

## The *Wali-Songo* and (Western) Historiography: A Critical Review of a Methodological Achievement

Jazilus Sakhok\* & Asep Nahrul Musadad\*\*

### Abstract

Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Western academics, particularly Dutch philologists, have been leading the way in modern research on Javanese history and literature. This scholarship has significantly influenced the narrative of Indonesian history in various aspects. However, despite its noteworthy legacy, there have been some challenges to the emic and native perspectives. This study aims to address this issue by examining the *wali-songo* (the Javanese nine saints) narrative in Western historiography. The study will critically review the contribution of Western scholars in explaining the narrative of *wali-songo*, primarily in terms of methodology. It will also highlight the legacy and impact of this scholarship on the intellectual history of Indonesia, specifically in the context of the *wali-songo* narrative. Ultimately, this paper seeks to bring about a nuanced understanding of the “historiography of *wali-songo*” in light of existing scholarship on this topic.

**Keywords:** *Wali-Songo*, Javanese Nine Saints, Dutch Philological Studies, historiography

### Introduction

There are reasons to believe regarding some unresolved issues on the historiography of Malay-Indonesian archipelago in general, and the Javanese-Islamic historical account in particular. This keeps the topic open for further inquiry, as there are gaps in – borrowing Aziz Al-Azmeh’s term – ‘the constitution of historical categories’ and ‘objects of historical inquiry’.<sup>1</sup> Nancy K. Florida<sup>2</sup> has reconstructed historical categories in the Javanese context, distinguishing it from Western conception, which was also previously warned by A.H. Johns.<sup>3</sup> The historical reliability of Javanese sources has also generated considerable discussion, especially since C.C. Berg expressed skepticism.<sup>4</sup>

This paper aims to address these issues by emphasizing the need to take into consideration three types of historical facts: artifact, sociifact, and mentifact,<sup>5</sup> as identified by Sartono Kartodirdjo. Through this framework, the gaps in material and methodological issues can be identified while constructing a historical account within the Malay-Indonesian context. The current hegemony of “artifact-based historiography” must be recognized, and the fundamental presumptions about what history and historiography are must be reconsidered.

The historiography of the Malay-Indonesian world has been influenced by Euro-centric historiography. This methodological framework gives a lot of importance to artifact/written/documentary-based historiography. As a result, certain narratives that are embedded in the *mentifact* and *sociifact* of a community are often ignored when there is no historical evidence in the form of artifacts or documents. One such example is the narrative of the Javanese nine saints, or *wali-songo*. The historical agency of these religious propagators has been overlooked by the current (Western) historiographical tradition, which often subordinates their narratives beneath political history. Additionally, many accounts that go beyond the so-called “documentary evidence” have been historically de-legitimized.

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\* Jazilus Sakhok, Lecturer, Fakultas Dirasah Islamiyah, Universitas Nahdhatul Ulama (UNU) Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Email: j.sakhok@gmail.com.

\*\* Asep Nahrul Musadad (corresponding author), Lecturer, Fakultas Ushuluddin dan Pemikiran Islam, Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Email: asepnahrul92@gmail.com.

<sup>1</sup> Aziz Al-Azmeh (2007), *The Times of History: Universal Topics in Islamic Historiography*, Budapest: CEU Press, p. xv.

<sup>2</sup> Nancy K. Florida (1995), *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future: History as Prophecy in Colonial Java*, Durham & London: Duke University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony H. Johns (1964), “The Role of Structural Organisation and Myth in Javanese Historiography,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1.

<sup>4</sup> See M. C. Ricklefs (1987), “Indonesian History and Literature,” in Ibrahim Alfian et al. (eds.), *Dari Babad dan Hikayat sampai Sejarah Kritis: Kumpulan Karangan Dipersempatkan Kepada Prof. Sartono Kartodirdjo*, Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, pp. 203-204.

<sup>5</sup> See Sartono Kartodirdjo (1992), *Pendekatan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial dalam Metodologi Sejarah*, Jakarta: Gramedia, p. 154; Sartono Kartodirdjo (2013), “Sejarah Intelektual,” in Leo Agung S. (ed.), *Sejarah Intelektual*, Yogyakarta: Ombak, pp. 208-214.

The writings of Theodore G. Th. Pigeaud and H. J. de Graaf,<sup>6</sup> show that the story of Sunan Kalijaga is intertwined with the political history of Java, something that was also previously done by Thomas S. Raffles.<sup>7</sup> However, the narrative of the *wali-songo*, the spreaders of Islam in coastal Java centered on Demak, is considered an unreliable tradition by some, including M. C. Ricklefs, who states that there is no documentary evidence to support it. Therefore, these legends can't provide much information about the actual events surrounding the arrival of Islam.<sup>8</sup> This highlights the importance of investigating the two main issues under scrutiny: *wali-songo* narratives and Western historiography.

### Previous Studies and Methodological Notes

It can be safely said that during the colonial period, Dutch orientalists were among the first researchers to study the saints of the archipelago in a modern way. Douwe Adolf Rinke (1878-1954 AD) wrote a series of six articles on Javanese saints in the Dutch Journal *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal* between 1910 and 1913. These articles were among the earliest ones on the subject. They provided a brief but detailed overview of several saints, including Shaikh Abdulmuhyi, Seh Siti Jënar, Sunan Gësëng, Ki Pandan Arang Tëmbayat, and the grave at Pamlaten.<sup>9</sup> Narratives on the history of Javanese saints, including the members of *wali-songo*, are also mentioned in many works by Dutch orientalists such as Theodore G. Th. Pigeaud and H.J. de Graaf,<sup>10</sup> which is framed in Javanese political history. Another important work is that of B.J.O. Schrieke's<sup>11</sup> and G.W.J. Drewes<sup>12</sup> who examine the manuscript attributed to Sunan Bonang. These works use a positivist-philological framework based on the written sources and maintain the historic-hagiological perspective, along with an emphasis on the political and literary history.

A clearer explanation of the process of Islamization of coastal Java in the context of increasing trade that brought a new society is provided by Denis Lombard through the *wali-songo* narrative.<sup>13</sup> Although he didn't object to discussing the life stories of certain members of *wali-songo* using traditional sources, he did require that it be in alignment with significant historical events. Nevertheless, current studies on the *wali-songo* fare limited in number. The most recent progress has been made through a philological examination of Javanese literature, which focuses on the Islamic genealogy rather than the Indic legacy. Verena Meyer's recent research on *Seh Mlaya* (also known as Sunan Kalijaga) serves as a notable example of this advancement.<sup>14</sup>

To the best of our knowledge, studies focused on examining the Western historiographical scholarship on *wali-songo* remain absent. However, we have to mention several Indonesian scholars whose works try very hard to explain the historical existence of *wali-songo* such as Solichin Salam,<sup>15</sup> Widji Saksono,<sup>16</sup> and the late Agus Sunyoto.<sup>17</sup> The last author provided insights on the historical marginalization of *wali-songo*. This was caused by the Dutch influence on the writing of Indonesian history and puritan Muslims who consider pilgrimage to the tombs of saints as heresy.

This article is the outcome of library research on Western scholarship related to the *wali-songo*. We focus on the methodological aspects of some representative studies and address some significant methodological issues. Additionally, we briefly touch upon the impact of Western scholarship on the *wali-songo* in Indonesian historiography. The article concludes with theoretical reflections on the possible contributions of this research for further inquiry into the *wali-songo* and its historiography. We aim to answer some critical questions such as how Western scholarship portrays the *wali-songo*, what

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<sup>6</sup> Theodore G. Th. Pigeaud and H.J. de Graaf (1976), *Islamic States in Java 1500-1700*, Leiden: Springer, pp. 6, 10, 14, 22 & 26.

<sup>7</sup> Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles (1830), *The History of Java Vol. 2, Second Edition*, London: John Murray, 1830, pp. 122-146.

<sup>8</sup> M. C. Ricklefs (1981), *A History of Modern Indonesia c. 300 to the Present*, London: Macmillan, pp. 5-10.

<sup>9</sup> D. A. Rinke (1996), *Nine Saints of Java*, H. M. Froger (trans.), Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Pigeaud and Graaf (1978), *Islamic States in Java 1500-1700*; Theodore G. Th. Pigeaud (1967), *Literature of Java, Vol.1: Synopsis of Javanese Literature 900-1900 A.D.*, Berlin: Springer Science and Bussines Media.

<sup>11</sup> B. J. O. Schrieke (1916), *Het Boek Van Bonang*, Utrecht: P. Den Boer.

<sup>12</sup> G. W. J. Drewes (1969), *The Admonitions of Seh Bari*, Berlin: Springer Science and Bussines Media.

<sup>13</sup> Denys Lombard (2005), *Nusa Jawa: Silang Budaya, II: Jaringan Asia*, Winarsih Partaningrat et al. (trans.), Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, pp. 42-44.

<sup>14</sup> Verena Meyer (2021), "A Wali's Quest for Guidance: The Islamic Genealogies of *Seh Mlaya*," *Wacana*, Vol. 22, No. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Solichin Salam (1960), *Sekitar Wali Sanga*, Kudus: Menara Kudus.

<sup>16</sup> Widji Saksono (1995), *Mengislamkan tanah Jawa: telaah atas metode dakwah Walisongo*, Bandung: Mizan.

<sup>17</sup> Agus Sunyoto (2011), *Wali Songo: Rekonstruksi Sejarah Yang Disingkirkan*, Jakarta: Trans Pustaka; Agus Sunyoto (2016), *Atlas Wali Songo*, Jakarta: Kerjasama Pustaka Iman, Trans Pustaka, dan LTN PBNU.

*The Wali-Songo and (Western) Historiography: A Critical Review of a Methodological Achievement* impact it has on the narrative of Indonesian history, and whether there is a “historiography of wali-songo”?

### **Wali-songo and the Javanese Textual Archives**

The heritage of *wali-songo* can be divided into two categories: “living” historical traces in the current pilgrimage tradition, and “silent” historical evidence found in various textual archives. Scholars usually rely on the latter to uncover historical narratives while the former is mainly studied through anthropological and ethnological investigations. The stories of *wali-songo* have been recorded in numerous works by Javanese writers from the past to the present day.<sup>18</sup> The tombs of saints in Java hold a significant historical and cultural value to the Javanese people, in particular and the Malay context in general.<sup>19</sup> Even today, these sacred sites are carefully maintained as a symbol of the country’s rich heritage. Not only do they serve as physical reminders of the past, but they also act as pilgrimage destinations that invite people from all corners of the world to come and pay their respects. The Javanese hold these tombs in high regard and consider them to be an integral part of their cultural identity. As such, these sites continue to play a vital role in shaping the country’s social fabric and cultural landscape.

The tale of the *wali-songo* is a noteworthy part of Javanese literature and has been documented in various forms, including *hikayat*, *babad*, *serat*, and *suluk*. It is often considered a “silent artifact” and can be found in numerous works. One of the earliest manuscripts related to the *wali-songo* is the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Cod. Or. 1928, which is held at the Leiden University Library. The copyist ascribed it to Pangeran Bonang, and Schrieke asserts that the post-script is authentic. After conducting cross-reference analysis, Schrieke separated the historical accounts from the legends and concluded that Prince Bonang was a historical figure, despite being mostly shrouded in legends.<sup>20</sup> If Schrieke is optimistic about the attribution, then Drewes is skeptical and argues that legends may have readily developed in the roughly 75 years that would have passed since Sunan Bonan’s death, despite the fact that there are solid reasons to believe that the text it includes is older. Hence, “it is by no means impossible that as early as the end of the sixteenth century the work was wrongly ascribed to the saint of Bonang,”<sup>21</sup> although he does not have so much to say regarding the historical reliability of Sunan Bonang himself.

From the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, stories about *wali-songo* have been found in Javanese textual archives.<sup>22</sup> This period is known as the renaissance of Javanese culture, which was encouraged by the Dutch in order to create what Nancy K. Florida called ‘non-Islamic essential Javanesses’. These stories refer to the old Hindu-Buddhist literary tradition.<sup>23</sup> In the past, studies on the Hindu-Buddhist background of this literature were dominant. However, since Florida’s studies, scholars have focused on finding the Islamic genealogy of these literatures.<sup>24</sup>

The works of *pujongga* are mainly written in poetic form, and they are an essential part of the Javanese oral tradition. *Pujongga* are not simply skilled poets, but they have sacred and esoteric qualifications and serve as advisors to the king. A *pujongga* possesses a sharp inner feeling (*waskita*) that is linked to a concept of revelation (*wahyu kapujanggan*). Nancy K. Florida has explained that *pujongga* are

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<sup>18</sup> For studies of the *wali-songo* in popular literature in Indonesia see Ermita Soenarto (2005), “From Saints to Superheroes: The Wali Songo Myth in Contemporary Indonesia’s Popular Genres Author,” *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 78, No. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Some recent studies show a clear connection between the wali-songo and the Malay world. See, for instance, Khairul Azhar Meerangani (2019), “Peranan Ulama dalam Penyebaran Ajaran Islam di Pulau Besar, Melaka,” *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, Vol. 14, No. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Schrieke (1916), *Het Boek van Bonang*, pp. 45-55.

<sup>21</sup> Drewes (1969), *The Admonitions of Seh Bari*, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Among the representative literature that records the story of *wali-songo*, inscribed during 18<sup>th</sup> and mainly 19<sup>th</sup> century are; *Babad Tanah Jawi*, *Sejarah Banten*, *Serat Wali Sana*, *Suluk Musawaratan Para Wali*, *Cathetan tumraping Wali Sanga*, *Sajarah Para Wali*, and many others. There are also particular literatures on a saint such as *Suluk Ling Lung*, *Serat Lokajaya*, *Suluk Syeh Melaya*, *Primbon Pegon/Sajarah ing Kadilangu*, *Naskah Raden Sahid*, *Suluk Kalipa Bonang*, and the likes. See Florida (2012), *Javanese Literature in Surakarta*, Vol. 3, pp. 174 & 144; Florida (2012), *Javanese Literature in Surakarta*, Vol. 1, pp. 71, 273 & 282; Willem Remmelink (ed.) (2022), *Babad Tanah Jawi, The Chronicle of Java: the revised prose version of C.F. Winter Sr. (KITLV Or 8)*, Leiden: Leiden University Press; Marsono (1996), “Lokajaya: Suntingan Teks, Terjemahan, Struktur Teks, dan Analisis Intertekstual dan Semiotik,” Disertasi, Universitas Gadjah Mada Yogyakarta; Ricklefs (1981), *A History*, pp. 9-10; Nur Fauzan Ahmad and Ilham Ibnul Hakim (2023), *Alih Aksara Sajarah Para Wali*, Jakarta: Perpustakaan Press; R. Adi Deswijaya (2023), *Naskah Raden Sahid*, Jakarta: Perpustakaan Press.

<sup>23</sup> Nancy K. Florida (1997), “Writing Tradition in Colonial Java: The Question of Islam,” in S. C. Humphreys (ed.), *Cultures of Scholarship*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p. 187.

<sup>24</sup> Andrea Acri and Verena Meyer (2019), “Indic-Islamic encounters in Javanese and Malay mystical literatures, *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Vol. 47, p. 139; Meyer, (2021), “A Wali’s Quest for Guidance.”

different from “court-poets” and are actually “masters of language with a prophetic pen.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, the concept of *pujongga* is not only related to literature in the modern sense, but it is also embedded with Javanese esoteric and occult knowledge. It is the esoteric writing tradition across time in the Javanese court.

It is important to note that despite the Dutch projection of a literary renaissance based on Hindu-Buddhist literature, most of the prominent writers in Surakarta were actually *santri* who studied at *pesantran*. Therefore, works with Islamic themes are more prominent than those translated from Hindu-Buddhist literature, which have been “islamized” by these authors who came from *santri* family.<sup>26</sup> The narrative on *wali-songo* is recorded in Javanese textual archives within this historical context.

It is necessary to understand the significant gap between “emic” language and “etic” concepts used in scholarly investigations of this heritage. When *babad* was read by 19<sup>th</sup> century Dutch orientalist, they categorized the works as “Javanese literature and art” and found little, if anything, of historical value due to reliability problems with the source of history. Consequently, the issues of history and literature have become a methodological controversy in this regard.

### **Between History and Literature: The Long Contestation**

The early Dutch philologists often encounter difficulties in finding historical material as many of the narratives are considered to be mythical or legendary in nature. This makes it challenging for them to identify objective representations of the past. As a result, the historical value of the literature under consideration remains ambiguous, and many manuscripts that have now become silent evidence artifacts are not given the historical recognition they deserve.

These manuscripts are often viewed through an imaginative lens, which makes it difficult to trace the objective representation of the past. The closure of these narratives also adds to the complexity of finding historical material. The historical value of the literature is often silenced, and many investigations on this heritage conclude that the narratives are mythological or legendary in nature.

In such cases, the historical value of the literature is often overlooked, and countless manuscripts are not given the recognition they deserve. It is essential to trace the objective representation of the past to understand the historical significance of these manuscripts. Only then can they be considered as valuable artifacts that offer insight into the past.

When Western scholars analyze Indonesia’s cultural heritage, they often fall into two groups. The first group views it as a work of art or literature (*karya sastra*), while the second group approaches it through a positivist-historical lens. One historian who is aware of the debate surrounding the relationship between Indonesian history and literature is M.C. Ricklefs. In his essay titled “Indonesian History and Literature,” he discusses this controversy in detail:

In Western academic circle until the last few decades, the study of Asian societies tended to preserve or mirror a simple distinction between history and literature with an added layer of linguistic complexity. If History was about facts, its study must rest on sources which were factual, and these were overwhelmingly thought to be sources of European (regarded as modern and rational) origin. Asians, on the other hand, were implicitly seen as other – worldly people whose writings were more often of the nature of myth or legend. So, Asian texts fell into the realm of literature, for they were creative and imaginative in character.<sup>27</sup>

Ricklef, as well as A. Teuw,<sup>28</sup> are fully aware of the distinction between literature and history as an issue that arises when investigating the Javanese written heritage. Both try to mediate as literature and history can go hand in hand. For Teuw, the two do not need to be contradictory, because each talks about the same thing with different dimensions. Ricklefs who explicitly declares himself a historian,

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<sup>25</sup> Nancy K. Florida (1987), “Reading the Unread in Traditional Javanese Literature,” *Indonesia*, No. 44, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Florida (1997), “Writing Tradition,” pp. 195-204.

<sup>27</sup> M. C. Ricklefs (1987), “Indonesian History and Literature,” in Ibrahim Alfian et al. (eds.), *Dari Babad dan Hikayat sampai Sejarah Kritis: Kumpulan Karangan Dipersempahkan Kepada Prof. Sartono Kartodirdjo*, Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, p. 199.

<sup>28</sup> A. Teuw (1987), “Tentang Priyayi, Sastra, dan Sejarah,” in Ibrahim Alfian et al. (eds.), *Dari Babad dan Hikayat sampai Sejarah Kritis: Kumpulan Karangan Dipersempahkan Kepada Prof. Sartono Kartodirdjo*. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, pp. 11-33.

asserts that the controversy that arises from that distinction is initiated by some misunderstandings in looking at the task from a Western historical perspective. He clarified that the historian's task is not what one might imagine in seeking an objective narrative of the past, but emphasized the aspect of subjectivity in historiography.<sup>29</sup>

Ricklefs said that both European historical sources such as VOC records and indigenous sources such as *babad*, *serat*, and others, must be treated with the same way as historical sources analyzed through rigorous historical methodology. For him, a trained historian would be able to find historical materials from literary works, because a work in the context of Javanese sources contains literary narrative and historical account.<sup>30</sup> However, both principally recognize the existence of European distinction of literary and history and remain faithful to the Western conceptual framework and its implications.

Another important issue is of course the gap in historical records.<sup>31</sup> It seems to be the reason for Ricklefs, in his *Mystic Synthesis*, to not mention the *wali-songo*, at all, in the historical narrative of Islamization in the 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. He seems to consistently consider the *wali-songo* as legendary figures in the conversion of Java to Islam that “survive only in manuscripts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.”<sup>32</sup> For him, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century manuscripts edited by Schrieke as *Het Boek van Bonang* and revised by Drewes as *Pitatur Seh Bari* do not sufficiently prove the existence of these figures before the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

On the other hand, the innovative orientations in the history of Java and the archipelago are also carried out by historians of the *Annales* school, as demonstrated by Denys Lombard and Anthony Reid. It is undeniable that Lombard's study of Javanese history was groundbreaking.<sup>33</sup> The three-volume Lombard's *Le Carrefour Javanais* published in 1990 was the first encyclopedic work to explain the history of Java in an Asian and world context.<sup>34</sup> Lombard's work has introduced a model in studying the Javanese through the perspective of social and mental history by conducting an in-depth study on something he called ‘nebula of mentality’.<sup>35</sup> Anthony Reid demonstrated a similar approach by seeking for the “total history” of Southeast Asia.<sup>36</sup>

This kind of study is revolutionary in several ways. One of the most important is that Lombard and Reid's studies have shifted from political history. On the other hand, their studies have also shown what might be called the “agency” of Java, the archipelago, and Southeast Asia, in creating their historical narrative without having to be limited to the colonial lens as the “center” of production of historical explanation. Lombard's study, for example, successfully raised the historical agency of local trade in the coastal areas of the archipelago, as not only a passive object under an aggressive colonial narrative, but also had its historical independence.<sup>37</sup> As explained before, he seems to display a historical agency of the *wali-songo* narrative in the mental space of Islamization in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries even though he was aware of the historical ambiguity that exists in Javanese sources.<sup>38</sup>

Another kind of study tends to sketch a reconstruction related to the Javanese paradigm which is possible to become a framework similar to so-called “history” in the European mindset. It was conducted by several historians who tried to dismantle the power of colonial knowledge in Javanese historiography and conduct more in-depth studies by giving a greater focus to emic perspectives, among which the most representative is Nancy K. Florida. In a book derived from her dissertation on *Babad Joko Tingkir*, she formulated several findings related to the Javanese perspective on writing history.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Ricklefs (1987), “Indonesian History and Literature,” pp. 205-208.

<sup>30</sup> Ricklefs (1987), “Indonesian History and Literature,” p. 204.

<sup>31</sup> M. C. Ricklefs (2006), *Mystic Synthesis: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century*, EastBridge, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Ricklefs (2006), *Mystic Synthesis*, p. 34; Ricklefs (1981), *A History of Modern Indonesia*, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> The influence of this book is said to be equal to that of Raffles' *History of Java*, Pigaeud's *Java in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century*, and Geertz's *The Religion of Java*. See Aswiwarman Adam (2007), *Pelurusan Sejarah Indonesia*, Yogyakarta: Penerbit Ombak, p. 33.

<sup>34</sup> Lombard's three volumes were translated into Indonesian since 1996. See Denys Lombard (2005), *Nusa Jawa: Silang Budaya, I: Batas-Batas Pembaratan*, Winarsih Partaningrat et al. (trans.), Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama; Denys Lombard (2005), *Nusa Jawa: Silang Budaya, II: Jaringan Asia*, Winarsih Partaningrat et al. (trans.), Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama; Denys Lombard (2005), *Nusa Jawa: Silang Budaya, III: Warisan Kerajaan Konsentris*, Winarsih Partaningrat et al. (trans.), Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama.

<sup>35</sup> Lombard (2005), *Nusa Jawa: Silang Budaya, I*, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Anthony Reid (2014), *Asia Tenggara dalam Kurun Niaga 1450-1680, Jilid I: Tanah di Bawah Angin*, Mochtar Pabotinggi (trans.), Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor; Anthony Reid (2011), *Asia Tenggara dalam Kurun Niaga 1450-1680, Jilid II: Jaringan Perdagangan Global Asia Tenggara*, R. Z. Leirissa (trans.), Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor.

<sup>37</sup> Lombard (2005), *Nusa Jawa: Silang Budaya, I*.

<sup>38</sup> Lombard (2005), *Nusa Jawa: Silang Budaya, II*, p. 55.

<sup>39</sup> Florida (1995), *Writing the Past*.

She is perhaps the earliest scholar to make a notable argument about the fundamental differences between the Western post-enlightenment and Javanese traditions of historical writing. For Florida, the Western idea of history is to seek an objective representation of the past as shaped by its historical context and constructed as something that actually happened.<sup>40</sup> Thus, despite the acknowledgment of subjectivity in recording history, the factual value has after all been one of the main issues in the Western discourse in history as C.C. Berg, cited by Ricklefs, once posed a question: "...what is *Negarakeragama*: reliable historiography or unreliable flattery?"<sup>41</sup>

Concerning the nature of Javanese historical writing, Florida states:

Traditional Javanese historical writing appears to have been a significantly different project with a significantly different relation to the past. Recognizing the presence of living pasts in the historically becoming presents in which they wrote, the writers of traditional histories Java understood the inscription of these texts as historical events, and the texts themselves as potential contexts. Recognizing their own historical agency, these Javanese historians could, then, self-consciously employ traditional conventions of writing to effect a transformation of tradition itself. That is, such traditional Javanese historical writing, because it was self-consciously written in and of history, was capable, at times, of rewriting the conditions of its own production.<sup>42</sup>

Florida's research has successfully revealed the worldview of Javanese poets and rulers in constructing history. His study of the *Babad Jaka Tingkir*, which was written anonymously by an exile during Surakarta's fall to Dutch colonial domination in 1829 AD, provides insight into the writing of history in the context of prophecy. The purpose of the text is to guide readers in planning for the future by arming them with the narratives of the past, amidst the despair of the present. Florida's study is a rigorous philological investigation that connects his findings to the broader picture of historical writing traditions in Java.

This kind of critical assessment, in fact, has been previously recognized as early as the 1960s. The awareness of the importance of taking the emic dimension as a variable into consideration has been casted previously by, for instance, Anthony H. Johns. He is among the early scholars who warned anyone who studies Indonesian cultural history to make sense of the emic terms in the midst of "galaxy of non-indigenous elements," since to "elucidate the valid picture of their role and significance, these elements need to be studied in their own terms, in relation to their environment and at specific synchronic levels."<sup>43</sup> For Johns, old Javanese literature such as *Pararaton* and *Babad Tanah Jawi*, for instance, must be read in their contextual function of kingship. That the ruler is placed as the figure "who link the present with the past and the future and give human life its appropriate place in the cosmic order."<sup>44</sup>

It is imperative to conduct further studies of Javanese literary sources as they contain a plethora of manuscripts that have yet to be examined by scholars. These manuscripts can provide valuable insights into the social, cultural, and political aspects of Javanese history. By exploring these sources, we can gain a better understanding of the Javanese people's way of life, beliefs, and practices.

Another area that requires further exploration is the tradition of historiography in Javanese culture. While existing studies have mainly focused on Javanese sources as historical products, there is a need to delve deeper into the process of how these sources were constructed. By examining the methodology used in Javanese historiography, we can gain a better understanding of how historical events were recorded and interpreted in Javanese consciousness.

In other words, the study of Javanese historical methodology has not received adequate attention and needs to be addressed. It is crucial to understand the methods used to record and interpret historical events in Javanese culture to gain a more comprehensive understanding of its history. Thus, future

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<sup>40</sup> See the first section on her book. Florida (1995), *Writing the Past*, pp. 52-80.

<sup>41</sup> Ricklefs (1987), "Indonesian History and Literature," pp. 203-304.

<sup>42</sup> Nancy K. Florida (1995), *Writing the Past*, p. 52.

<sup>43</sup> Anthony H. Johns (1964), "The Role of Structural Organisation and Myth in Javanese Historiography," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1, p. 91.

<sup>44</sup> Johns (1964), "The Role of Structural Organisation," p. 93.

*The Wali-Songo and (Western) Historiography: A Critical Review of a Methodological Achievement* studies should aim to explore this area in greater depth to provide a more complete picture of Javanese history.

As such, we can summarize at least four important remarks on the Western methodological stance concerning the historical value of Javanese sources. *First*, those who apply general skepticism on the reliability of Javanese sources seeing it as supernatural documents written in the interest of “politico-religious myth” as proposed by old C.C. Berg, although it finds little supports.<sup>45</sup> *Second*, those who disagree with the previous opinion and believe that there are aspects of reliable history that can be distilled from Javanese sources, which is literary in nature. This group, which is majority in number, has different degrees in terms of the extent to which they are skeptical and optimistic in analyzing a Javanese source. Among the proponents of this group are: B.J.O Schrieke, G.W.J. Drewes, A. Teeuw, M.C. Ricklefs, and the likes. *Third*, the proponents of *Annales* school such as Denish Lombard and Anthony Reid who place the ‘nebula of mentality’ excavated from ‘geological layers’ in the first place. *Fourth*, those who place the Javanese historical tradition outside the post-enlightenment European historical paradigm and explore the perspective in writing their own history. Nancy Florida is a leading figure in such studies.

### **The Impact of Dutch Philological Studies in Indonesia: A Post-Independence Case**

Florida’s previous studies has also impressed subsequent scholars about the effect brought by Dutch cultural policy, including the trend of philological studies through the making of Javanology, an institution established to approach the palace and subjugate the Javanese.<sup>46</sup> In this regard, she emphasizes that this policy “would define high Javanese culture” as “standing in opposition to Islam as the more or less exclusive property of a hyper-refined elite, or *priyayi*, class.”<sup>47</sup> The power-relations between Indonesian studies and Dutch colonialism have also been previously exposed since the 1980s by H.L. Wesseling.<sup>48</sup> In his article on the “tropical studies” in the Netherlands, he explains how Indonesian studies has become an integral part of the colonial agenda that finds its roots in “tropical studies” of “colonial studies” that was introduced in universities, especially in Leiden, since 1877 AD. At that time, several disciplines were developed; colonial administration and economics, customary law (*hukum adat*), Islamic studies, Chinese studies, and cultural studies of the peoples of the Indonesian archipelago.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the fact that many of the colonial institutions have undergone major changes in terms of their names and orientations, a few of them have managed to survive till date. It is interesting to note that one of the key issues that Wesseling attempts to address is related to these institutions. While the exact details are not clear, it is possible that Wesseling is trying to shed light on how these institutions have managed to adapt and evolve over time, and whether they continue to serve their original purpose or have taken on a new role in the modern world. He explicitly asks - though does not offer an explicit answer - “was de-colonization a rupture, the beginning of a new era? or was there rather a continuity between the two periods?”<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the impact of this Euro-centric orientation in the historical narrative of Java and Indonesia in general also present in the case of *wali-songo*.

Starting from the 1950s, the voices of those who have been directly impacted have been heard from the pesantren tradition. This tradition, which is a unique Islamic education system in Indonesia, sought to educate students in Islamic values, morality, and spirituality. However, it eventually had to reconcile with the formal education system introduced by the West. In 1372/1952, Bisyrî Mustafa, a Javanese *kiai* who was also a prolific writer from Rembang, Central Java, wrote a treatise entitled *Tarikh al-Auliya’ Tarikh Wali Sanga* (History of the Saints, History of the *wali-songo*) written in Javanese *pegon* script.<sup>51</sup> Bisyrî Mustafa’s treatise, which was written in Arabic, provides an in-depth analysis of the lives and teachings of the Wali Sanga. It also explores the social and historical context in which the

<sup>45</sup> Cited in M. C. Ricklefs (1981), *A History of Modern Indonesia: c. 1300 to the Present*, London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., p. 16.

<sup>46</sup> More information on this institution, see Kenji Tsuchiya (1990), *Javanology and the Age of Ranggawarsita: An Introduction to Nineteenth Century Javanese Culture*, in Takashi Shiraishi (ed.), *Reading Southeast Asia*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, pp. 75-108.

<sup>47</sup> Nancy K. Florida (1997), “Writing Tradition,” p. 193.

<sup>48</sup> H. L. Wesseling (1987), “Knowledge is Power: Some remarks on colonial studies in the Netherlands,” in Ibrahim Alfian et al. (eds.), *Dari Babad dan Hikayat sampai Sejarah Kritis: Kumpulan Karangan Dipersembahkan Kepada Prof. Sartono Kartodirdjo*, Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press.

<sup>49</sup> Wesseling (1987), “Knowledge is Power,” p. 351.

<sup>50</sup> Wesseling (1987), “Knowledge is Power,” p. 352.

<sup>51</sup> Bisyrî Mustafa (1372 AH), *Tarikh al-Auliya’ Tarikh Wali Sanga*, Kudus: Menara Kudus.

Wali Sanga lived and how they were able to spread Islam in Java. Through his treatise, Bisryi Mustafa sought to preserve the *pesantren* tradition and its unique approach to Islamic education while also acknowledging the importance of formal education. In that treatise, Mustafa explains that the main reason that prompted him to write *Tarikh* was the lack of textbooks on history (*buku-buku sejarah*) both in schools (*sekolahan*) and Islamic school (*madrassa*) that contain *wali-songo* narratives.<sup>52</sup>

For Mustafa, who is a *kiai* in a *pesantren*, the absence of the history of the Javanese saints in the textbook of history taught in *madrassa* is a cause for concern. To him, the reason is evident; these saints spread Islam (*pemedar agami Islam*) in Java and throughout Indonesia.<sup>53</sup> It would be a mistake if they were not introduced to the later generation of Muslims in Indonesia. What Bisri Mustafa expresses through his work is a testimony to the - conscious or unconscious - marginalization of the historical figure of *wali-songo* in the state of post-independence modern education. One can frame this effort as the feedback caused by the impact of the certain hegemonical perspective on history that subordinates another mode of thought through which a narrative is included or excluded from the so-called official grand narrative on one issue.

The treatise can also be framed through the context of the curriculum issues in Islamic educational institutions in post-independence Indonesia. In fact, the explanation of *wali-songo* in *Tarikh al-Auliya'* is only mentioned in about half of the book, while in the remainder, the author explains the history of Islam in Indonesia and the history of the independence movement to contemporary history when the book was written. The writer's intention is to include the narrative of the *wali-songo*, who were responsible for spreading Islam, in Indonesia's "national history." This was happening at the same time that formal educational institutions in Indonesia were flourishing, which brought about a different type of historical discourse. Throughout this time, we have observed different historical variations and competition from two distinct traditions.

Another work on *wali-songo* produced in the *pesantren* tradition is *Ahla al-Musamarah fi Hikayat al-Auliya' al-'Asyarah* by Abu al-Fadhil Senori, a Javanese *kyai* from Tuban, East Java.<sup>54</sup> Written in 1961 in Arabic, this book contains stories related to the Javanese saints. Almost half the book also recounts the transition from Majapahit to Demak and the warring conflicts involving the two, where the saints are depicted as an advisory council centered in the Demak Sultanate. The background to the writing of this book, according to the author, is based on the tradition of previous Muslim scholars who used to write the history of their countries and what happened to their inhabitants both in the past and in the present, as a warning to future generations.<sup>55</sup> In contrast to Bisryi Mustafa's *Tarikh*, Senori's *Ahlal Musamarah* shows a more detailed narrative in which the battle between the believers and the infidels is the central theme represented through the power transition from Hindu-Buddhist Majapahit to the Islamic Sultanate of Demak.

In the 1960s, since the flourishing of Islamic higher institution, the history of Islamization in Indonesia has become a trend of discussion among scholars of Islamic universities at the national level, two decades after Haji Agus Salim wrote the treatise on this issue throwing early criticism to the Western narrative on the coming of Islam in Indonesia.<sup>56</sup> It was culminated by the national conference on *sedjarah masuknja Islam ke Indonesia* (history of the advent of Islam in Indonesia) held in Medan, March 17-20, 1963. Muhammad Said, chairman of the seminar, emphasized that the event arose from the fact that foreign sources have long shaped the history of Indonesian culture, including the history of Islamization, which, according to him, "must be renewed with such fresh and national elements from our own research."<sup>57</sup> Roeslan Abdulgani, Minister for Information at that time, even linked the seminar to the continuation of the "revolution of Indonesia" and to break free from a 'Western-centric' to an 'Indonesia-centric' history.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Mustafa (1372 AH), *Tarikh al-Auliya'*, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> Mustafa (1372 AH), *Tarikh al-Auliya'*, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Al-Fadil Abu al-Fadhil al-Senori al-Tubani (n.d.), *Ahlal Musamarah fi Hikayat al-Auliya' al-'Asyarah*, Tuban: Majlis al-Ta'lif wa al-Huffadz. See also Abu al-Fadhil Senori (2020), *Wali Tanah Jawa: Kisah Peralihan Kekuasaan Majapahit ke Demak (Terjemah Ahla Musamarah karya Kiai Abul Fadhil Senori Tuban)*, M. Solahudin (trans.), Kediri: Nous Pustaka Utama.

<sup>55</sup> al-Tubani (n.d.), *Ahlal Musamarah*, p. 2; Senori (2020), *Wali Tanah Jawa*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>56</sup> Hadji A. Salim (1962), *Riwayat Kedatangan Islam di Indonesia*, Djakarta: Tinta Mas. The book was first published in 1941.

<sup>57</sup> See Panitia Seminar Sedjarah Masuknja Islam di Indonesia (1963), "Risalah Seminar Masuknja Islam ke Indonesia," Medan, p. 15.

<sup>58</sup> Panitia Seminar Sedjarah Masuknja Islam di Indonesia (1963), "Risalah Seminar," pp. 40-44.



In this milieu, several writers who were interested in the narrative of *wali-songo* emerged. Among the most representative authors are Solichin Salam<sup>59</sup> and Widji Saksono<sup>60</sup> who conducted studies on the historical narrative of *wali-songo* based on various sources, Javanese literary sources to the Dutch philological studies. James J. Fox, as quoted by Sunarto, mentions Solichin Salam's book as being responsible for the popular formation of *wali-songo* today.<sup>61</sup> With Hoesin Djajadiningrat's review, his book becomes a milestone in the literature on the historical narrative of *wali-songo* even though he admits that it may still contain legendary accounts.

It is worth noting that the *wali-songo* narrative was included in the *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia* (Indonesian National History), which was published in 1975. Sartono Kartodirdjo, one of the authors, was familiar with the annales approach. In the third volume of the book, *wali-songo* is explained as a traditional term used to refer to the propagators of Islam in Java. The sources referenced in this book are *babad* and *hikayat*, which are studies conducted by Dutch philologists. In general, *wali-songo* narratives are presented in the context of explaining the spread of Islam in Java and the surrounding regions. Although there was some hesitation when quoting Javanese sources, some *wali-songo* narratives are explained to support theories of Islamization, such as trade, marriage, and traditional Islamic learning that first occurred on the north coast of Java.<sup>62</sup>

It can be concluded that while Western scholarship, mainly Dutch philological studies, has produced several narratives about the coming of Islam and some controversies over *wali-songo*, including its historical discredit, the post-independence Indonesian scholarship has used previous scholarship as the basis for creating new narratives. In the case of the *wali-songo* narrative, it is included in authoritative history books in Indonesia and depicted in popular literature. This has generated claims of the *wali-songo* narrative being folklore, myth, legend, popular stories, and even semi-historical narratives.

### **Rethinking Hagiography and Transcending Artifact-Based Historiography**

Let us delve into a theoretical discussion regarding the historiographical classification of *wali-songo*. The historical reliability of Javanese sources has been questioned due to the influence of the "positivist-historical perspective." Furthermore, the notion that *wali-songo* is merely a legend and folklore is influenced by a hagiographical perspective. The conflicting views between hagiography and positivist-historiography are evident in Douwe Adolf Rinke's pioneering study on Javanese saints, where he sought a "historical-hagiological" account.<sup>63</sup> In this case, the so-called hagiological aspects surrounding the saint's biography become "ahistorical" and even superstitious in the face of the positivist-historical lens.

The hagiological perspective has become a popular trend in the study of the biographies of saints in European scholarship. It views the medieval accounts of saints' lives as "pious fiction," legends, and folklore, thereby questioning the historical accuracy of these biographies and disregarding the context in which they were written. According to Thomas J. Heffernan, who has studied sacred biography in the European Christian tradition, the study of such literature cannot be judged by a modern perspective that discredits supernatural or magical phenomena. Instead, it should be examined within the context of the time in which it was written, taking into account the relationship between the author and the audience, as well as the didactic purpose of the text.<sup>64</sup>

This account can offer valuable insights into the biographies of Javanese saints. Rather than conducting purely historical or hagiographic studies, one can also use historical-anthropological analysis to better understand the cultural and social context of these Javanese texts. These saints were real historical figures who played important roles in their communities during their time. As such, they were revered and their stories were passed down through generations. The people who wrote their biographies were members of their communities, and their accounts reflect the collective memory and understanding of

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<sup>59</sup> Solichin Salam (1960), *Sekitar Wali Sanga*, Kudus: Menara Kudus.

<sup>60</sup> Widji Saksono (1995), *Mengislamkan Tanah Jawa: Telaah Atas Metode Dakwah Walisongo*, Bandung: Mizan. The book was originated from his under-graduated thesis (*skripsi*) in IAIN Sunan Kalijaga written in 1960.

<sup>61</sup> Soenarto (2005), "From Saints to Superheroes," p. 38.

<sup>62</sup> Sartono Kartodirdjo et al. (1975), *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia III*, Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, pp. 117-126.

<sup>63</sup> Rinke (1996), *Nine Saints of Java*, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Heffernan (1988), *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographies in the Middle Ages*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 18-20.

these saints. The biographies serve as didactic role-models to guide the community's development in the future, rather than simply being purely fictional accounts.

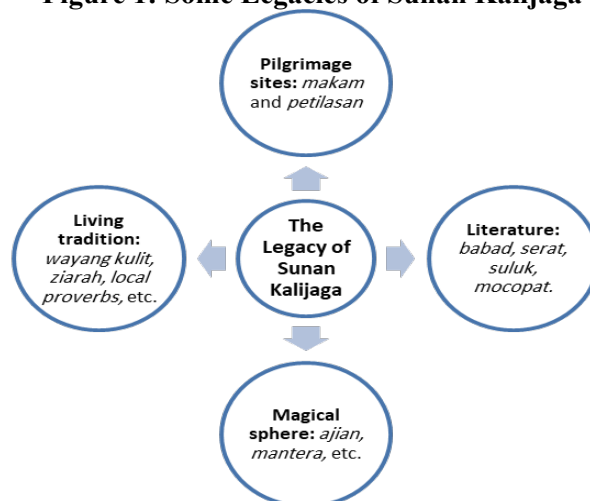
How can we define the *wali-songo* as a historical category? We can begin by referring to the research conducted by Anne K. Rasmussen on the tradition of reciting the Qur'an in Indonesia. While studying the collective memory of the religious figures associated with the *wali-songo*, she arrived at a conclusion that may shed light on the matter: "Although their histories are considered dubious in the positivist tradition, no one with whom I came into contact challenged their existence as important heroes who shaped the history of Indonesian Islam."<sup>65</sup>

Rasmussen's findings will perhaps remain the same to this day regarding the *wali-songo* in the living tradition of the community. The strong presence of the *wali-songo* among the Javanese, is indicated by the fact that he is present in almost all areas of their lives. Sunan Kalijaga, for instance, has become a kind of living guide of the community. Countless books have been written to commemorate his stories and wisdom. Many proverbs and philosophies lived in today's society are believed to have originated from him. His name is engraved in the street, university, and has become the marker for many other monuments. In addition, many living traditions today are associated to Sunan Kalijaga.

Hence, one can investigate *wali-songo*'s legacy through the framework that go beyond artifact. As mentioned before, the artifact-based historiography is the foundation on which Western studies of the *wali-songo* and Islamic history in Indonesia are based. It is the main foundation of the positivist historians as Rasmussen has mentioned before. In this regard, we can pay our attention to what Sartono Kartodirdjo previously emphasized in the 1990s regarding three kinds of historical facts; *artifact*, *mentifact*, and *sociofact*.<sup>66</sup> When explaining the triad, Kartodirdjo was talking about the possibility of integration between historical and anthropological approaches by quoting the famous anthropologist Evan-Pritchard: "anthropology is history."<sup>67</sup> To take the last two facts into consideration, indeed, such an interdisciplinary approach in studying history has to be conducted.

Thus, in addition to investigating the artifacts, the collective memory of the community embodied in a living tradition must receive the attention it deserves. Tellingly, 'artifact-based studies' should be in dialog with the *mentifact* and *sociofact*-based investigations. Let us look at the possibility of this kind of framework in the case of Sunan Kalijaga, one of the most popular members of the *wali-songo* among the Javanese. In the light of three historical facts, the possible fields to trace the historical legacy of Sunan Kalijaga can be mapped into the following scheme:

Figure 1: Some Legacies of Sunan Kalijaga



<sup>65</sup> Anne K. Rasmussen (2010), *Women, the Recited Qur'an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia*, Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, p. 58.

<sup>66</sup> Sartono Kartodirdjo (1992), *Pendekatan Ilmu Sosial dalam Metodologi Sejarah*, Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, p. 154.

<sup>67</sup> Kartodirdjo (1992), *Pendekatan Ilmu Sosial*, p. 153.

It must be recognized that what will be offered here is certainly not yet the construction of an established autonomous historical methodology. It should be realized that many more exhaustive studies – as represented by Nancy K. Florida – are needed to move in that direction. However, we believe that one of the simplest steps possible today is to start by transforming the way we view the so-called “historical facts” and Sartono Kartodirdjo’s proposal, which is also inspired by some alternative discourses in Western tradition,<sup>68</sup> can be a good start toward that direction.

It is important to note that there have been few studies that go beyond artifacts and focus on the interdisciplinary historical analysis of Javanese saints. These studies have been conducted by Dutch orientalist since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As mentioned earlier, Rinke’s *De Heiligen van Java* initiated a “historical-hagiological” investigation into the personality of a saint.<sup>69</sup> Rinke’s innovation in these articles is maintaining the object of study from the mere written document engagement to the anthropological studies. However, what Rinke did at the time was to ‘filter’ the so-called historical material from the hagiological one. In his research on the tomb of Sheikh Abdul Muhyi, for instance, Rinke seems to apply a clear dichotomy between hagiological data in the form of the miracles of the saint *vis a vis* the “scientific point of view.”<sup>70</sup> This methodological awareness underlies his entire study of the tombs of the saints he visited in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

According to some Dutch scholars, including Rinke, who studied Javanese saints, a thorough examination of their works reveals that they do not completely deny the historical existence of Javanese saints. The scholars acknowledge that the saints did exist historically, but their existence has been obscured by stories of irrational miracles. Rinke emphasizes the importance of collecting historical data through field research, as the longer historical data is collected, the more it becomes obscured by stories of miracles, as is the case with the stories of Javanese saints.<sup>71</sup> In our perspective, Rinke fails to recognize that the act of recording history and how a historical event is interpreted by society over time is itself a historical occurrence. Dismissing hagiographic stories as not part of history is an ignorant approach to this principle.

As previously mentioned, Nancy K. Florida has successfully shed light on an important issue. However, it is important to note that her research is based solely on artifacts. The question arises whether Florida’s framework can be applied to the three types of historical facts mentioned earlier. This leads us to a broader methodological horizon, which aims to expand the scope of historical sources to include not only written sources, but also oral and quasi-historical sources.<sup>72</sup> Some scholars refer to this model as “historical-ethnography” to reach what might be called “indigenous history” which, according to Mac Marshall, denotes the “oral traditions” itself.<sup>73</sup> For the proponents of this orientation, contemporary study on indigenous history means “challenging established colonial mythologies of the past and narratives that speak of settler dominance and indigenous subjugation.”<sup>74</sup> This perspective also places all historical accounts, both from oral and written sources, as cultural product “that represent particular positioned point of view.”<sup>75</sup>

It is interesting to consider the Annale school’s focus on the historical agency of the “common people.” Political history has also become an essential feature in colonial historiography. This perspective has contributed to the creation of the *wali-songo* narrative in orientalist studies, which is framed more in terms of political history rather than the cultural legacy inherited at the grassroots level.

Regarding the case of the *wali-songo*, we can consider two categories of their legacy: the “living” and the “silent.” The artifacts, such as source literature (*babads*, *serats*, *suluks*, *wirids*, etc.), inscriptions,

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<sup>68</sup> These terms are coined by John Huxley, an evolutionary biologist when explaining the culture in the anthropological sense. See John Huxley (1955), “Guest Editorial: Evolution, Cultural and Biological,” in *Yearbook of Anthropology* (1955), Chicago: Chicago University Press, p. 10.

<sup>69</sup> Rinke (1996), *Nine Saints of Java*, p. 1; Waston, W. (2018), “Building peace through mystic philosophy: Study on the role of Sunan Kalijaga in Jawa,” *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 281-308.

<sup>70</sup> Rinke (1996), *Nine Saints of Java*, p. 10.

<sup>71</sup> He states: “In view of the gradual fading of historical details and the trend towards orthodoxy, with the subsequent levelling of other current stories concerning Saints, it is desirable to take in hand descriptions of that which still remains before more is obscured and data can no longer be gathered.” Rinke (1996), *Nine Saints of Java*, p. 10.

<sup>72</sup> William R. Lee (2013), “Reflections on Oral History and Quasi-History: The Larger Context,” *Journal of Historical Research of Music Education*, Vol. 34, No. 2.

<sup>73</sup> Mac Marshall (1996), “Engaging History: “Historical Ethnography and Ethnology,” *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 94, No. 4, p. 972.

<sup>74</sup> Steven Antonellos and Jayne Rantall (2017), “Indigenous History: A Conversation,” *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2, p. 116.

<sup>75</sup> Antonellos and Rantall (2017), “Indigenous History,” p. 116.

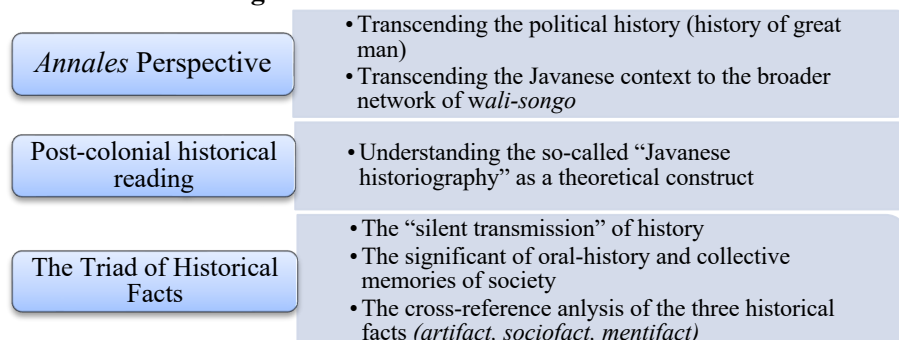
and other historical objects, are the “silent” evidence. They are objective and reliable as historical evidence. However, their position as historical sources become subjective when studied by individuals. This subjectivity can result in two outcomes: “silent” or “living” in terms of historical value. It depends on the methodology and the questions asked, as well as the effort to “silence one narrative and enliven the other.”

One should consider *mentifact* and *sociofact* as living things, which together form the “living tradition.” While they can be reliable sources for contemporary source-based history writing, the problem arises when one uses a “living” tradition as a source for past events. To address this issue, anthropological examination of both types of facts is necessary. This examination should explore aspects that can provide historical insights in dialog with established historical narratives derived from artifacts. According to Kartodirdjo, integrating historical and anthropological approaches requires integrating the worldviews of each discipline. Diachronic historical studies must be combined with synchronic anthropological studies.<sup>76</sup>

It is important to understand this framework as conducting mutualistic review by investigating three historical facts simultaneously. It goes beyond focusing solely on artifacts and recognizes *sociofacts* and *mentifacts* as important historical facts that must be considered along with the findings from artifacts. This framework offers an alternative methodology to uncover a particular historical fragment of *wali-songo* whose legacy is spread across multiple layers of facts. The interrelatedness between the triad ultimately leads to what Fazlur Rahman called “silent transmission” in a “living tradition”<sup>77</sup> mediated by the oral-*cum*-written tradition and along with the device of the collective memory within society. Historical transmission, in this framework, is not only artifact-based, but it also occurs through the medium of social praxis that reflects a certain mentality.

Based on the previous explanation, possible enrichment to the theoretical framework on *wali-songo* studies can be described as follows:

**Figure 2: The Theoretical Framework**



## Conclusion

Western academic studies on the *wali-songo* have resulted in legends, unreliable traditions, folklore, and semi-historical narratives. While examining the Javanese sources, scholars have found varying levels of skepticism or optimism regarding the search for “reliable historical evidence.” These sources are primarily considered literary works. This scholarship has influenced Indonesia’s intellectual history in the search for a “methodological” identity after gaining independence. The case of the *wali-songo* narrative records this dynamic.

However, it wasn’t until post-colonial scholars like Nancy K. Florida produced their thought-provoking findings that the Western scholarship on the *wali-songo* became more reliable. Prior to this, the writings produced by Western scholars were essentially confessional texts that explained the identity of the civilization that shaped the authors in explaining a phenomenon “other than their own.” Farish M. Noor

<sup>76</sup> Kartodirdjo (1992), *Pendekatan Ilmu Sosial*, p. 154.

<sup>77</sup> See Herbert Berg (2005), *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period*, London: Routledge, p. 34.

*The Wali-Songo and (Western) Historiography: A Critical Review of a Methodological Achievement* refers to these texts as “confessional texts.”<sup>78</sup> In this regard, an attempt to formulate ‘autonomous knowledge’ is a worthy endeavor, even if it requires such exhaustive works. Our last session on transcending hagiography and artifact-based historiography is just a small piece of that giant task.

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<sup>78</sup> Farish A. Noor (2021), *The Long Shadow of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Critical Essays on Colonial Orientalism in Southeast Asia*, Petaling Jaya: Matahari Books, pp. 323-378.

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