 by the government, the MUI has these two perceived characteristics until today. However, in many cases, as we have seen above, the government, police, parliament, and media have positioned it as “official” and “representative” ‘ulamā’ body. Its *fatwās* has been used by the police to arrest people charged by the MUI as deviant, and by the judges to give their verdicts. Many local governments also take MUI *fatwās* and opinions into consideration in formulating their policies. This has been reflected in the cases of deviant beliefs and the withdrawal of the building of Sultan Hasanuddin statue discussed above. This has enhanced the political position of the MUI in the local political arena.

Indeed, one of the most important roles of MUI of Banten is guarding the politics of Sunni orthodoxy. As our discussion above has

⁶³ Interview with KH Matin Syarqowi, June 2008.

indicated, the MUI has been demanded by Muslim leaders and society to evaluate the “Islamicness” of certain beliefs or sects, and issue *fatwā* or recommendation (*tausyiah*) on them. The political contestation between various Muslim organisations could happen in this process. The mainstream has always hegemonised MUI *fatwās*, recommendations and discourses in the name of “protecting the *ummah*” from local, national and trans-national allegedly “deviant” beliefs and sects. The problem is that some of MUIs *fatwās* or its ten criteria of deviancy have been used or abused by certain groups to justify their violent acts against other groups they claimed to be deviant from Islamic orthodoxy. This is usually fuelled with rumours of allegedly deviant teachings of the groups, which are not necessarily true. Uncritical masses simply believed that the rumour was true and they thought that they had to do something to stop them, even through violent way. In such cases the MUI usually simply says that the MUI, as ‘ulamā’ institution, is responsible for issuing *fatwās* as part of guiding the *ummah*, but not responsible for the violence possibly emerging from them, because it has disclaimed in the *fatwās* or through media that violence is not tolerated. However, this also means that in the issue on deviant beliefs, polytheist and *bid’ah* practices, the MUI has been driven by conservative, puritanical Muslim groups and Islamist movements. The MUI has taken the position “puritanical moderate Islam” to keep the trust of the government and parliament on the one hand, and that of Muslim society on the other. This seems to be the most suitable position adopted by the MUI. Yet, the absence of progressive ‘ulamā’ in the MUI could lead this organisation to be more conservative and puritanical, if not radical, in the future. []

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