

# THE FUZZY SACREDNESS AURA AND CYBER-BASED DA'WAH Redrawing *Karamah* of *Tuan Guru* within The Belief System of Sasak Muslims

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**Abstract:** This article examines Sasak Muslims' belief in *tuan guru's karamah* (charisma) in the midst of the emerging trend of cyber *da'wah*. Findings illustrate that Sasak Muslims have repeatedly recognized that *tuan guru's* charisma becomes an important consideration for their respect and obedience to *'ulamā* and are of great significance for *da'wah*. Accordingly, they have remained in favour of lived-*da'wah* practices compared to the online ones. There are two facets that frame the underlying rationales of the findings. First, not all Islamic rituals and *da'wah* activities can be transformed into the digital realm because *da'wah* has complexity of concepts and meanings embedded within any Islamic rituals that would be difficult to be reproduced into internet medium. Second, *da'wah* through digital platforms lead people to feel less auratic experience as normally they can through in-person *da'wah* activities.

**Keywords:** Islamic ritual, cyber based-*da'wah*, supernatural quality.

## Introduction

Although it necessitates Islamic preachers to have both substantive and methodological competencies of *da'wah* (proselytising),<sup>1</sup> possessing supernatural qualities that endow them with an aura of sacredness such as *karamah* (miracles) and *keseketen* (extra ordinary

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<sup>1</sup> See .Abdul Munir Mulkhan, *Ideologisasi Gerakan Dakwah* (Yogyakarta: Sipes, 1996), 64-240; Moh. Ali Aziz, *Ilmu Dakwah* (Jakarta: Prenada Media, 2019), 186-209.

power) is considerably required<sup>2</sup> within the Indonesian traditionalist Muslims in particular. Indeed, in the historiography of Indonesian Islam, *da'wah* actors such as *wali Sanga*, *kiai*, *tuan guru*, *ajengan*, and *'ulamā* (Muslim scholars) were often associated with various sacred stories.

Examples can be cited here. Kiai Abbas Buntet, for example, conducted *da'wah* by teaching *kanoragan* (supernatural power), *kekebalan* (invulnerability), *kesekten* (extra ordinary power) to his disciples to fight against the invaders (*penjajah*) after gaining religious knowledge from Mecca and several Islamic boarding schools in Java. Also, within Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) tradition, kiai As'ad Syamsul Arifin of Situbondo, East Java, was believed to be a *wali* of Allah, who was given supernatural powers and *karomah*. Tuan Guru Haji (TGH) Muhammad Zainuddin Abdul Majid and TGH Mutawali were the early generation of Tuan Guru in Lombok who were considered as resembling *wali*, possessing mystical power.<sup>3</sup>

However, in the last two decades, the Indonesian Muslims have undergone a new trend in conducting religious proselytising. Many *'ulamā* have created virtual *da'wah* channels with a broad reach to convey the messages of Islam to audiences. For instance, *Ustādh* Abdul Shomad, *Ustadz* Adi Hidayat, Buya Yahya, Gus Nur (Sugi Nur Raharja), Felix Shiauw, Hanan Al-Taki, and Gus Baha (Bahauddin Nur Salim). There are some virtual *da'wah* pages that have been popular, followed by more than million users in any social media channels such as Aswaja Yellow Book, Ideological Da'wah, Kaffah Islamic Community, Smart *da'wah*, *Ngaji Online Aswaja*, Fodamara, and Akhyar TV Indonesia. The virtual *da'wah* channels also often broadcast religious rituals and preachings through live-streaming video with direct feedback.

This contemporary situation certainly affects the formation of religious knowledge system, culture, and authority which is subsumed under traditional or charismatic authority. This is because the transmission and circulation of Islamic texts through a variety of cybermedia on the Muslim world have expanded the number of people who can directly conduct a dialogue with the text that could terminate

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<sup>2</sup> Abdurrahman Kasdi, "The Role of Walisongo in Developing Islam Nusantara Civilization," *Addin* 11, 1 (2017), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Agus Dedi Putrawan, "Dekramatisasi Tuan Guru di Pulau Lombok Nusa Tenggara Barat," *Right Jurnal Agama dan Hak Azazi Manusia* 5,2 (2014), 298.

the monopoly of the *‘ulamā* in any religious discourses as well.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Turner also asserted: “Global information technologies and their associated cultures undermine traditional forms of religious authority because they expand conventional modes of communication, open up new opportunities for debate and create alternative visions of the global community.”<sup>5</sup> Correspondingly, the charismatic authority of *kiai* and *‘ulamā* has been challenged by a massive religious discourse and ritual practice widespread on cybernetic space.

It is little known about the Sasak Muslims’<sup>6</sup> belief in *tuan guru*’s charismatic authority in the midst of the proliferation of digital-based *da’wah*. Using fieldwork study that includes an analysis of in-depth interviews with Muslim community in Lombok in 2018 with some update in 2020, this article has attempted to shed light on Sasak Muslims’ conception about *tuan guru*’s *karamah* and its role for *da’wah* in Lombok in the contemporary landscape.

### The Spread of Islam in Indonesia and Sacred Reality

In the Indonesian traditionalist Muslims’ belief, Islamic propagation (*da’wah*) and supernatural ability are inextricably connected like two sides of the same coin. Indeed, the history of Islam’s spread in Indonesia has developed parallel to the Islamic Mysticism (sufism) tradition which are closely associated with sacred reality such as extraordinary abilities, spiritual powers, mythical realms, unreasonable actions or supernatural phenomena (*kebāriq al-‘ādah*), as well as moral perfection.<sup>7</sup>

According to Amin, the birth of Islamic religion in Indonesia occurred in accordance with the medieval developments in mystic knowledge and rise of the *tarekat*. It can be seen from the alliance

<sup>4</sup> Dale F. Eickelman and J.W. Anderson, “Print, Islam, and the Prospect for Civic Pluralism: The New Religious Writings and Their Audiences,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 8, 1 (1997), 49. See also Taufik Abdullah, “The Formation of a New Paradigm? A Sketch on Contemporary Islamic Discourse,” Mark Woodward (ed.), *Toward a New Paradigm: Recent Developments in Indonesia Islamic Thought* (Tempe: Arizona University Program for Southeast Asia Studies, 1996), 75.

<sup>5</sup> Bryan S. Turner, “Religious Authority and the New Media,” *Theory, Culture, and Society* 24, 2 (2007), 120.

<sup>6</sup> Suprpto, “Sasak Muslims and Interreligious Harmony: Ethnographic Study of the Perang Topat Festival in Lombok - Indonesia,” *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 11, 1 (2017)

<sup>7</sup> Ade Fakhri Kurniawan, Noorhaidi Hasan, and Achmad Zainal Arifin, “Wali and Karamah: A Discourse and Authority Contestation in al-Tarmasi’s *Bughyat al-Adhkiyā*,” *Al-Jami’ah Journal of Islamic Studies* 57, 2 (2019), 287-328.

between the world-renowned mystic figures who lived at that time such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, M. Abdul Qadir al-Jilani, Najmuddin al-Kubra, Abu Hasan al-Syadzili, and Abdullah al-Syattari and the mystic traditions which exist in Indonesia up till present day; that is, the *Qadiriyyah tariqat* refers to M. Abdul Qadir al-Jilani, the *Kubrawiyyah tariqat*, the *Naqsabandiyya tariqat* refers to Abu Hasan al-Syadzili, and the *al-Syattari* refers to Abdullah al-Syattari.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the influence of the Sufism tradition in Indonesia can be traced back from the works of Acehnese Sufis as written by Hamzah Fansuri, Shamsuddin Pasai, and Nuruddin Arraniry from Samudra Pasai.<sup>9</sup>

Many kinds of literature on Sufism have stated that Sufism traditions are often dealing with the *walī*.<sup>10</sup> They are regarded those who have achieved the perfect knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*), have obtained divine power from God (*quwwah ilāhiyya*), and have had *karamah*<sup>11</sup> because of their proximity to Allah. Regarding to this tradition, *karamah* is commonly utilised for an indicative of a person's sainthood<sup>12</sup> as well as to help Islamic saints in obtaining the purposes of proselytising (*da'wah*), namely attracting a number of people to convert to Islam.<sup>13</sup> It can be seen from some footprints of *wali sanga*

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<sup>8</sup> Samsul Munir Amin, *Sejarah Peradaban Islam* (Jakarta: Amzah, 2015), 31-113.

<sup>9</sup> Harun Nasution, *Falsafah dan Mistisisme dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1992), 56.

<sup>10</sup> The word *walī* is taken from the Arabic language *wala*, with the plural form of *awliya* which means *qaraba*, that is near. See Louis Ma'luf al-Abb, *al-Munjid* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1937), 1061. According to the Javanese tradition, *walī* is a title for those that are regarded sacred. See *Ensiklopedi Indonesia* (Bandung: Ikhtiar Baru van Hoeve, n.d), 1417.

<sup>11</sup> *Karamah* is superhuman and supernatural powers are given to saint spoken of by Muslim lexicographers as *kbāriq al-'ādat* (things contrary to custom) which in turn has made him very different from society at large. The notion of *karamah* differs from that of, *mu'jizah*. A *mu'jizah* (plural *mu'jizāt*) is attributed only to the Prophet, while a *karamah* is attributed to saints. See A.J. Wensinck, "Mu'djiza," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 7 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 295. In terms of *karamah al-awliya'* (marvels of *walī*), in sufims tradition, it is as a mark of honour for confirming him in piety and God-fearing reverence. These *karamah* include prediction of the future, interpretations of the secrets of the heart, and miraculous happenings. See L Gardet, "Karāma," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 4 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), 615.

<sup>12</sup> Muslih Al-Maraqi, *an-Nur al-Burbani fi Tarjamah al-Lajain ad-Dani* (Semarang: Toha Putra, 1962a).

<sup>13</sup> Abdurrahman Kasdi, "The Role of Walisongo in Developing Islam Nusantara Civilization," *Addin* 11, 1 (2017), 15. See also Putrawan, "Dekarismatisasi Tuan Guru di Pulau Lombok Nusa Tenggara Barat," *Insight* 5, 2 (2014), 284-295.

in doing *da'wah* toward Javanese kings. The manuscript *Piwulang* of Sunan Kalijaga, for instance, representatively represented saint's teachings containing 60 mantras (spells) which taught to the Sultan of Kraton (Sultan's Palace) Pajang, the second *Sinubun* Kangjeng Pangeran Pugĕr in Kraton of Mantaram, the third and the fourth *Susubunan* Pakubuwono (ruler of Surakarta), and to Kanjeng Panembahan Senapati in Mataram Kingdom.<sup>14</sup> These mantras were about *dzikir* (remembrance) to become invulnerable and a powerful person; to have ability to jump over rivers, to disappear (not seen by anyone), to sharp objects, to fly when surrounded by enemies, to get a blessing from God, to get respect from others, and to pray when meeting enemies or wild animals, and so forth.<sup>15</sup>

Another evident is a popular recount of *Kiai* Abbas Buntet, who was considered having *kedigdayaan* (extra ordinary power) during his lifetime. *Kiai* Abbas was not only well-known as an established scholar (*ʿālim*), but he also regarded being able to work miracles (*karamah*). When the battle of Surabaya in 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1945 occurred, *Kiai* Abbas attacked the enemies by pelting them with handfuls of sand, which made them run away. It was also told that *Kiai* Abbas could go to Surabaya from Cirebon with just one beat (*bentakan kaki*).<sup>16</sup>

For *da'wah* purposes, *karamah al-awliya'* is not only has an important role in converting people to Islam, but it is also useful to lead bad individuals (*orang nakal*) to the right path of God. Study conducted by Jamhari concerning on the veneration of *wali* and holy persons in *tarekat Istighasthat Ihsaniyyat* has revealed that through *gemblengan*—a form of invulnerability by which he transferred a spiritual power—they became invulnerable to sharp objects, fire and bullets. The leader of the order, Gus Abdul Latif, succeeded to lead bad people (*orang nakal*) to the right path and return to the path of God.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Rahmat, "Piwulang Sunan Kalijaga (Teks Tentang Mantra): Deskripsi Teks dan Akulturasi Bahasa," *Jumantara* 7, 1 (2016), 89-102.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Samsul Munir Amin, *Karomah Para Kiai* (Yogyakarta: LkiS, 2008), 72.

<sup>17</sup> Practising and reciting a particular prayer conducted by devout Muslims in order to be able to perform marvels is categorised as *ilmu putih*. Arif Jamhari, "The Majelis Dhikr of Indonesia: Exposition of Some Aspects of Ritual Practices," *Journal of Indonesia Islam* 3, 1 (2009), 133. See also Idem, *Rituals of Islamic Spirituality: A Study of Majelis Dhikr Groups in East Java* (Canberra: ANU E-Press, 2010), 170.

## The Social Reality of *Tuan Guru* and Islamic Proselytising

In the Eastern Indonesian island of Lombok, *tuan guru* is akin to both *'ulamā* (spiritual leaders) and *ustādh* (Muslim religious teachers), much like *kiai* in Java.<sup>18</sup> *Tuan guru* is conceived as knowledgeable person from whom people learn Islamic teachings and as a person who is believed to inherit prophecy (*waratha al-anbiya*) which enables him to give a divine blessing (*barakah*).<sup>19</sup>

Researches have illustrated that generally *tuan guru* is spiritually and intellectually very different from people at large. Fahrurrozi's study indicated five criteria for those who are regarded as *tuan guru*; first, having broad Islamic knowledge; *second*, having expertise in reading classical texts of the various Islamic disciplines (*kitab kuning*) third, having heredity; fourth, having great pious; fifth having number of *santri*.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, Jamaludin proposed three conditions for those who are regarded as *tuan gurus*, first, they have extensive knowledge about Islam and its various teachings because *tuan guru* becomes the main interpreter of religious texts amongst the Sasak Muslims. Second, they have studied with established scholars (*alim-ulama*) in the Middle East, especially Haramain, namely Mecca and Medina. Third, they obtain recognition from Muslims. Forth, they possess *karamah* (marvels).<sup>21</sup>

In this sense, *tuan guru* is not only considered as a knowledgeable and pious person, but also a sacred individual endowed with *karamah*.<sup>22</sup> It is a truism to contend that *tuan guru* is regarded as having *karamah* (marvels) as often found within Sasaknese's folklore and local muslim stories up until currently. As a sacred story of Tuan Guru, Muhammad Rais is one of marvel-related tales. It was told that Tuan Guru Muhammad Rais got message in a dream to take a book (*kitab*) in *segare* (sea). Then Tuan Guru Rais went for fishing with a villager from Tanjung Karang to the sea near with *Loang Balog*. Not likely to happen, the villager got many fishes and seemed the fish constantly eat up the

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<sup>18</sup> Jeremy J. Kingsley, "Peace-makers or Peace-Breakers? Provincial Elections and Religious Leadership in Lombok, Indonesia," *Indonesia* 93 (2012), 53-82.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Fahrurrozi, "Tuan Guru antara Idealitas Normatif dengan Realitas Sosial pada Masyarakat Lombok," *Jurnal Penelitian Keislaman* 7, 1 (2010), 221-250.

<sup>21</sup> Jamaluddin, "Islam Sasak: Sejarah Sosial Keagamaan Masyarakat Sasak Abad XVI-XIX," *Jurnal Indo-Islamika* 1, 1 (2011), 63-88.

<sup>22</sup> Putrawan, *Dekramatisasi Tuan Guru*, 284-295.

bait at that time. Meanwhile Tuan Guru Rais looked patiently waiting for his bait to be eaten by fish. After a few minutes, Rais seemed to lift his fishing rod, and apparently what he got was a book. Soon after that, he said goodbye to the villagers to go home, because he had already got something he had been waiting for a long time ago.”<sup>23</sup>

Unreasonable actions were also conducted by Tuan Guru Achmad, well known as tuan guru *Ret Tet Tet*. He was often regarded doing things contrary to custom (*khāriq al-‘ādah*) because he was able to miraculously disappear. Once upon time, when one of villagers passed away and buried in Sekarbela, Tuan Guru Ret Tet Tet came late. Then one of his disciples asked the reason why he came late. Tuan Guru Ret Tet Tet answered: “I had just come from consolation (*ta’ziya*) in Bagdad“. Another sacred story conducted by Tuan Guru Haji (TGH) Ret Tet Tet was when he disguised himself as a beggar. At that time, people often found TGH Ret Tet Tet in a bus station and traditional market, Cakra Negara, to take some sellers’ stuffs, then he gave to other people who need them by saying “*sedekah-sedekah* (donation).” Once, in Central Lombok, he disguised himself as a beggar, begging every citizen he met in a village in Central Lombok. But none of them gave money, after the beggar left, the village was on fire.<sup>24</sup> In addition, another supernatural phenomena (*khāriq al-‘ādah*), like *kiai* in Java, *tuan guru* also has what is called *ilmu laduni*, that is knowledge acquired without learning.<sup>25</sup>

The sacred belief of this sort has remained alive amongst Sasaknese Muslim up to present day. Some participants of this study firmly believe that *tuan guru* has supernatural powers and *karamah*. For example, Rahmatulloh, one of the interviewee, told that once he came and asked for help Tuan Guru Haji Ridwanullah, the leader of Islamic Boarding School Darussalam Beremi Desa Darussalam in Gerung District West Lombok, to set up for rain-delay when he was holding *hajatan* (ceremony):

When I held a *nyongkolan* ceremony using *Gendang Belek* on Sundays, I went to see Tuan Guru Haji Ridwanullah, the leader of

<sup>23</sup> Jamaluddin, *Islam Sasak*, 146.

<sup>24</sup> Erni Budiwanti, *Islam Sasak: Wetu Telu versus Waktu Lima* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2000), 295-296.

<sup>25</sup> Putrawan, *Dekarismatisasi Tuan Guru*, 284-295. See also, Endang Turmudi, *Struggling for the Umma: Changing Leadership Roles of Kiai in Jombang, East Java* (Australia: ANU E-Press, 2006), 67–88.

the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Gerung. I need for help *tuan guru's* prayer to postpone the rain, and it was really happened.<sup>26</sup>

Usually, *tuan guru* requires the disciples to do *wirid* (quotes from the specified the Quran to be read after prayer) in order to meet their needs or to get *kesaketen* (extra ordinary power) through the process of *ijāzah* (direct authentication and certification from *kyai* or *tuan guru* to his disciples). Sulhan Ahmad said that he has received *ijāzah* from Tuan Guru Mawe to do a certain *wirid* to get a peaceful protection from witchcraft or black magic forces as well as robbers and thieves, as follows: "I feel at peace and have not been scared to robbers or thieves, and I am not afraid anymore of the black magic force that haunts me all the time."<sup>27</sup>

Further, Ahmad coined that for those who received *ijāzah* from *tuan guru* should take note of any specific instructions pertaining the way to implement *wirid*. Consequently, the disciples become more consistent in implementing the Islamic teachings and performing the five times daily prayers on time.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Musthofa and Abdul Majid acknowledged that they attempted to implement the *tuan guru's* spiritual advices in order to get blessing and reposefulness from God.

"..when we received *amalan* (specified instruction to do) and *bacaan* (reading quotes from the specified the Quran) that required to be recited after doing a certain prayer, for instance, so we have to completely implement as what was instructed. Otherwise we do not get reposefulness from Allah."<sup>29</sup>

Amak Muhaidi, a religious leader as well as a head of *dusun* (an administrative division form below village), also said that he felt insecure because of a threat of witchcraft, black magic, and thieves if he did not hold *kekebalan* (invulnerability power) from *tuan guru*.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, Iskandar, a disciple of Tuan Guru Abd Rauf in the Center of Lombok, admitted that consistently recited *wirid* given by his *tuan guru* in order to get blessing, reposefulness, and protection from Allah Swt. Accordingly, it would be easier to bring bad people (*orang nakal*) to

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Rahmatulloh, July 25, 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Sulhan Ahmad, July 20, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Haji Sulhan Ahmad, July 20, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Haji Majid, July 20, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Muhaidi, July 28, 2018.

the right part of Allah if *tuan guru* or *kiai* has invulnerability and ability to win the battle on witchcraft.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, to get blessing, for those who are fanatic with the *tuan guru*, they will keep *tuan gurus'* photos in wallets and cars that can be brought everywhere or displayed in the walls of houses as a talisman.<sup>32</sup>

With this regard, having such human resources, *tuan guru* has respected position and religious legitimacy for conducting *da'wah* toward Sasak society wherein religious observance, piety, and supernatural ability are of great significance.<sup>33</sup> Drawing on Weber's perspective, it is understandable that many of *tuan guru* and *kiai* have charismatic authority<sup>34</sup> since they are deemed the holder of divine authority, including through *karamah*.

### **Authenticity and Sanctity: Sasak Muslim's Response to Virtual *Da'wah***

Although the proliferation of institutional online feeds for *da'wah* purposes changes the way of many Muslim learning the Islam, it seems does not completely fit to Sasak Muslim in the sense that that not all of them are interested using social media, YouTube channel in particular, in learning Islam. Some participants of this study asserted that *da'wah* is conveying religious teaching through verbal sermon and goodly model (*uswatun hasanah*), therefore, people not only need the normative message (*taushiyah*) but also exemplary approaches (*uswab*). However, YouTube channel and other social media are regarded just offer audio-visual content of religious preaching and do not cover the preachers' real-life attitude as a goodly model.

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Iskandar, July 29, 2018

<sup>32</sup> Jamaludin, *Persepsi dan Sikap Masyarakat Sasak Terhadap Tuan Guru* (Yogyakarta: CRCS, 2007), 7.

<sup>33</sup> Jeremy J. Kingsley, "Redrawing Lines of Religious Authority in Lombok, Indonesia," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 42, 5 (2014), 657-77.

<sup>34</sup> Max Weber defined charisma as a "certain quality of an individual's personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities". David G Brofirstmly, "Charisma and leadership: Charisma and Charismatic Authority," D Chryssides and Benjamin E. Zeller (eds), *New Religious Movement in Companion to New Religious Movement* (Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 56. See also Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building* (London: Chicago Press, 1968), 48.

“Being physically present in offline *da'wah* allows believers to know Muslim clerics’ moral qualities and magnetic personalities”.<sup>35</sup>

Lalu Mahdan Badiaktar, one of interviewee, stated that physical *da'wah* not only sets a good model for the followers but it enables them to feel the sacredness aura of *tuan guru* that is likely to produce deep impression.

“Physical *da'wah* provides qualitatively different religious experience and generates emotional impression compared to online *da'wah*. It is like attending live music concert compared to watching music on TV screen. Direct interaction with musicians in live music performance would convey a deep impression and emotional satisfaction”<sup>36</sup>.

This is relevant to Abdur Rozaki’s research result that revealed physical appearance is one of sources of *kiai*’s charismatic power such as a large body, loud voice, and sharp eyes called as given charisma from God, besides engineering process like the extended religious knowledge, sincerity, and integrity.<sup>37</sup>

Like *kiai* in Java, *tuan guru* occupies an elite, respectable position, and social standing within Lombok Muslim community. The data from this study showed that the position of *tuan guru* in the midst of digital Sasak Muslims has remained very respectable and still became the ultimate source of guidance for social-religious matters. However, there is a general recognition of Sasak Muslim society that *tuan guru* structure is hierarchical, namely the “sacred *tuan guru*” those who are regarded having *karamah* (marvel or supernatural quality) and “ordinary *tuan guru*” who only teach the Quran and convey religious teachings to the believers.

In regard to this reality, all interviewees of this study repeatedly acknowledge *tuan guru*’s charisma, blessing, and *karamah* as disciples’ main consideration for respect and obedience. Some come to see sacred *tuan guru* not only for attending religious gathering, but also for particular purposes such as asking for prayer to reject any disasters, to avoid black magics, to get a bottled mineral water for healing, to

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Lalu Mahdan Badiaktar, July 1, 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Abdur Rozaki, *Kabrisma Menuai Kuasa “Kiprah Kiai dan Blater Sebagai Rezim Kembar di Madura* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Marwa, 2004), 88.

determinate good times, good days, and good months before taking some important activities, or asking for morality advices.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, “Lombok people more respect to the sacred of *tuan guru* than those who are not. Even the sacred *tuan guru* is easier to gain wider recognition.”<sup>39</sup> Consequently, the disciples are also convinced that the prayer delivered by the “sacred *tuan guru*” is more efficacious than the “unsacred” one as well as the quality of spiritual healing. “This is because the sacred *tuan guru* has stronger senses and supernatural power from God.”<sup>40</sup>

Accordingly, it is undoubtedly that Muslim Sasak’ view toward popular and famous Islamic preachers on social media or YouTube channel is not as respectable as *tuan guru*. Even though some participants of this study utilise hybridized space, that is, physical and the digital *da’wah*, they admit only access the credible *da’wah* institution channel or personal channel of famous preachers. Hasanaen Djuaini for example, he tends to access personal channel of *da’i* that is considered having expertise and extended knowledge in religious matters such as *ustadz* Abdul Somad, *ustadh* Adi Hidayat, and Quraish Shihab. Yet, he is not interested to access YouTube channel posted by the ordinary preachers.

However, according to interviewee, it is nothing can compete with the sacred *tuan guru*. Although famous *asatidh* (religious preachers) on YouTube channel have many followers throughout the world, Hasanaen Djuaini and Abdul Aziz, point out that the sacred *tuan guru* have remained possessing a higher prestigious position within Sasak Muslims, the sacred *tuan guru* in particular. Aziz illustrates this issue by making an analogy to the shaman that receive honored stratum in the midst society, “the more *tuan guru* who have extended-knowledge, pious, and sacred, therefore definitely the more they respected.”<sup>41</sup>

It is worth noting that another reason why Sasak Muslims in favor of physical *da’wah* is associated with *karamah* related-ritual matters such as *ijazah*-giving ritual (a direct authentication and certification from *tuan guru* to his disciples). It is firmly believed that *tuan guru* have *karamah* which is likely to give blessing and virtue. As mentioned

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Hasanaen Djuaini, June 30, 2020.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Abdul Aziz Fahmi, June 29, 2020.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with with Lalu Mahdan Badiaktar, July 1, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Abdul Aziz Fahmi, June 29, 2020.

above, some people come to see them for certain interest like to wish a sacred blessing (*ngalap berkah*), to get fortune, to and to avoid any catastrophes and black magic, so forth. In this regard, there is specific requirement and ritual that should be conducted pertaining to the process of *ijāzābi*-giving. Usually, *tuan guru* shake the disciples' hand while giving specific *amalan* (specified instruction to do) and *wirid* (reading quotes while from the specified the Quran). Different purposes could have different rituals, as suggested in what follows: "It would be difficult to conduct the process of *ijāzāb*-giving through social media or YouTube channel, and therefore not all religious activities can be conducted through online application."<sup>42</sup>

In addition, all interviewee favor conventional *da'wah* over online because of social reasons in the sense that they can keep in touch with neighbors, family, and other Muslim colleagues directly, as well as *tuan guru*.

Conventional religious gathering (*pengajian*) benefits me not only increase my religious knowledge, but also give me the chance to keep in touch with neighbors, family, and society. Even I can ask and discuss religious related-issues directly that is difficult to find on YouTube channel.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Fading of Sacred Realms in Virtual *Da'wah***

The proliferation of online religious proselytizing today has become a blessing and a great source of religious reference to many believers. These issues can be described by examining many researches from academics that have revealed the presence of various religious institutions' sites and personal accounts of religious leaders on social media that have transmitted essential information about Islamic teachings and tradition.<sup>44</sup> To some extent the use of the Internet

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Lalu Mahdan Badiaktar, July 1, 2020

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Abdul Aziz Fahmi, June 29, 2020

<sup>44</sup> Research conducted by the Center for the Study of Religion and Culture (CSRC) at Syarif Hidayatullah Islamic State University (UIN) Jakarta in 2018 revealed that there is a significant change of the way young Muslims deepen their knowledge of Islamic teachings. Surveyed Muslims aged between 17 and 24 in 18 regencies and cities across Indonesia tend to learn Islam through social media-based sermons rather than attending religious gathering (*pengajian*) in the mosque as well as through formal educations in family or organisation. Ivany Atina Arbi, "Mosques losing sway over youth because of online sermons, study shows," *The Jakarta Post* (February 10, 2019). See also M. Hatta, "Media Sosial sebagai Sumber keberagaman Alternatif Remaja dalam Fenomena Cyberreligion," *Jurnal Kajian Dakwah dan Kemasyarakatan* 22, 1 (2018),

aimed to spread certain Islamic streams' schools of thought and interest.<sup>45</sup> It is worth noting that many religious institutions also have webcasted religious sermons, ritual activities, and sacred placed in live-streaming.<sup>46</sup>

Correspondingly, academics asserted that new media have the unintended effect of warning charismatic authority that routinized through traditional forms of authority<sup>47</sup> because new media are democratic in terms of accessibility and availability for religious debate that is likely to radicalize a traditional culture of disputatious learning and argumentation. Accordingly, "the authority and legitimacy of information (in new media) cannot be subsumed under traditional or charismatic authority."<sup>48</sup>

However, this study reports different finding regarding the existence of charismatic authority in the midst of the proliferation of *cyber da'wah* in the sense that Sasak Muslims in Lombok keep believing in *tuan guru's karamah* and consequently have ability to transmit *barakah*.

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1-30. In regard with a description of social media used by religious leaders in Indonesia for *da'wah* purposes. See Dindin Solahudin and Moch Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority," *Religions* (2019), 1-12.

<sup>45</sup> Asep's study found that Salafist stream has used websites to promote the ideology of the *Salafi* movement, to attack those who consider against their school of teachings, to spread their viewpoints of contemporary issues, and to build networks both at the local and global level as a strategy to maintain the solidarity amongst followers. See Asep Muhammad Iqbal, "Agama dan Adopsi Media Baru: Penggunaan Internet oleh Gerakan Salafisme di Indonesia," *Jurnal Komunikasi Indonesia* 2, 2 (2013), 81-85. New media such as websites, facebook pages, blogspots, and twitter also become medium of voices for Shiite community in Indonesia to express their presence, movement, and thoughts as well as for the Sunnis and the Wahabi supporters. Rachmah Ida, "Cyberculture and Sectarianism in Indonesia: The Rise of Shia Media and Anti-Shia Online Movements," *Jurnal Komunikasi Islam* 6, 2 (2017), 1-19. See also Moch. Hidayatullah, "The Sectarian Ideology of the Islamic Online Media in Indonesia." *Insaniyat Journal of Islam and Humanities* 1, 2 (2017), 141-151.

<sup>46</sup> Oren Golan and Michele Martini, "Religious live-streaming: constructing the authentic in real time," *Information, Communication & Society* 22, 3 (2019), 437-454. Also see Brooke Foucault and Jay Melican, "The Digital and the Divine: Taking a Ritual View of Communication and ICT Interaction," N. Aykin (ed.), *Usability and Internationalization* (HCII, 2007), 74-82.

<sup>47</sup> Turner, *Religious Authority and the New Media*, 120.

<sup>48</sup> Weber's conception of charisma is based on the personal appeal of an exceptional figure such as innate supranatural quality but is transformed through disciples' participation. Turner, *Religious Authority and the New Media*, 120.

Although religious information and sermons as well as ritual activities have mushroomed on the Internet, they do not have corroding impact to the charismatic authority of *tuan guru* as the religious experience and rituals webcasted on YouTube channel and other cybernetic spaces cannot adequately transmit the aura of holiness.

This finding can be examined through a discussion of Walter Benjamin's theory of aura grounded from his study of photography. Benjamin asserts that reproduced artworks, including live-streamed video, diminish and weaken an aura of the sacred: "Photography is reproductive by definition, and this interposes distance (an experiential discrepancy) between the authentic, inspiring original and its limitation, which diminishes its meaning."<sup>49</sup>

Benjamin's assertion of a diminished meaning in replicated art is also evident in the finding of this study. The effort of many religious institutions and stakeholders those help religious leaders to reproduce religious rituals and preachings through live-streamed video on YouTube, website, web-television, and other cybernetic spaces is not meaningful to distant and widely dispersed participants, namely Sasak Muslim community. Consequently, they are in favor of lived *da'wah* practice (offline *da'wah*), although some utilizes a hybrid space, that is both offline and online *da'wah*.

It is true that the emergence of cyber *da'wah* enables the rise of new religious authority promoted by lay preachers what Hoesterey calls "innovative claims of religious authority"<sup>50</sup> and by new preachers who lies their appeal in traditionalist scholars and Arab saints performance to be looked charismatic. However, these new types actually differ and cannot break the mold of charismatic authority which its source in the innate and exceptional qualities of an individual's personality.<sup>51</sup> With regard to those who are convinced with exceptional qualities of individual-based conception of charismatic authority, they do not lay the basis of religious authority merely on oratorical competence and appearance appeal, but also on devotional quality, including *karamah*. In this sense, reproducing a miraculous power and auratic religious experience through cybernetic space would be very complicated as

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<sup>49</sup> Golan and Martini. *Religious live-streaming*, 437–454

<sup>50</sup> J.B. "Prophetic Hoesterey, Cosmopolitanism: Islam, Pop Psychology, and Civic Virtue in Indonesia," *City and Society* 24, 1 (2012), 38–61.

<sup>51</sup> Syamsul Rijal, "Performing Arab Saints and Marketing the Prophet: Habaib and Islamic Markets in Contemporary Indonesia," *Archipel* (2020), 189–213.

there are many dimensions of religious experiences and concepts that are interdependent and inseparable.

The tradition of *kiai* visitation (*sowan*) herein could become a good example. *Sowan* is *muwajjaha* (face-to-face meeting) between *kiai* or *tuan guru* and disciples in physical presence that usually intended to obtain *barakah*, and therefore well known as *tabarrukan*.<sup>52</sup> In this regard, the *muwajjaha* must take place physically, and cannot be done online because the physical presence (*muwajjaha*) in the *sowan* tradition indicates one's love expression and total obedience to *kiai* as heirs of prophets (*waratha al-anbiyā*), even it signifies one's piety. Alongside *sowan* in the sense *muwajjaha* as face to face meeting is a central act of piety, it also signifies an essential relationship between the culted figure and followers, in its capacity to inspire awe and to feel an auratic existence of the sacred. Accordingly, it would be hard to accommodate these interdependence concepts embedded within *sowan* tradition into reproduced religious digital artworks (live-streamed video and web-television program) that enable to signify the authentic meaning of *sowan*, that is, total obedience and piety, as well as to awaken auratic religious experience of *tabarrukan*. It is arguably, that virtual religious objects which is comparable with photography diminish the aura of holiness and blurs the authentic meaning of religious rituals.

Another example is the ritual of giving *ijāzah* that means the transmission of knowledge from *kiai* to disciples as the indicative of permission, authorisation, and authentication. Basically, it is an extension of the tradition of *isnad* (a continuous historical transmission) for hadith. Subsequently this *ijāzah* tradition has developed not only for hadith, but also for any kind of Islamic knowledge transmissions such as history, law, theology, and mysticism,<sup>53</sup> even for the transmission of ritual practices.<sup>54</sup> Similar with the tradition of *sowan*, the ritual of giving *ijāzah* also has

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<sup>52</sup> Arif Jamhari, "The Majelis Dhikr of Indonesia: Exposition of Some Aspects of Ritual Practices," *Journal of Indonesia Islam* 3, 1 (2009), 144. See also "Sowan dan Mencium Tangan Kiai," <https://islam.nu.or.id/post/read/39396/sowan-dan-mencium-tangan-kyai>.

<sup>53</sup> William A. Graham, "Traditionalism in Islam: An Essay in Interpretation," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23, 3 (1993), 511.

<sup>54</sup> Mukhammad Zamzami, "Konstruksi Sosial-Teologis Ritual Ijazah Asma' Artho (Uang Azimat) di Pondok Pesantren Fathul Ulum Kwagean Pare Kediri," *Islamica Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 12, 2 (2018), 306-332.

interrelation between one concept and others with regard to meaning-making and auratic experience. For those who create video of religious preaching or ritual activities wired on website, youtube, and web-TV w instance, they have to make sure that auratic experience embedded within *ijāzah*, physically personal meeting, *wirid*, and *riyāḍah* practice can be adequately reproduced into virtual reality and new media forms.

However, the participants of this study admitted that they accessed famous religious proselytisers (*da'i*) on YouTube is only intended to deepen the Islamic knowledge through provided video of speeches, but not to engage in online ritual, prayer, worship, meditation, what Helland called online religion.<sup>55</sup> The authenticity of religious practices has become a major reason for them not to embrace such online religion activities. This notion is relevant with Helland's idea of online religion that reveals "ritual activities and charismatic authority do not always transfer well into the Internet medium."<sup>56</sup> In other words, it is arguably, that the ability virtual reality of *da'wah* provided on new media forms up to present seems has remained disable to approximate the auratic experience, the sacred reality, and charismatic authority, including *karamah* of *tuan guru*.

## Conclusion

In the midst of the emerging trend of cyber-based-*da'wah* that shows that most religious institutions and preachers use social media and other cybernetic spaces in religious propagation, this study has uncovered that not all Islamic rituals and *da'wah* activities can be transformed into the digital realm, in particular the Islamic tradition that engage people's belief in supernatural quality, charismatic authority, and *karamah*-related issues. *Da'wah* complexity of concepts and meaning embedded within a religious ritual has become main barrier in transforming lived-ritual practices into internet medium.

Indeed, the genuine meaning of '*tabarrukan*' constructed from the interconnected-concepts (*mumajjaba*, prayer, total obedience, and piety in the tradition of *sovan*), for instance, would be hard to find in the reproduced digital creative artworks. Likewise, the tradition of *sovan*, in the case of *ijāzah*-giving ritual, the problem of the disappearance of

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<sup>55</sup> Christopher Helland, *Virtual Religion: A Case Study of Virtual Tibet* (Oxford: Handbook online, 2015).

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Helland, "Ritual," Heidi Campbell (ed.), *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 25–40.

sacredness aura has become a major reason of the Sasak Muslims' denial to bring this religious ritual online. They will not feel an auratic experience when the ritual takes place online as normally they can have through being physically present. It is worth noting that religious rituals which involve disciples' belief in *karamah* and charismatic authority of established Muslim scholars offer a mode of *da'wah* that enables believers to obtain spiritual experiences which are absent in virtual *da'wah*. []

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