

## THE LOCAL TRADITION OF MAGICAL PRACTICES IN BANTEN SOCIETY

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### Abstract

*This article aims to discuss the cultural phenomenon of magical practices in the Muslim society of Banten which still exists up to the present. It is a part of my MA thesis research that has been combined with my recent field research using ethnography method based on the anthropological approach. Magical practices becomes cultural identity for Bantenese society. Several sources on Banten mention that Banten as a central spot for magical sciences, besides it is also well-known as a religious area. The magical practices are still regarded important for Bantenese people, especially who live in the villages to solve their practical problems in their social life. Magic is a socio-religious phenomenon which has long, well-established roots in Banten society. It is traceable from many literatures that describes the uniqueness of Bantenese's culture. Besides other magical practices debus is the most noticeable appearance of the magical tradition in Banten since the sultanate period until nowadays. The existence of debus Banten and other kinds of magical practices in Banten has strengthened the reputation of Banten as if 'a haven of magical sciences'.*

*Tulisan ini mencoba mendiskusikan tentang fenomena kultural mengenai praktek magis pada masyarakat Muslim Banten yang masih ada hingga saat ini. Artikel ini merupakan bagian dari tesis Master saya yang sudah dikombinasikan dengan penelitian lapangan baru-baru ini dengan menggunakan metode etnografi berdasarkan pendekatan antropologis. Praktek magis sudah menjadi identitas kultural bagi masyarakat Banten. Beberapa sumber menyebut Banten sebagai pusat ilmu-ilmu gaib, di samping dikenal sebagai daerah yang religius. Praktek magis masih dianggap penting bagi masyarakat Banten, khususnya yang tinggal di pedesaan untuk menyelesaikan masalah-masalah praktis dalam kehidupan sosial mereka. Magis adalah sebuah fenomena sosio-kultural yang*

memiliki akar yang cukup lama dan sudah berakar kuat dalam masyarakat Banten. Hal ini bisa dilacak dari banyak literatur yang menjelaskan keunikan dari budaya Banten. *Debus* adalah bukti paling kongkrit dari tradisi magis di Banten sejak periode kesultanan hingga saat ini, disamping beragam praktek magis yang lainnya. keberadaan *debus* Banten dan berbagai jenis praktek magis yang lainnya di Banten telah memperkuat reputasi Banten sebagai 'tempat bersemayamnya ilmu-ilmu magis'.

*Key words: magic, local tradition, Banten*

## Introduction

The image of Banten as the religious area and as the central spot of magical practices has been widely well-known not only by Bantenese society itself but also by many people outside Banten. Many literatures and the research records on Banten, more or less often deal with the reputation of Banten as the *central spot of magical practices*. In this regard, Martin van Bruinessen on his book '*Kitab Kuning, Pesantren dan Tarekat: Tradisi-Tradisi Islam di Indonesia*' calls Banten as '*a heaven of the occult sciences*' (Martin, 1995:176).

The tradition of magical practices can be traced both from literature works of Banten and from the practices of this cultural phenomenon in Banten up to the present day. Many religious figures such as *kyai hikmah* and *ahli hikmah* in Banten teach and practice *ilmu hikmah* (magical science) to help Bantenese society in solving their practical problems. Many people believe in the *kyai's* supernatural power that can help them to reach their purposes and to solve their problems by using *kyai's* magical power. Because of his capability in Islamic knowledge and in magical sciences, the *kyai* of Banten has respectable and high position in the society. Several Arabic texts (*kitab*) as the sources of their *ilmu hikmah* make society believe that magical power of *kyai* is allowed in Islamic teaching so that they will be avoided from *shirk*.

Furthermore, there are also many *pesantren* in Banten, especially the *salafy pesantren*, which not only teach Islamic knowledge, but also teach magical sciences. *Ilmu sambatan*, *ilmu kontak*, *ilmu hadiran*, *ilmu kebal*, *hizb* are several representatives of magical sciences practiced and taught in these places. In some occasions, several *pesantren* in Banten conduct a religious ritual in which in this event there is a tradition of giving several *ilmu hikmah* to the *santri* and non-*santri* who are actively involved in this ritual tradition.

*Debus*, the cultivation of invulnerability to fire and sharp metal objects, is the most conspicuous representative of the magical tradition in Banten since

the sultanate period up to the present. *Debus* teachers engage in whole range of magical practices. Their techniques are an eclectic blend of Muslim and pre-Islamic magic, their sacred formulas including Islamic Arabic invocations alongside Javanese and Sundanese language formulas (Martin, 1995: 187-8).

The strong reputation that Banten as the central spot of magical practices may be traced in the various sources written by both the local writers and the International researchers. For instance, Sartono Kartodirdjo on his work describes how several religious figures who led the revolt distributed a kind of *amulet* (*jimat*) and the holy water (*air keramat*) to their followers before starting the rebellion in order to be safety and success in attacking their enemy. (Kartodirdjo, 1966:235). The similar actions were also conducted by several *kyai* or *ustadz* in the communist revolt of Banten in 1926. Michael Charles Williams on his book clearly stated that before going on the rebellion, several *kyais* who became the leaders of the revolt distributed *the invulnerability* (*ilmu kekebalan*), amulets, as well as the holy water to their followers (Williams, 1982: 372).

Several theses on magic in Banten written by some local writers have strengthened such an image that magic has apparently become the cultural identity of Banten society. Tihami's thesis discusses the function of magic as a tool of legitimation for *kyai* and *jawara* to be informal leaders in the village. He states that in *desa Pasanggrahan*, a *kyai* will be considered as a leader if he has supernatural power (Tihami, 1992:5). Furthermore, Helmy's thesis also deals with magic in Banten from the ontology point of view. He states that the practices of magic reflects the philosophical view of human's thought (Helmy, 2004: 236). Discussion on magic also becomes a research focus of Humaeni's thesis '*The phenomenon of Magic in Banten Society*', written in Leiden University in 2009 (Humaeni, 2009: 45-63). Moreover, Nitibaskara also writes the practices of black magic in two of villages in Banten. He explains how the social prejudices for the witches and the sorcerer were given by the Bantenese society in 1985-1990 (Nitibaskara, 1993:54-76)

This article tries to discuss several traditions of magical practices in Bantenese society, especially about *ilmu hikmah*, *ngelmu* in *pesantren*, the magical power of *pawang*, *bone-stters*, and *dukun*, the magical tradition of *debus* and other magical practices that have been ever existed in Banten.

### **The Tradition of Ngehikmah (Magical Practices) in Banten**

*Ngehikmah* is a Bantenese term generally referred to magical sciences

practiced by *kyai* (religious teachers), especially *kyai hikmah* or *ahli hikmah*. Based on my field research, there are many *kyai*, either who have a pesantren or not, not only teaching Islamic knowledge, but also teaching magical power. The *kyai* who teaches magical power (*ilmu hikmah*) in Banten is frequently called *kyai hikmah* or *ahli hikmah*. Many people come to his house or his pesantren only for asking his help to cure certain diseases or asking several magical sciences. In this regard, K.H.J.M, one of *kyai hikmah* from Padarincang Banten, states,

Almost everyday many people, from both around his village and outside Banten, come to my house for many purposes; some of them ask him to cure some diseases, some of them ask amulets (*jimat* or *wafaq*) for obtaining good jobs, good careers, good positions; some of them ask him to insert *susuk* for appearing dignity, bravery, and good-looking aura; Indeed, they ask me *pelet*, a magical power to make somebody love him/her (K.H.J.M, 2010).

Based on his statement above, it is clear that many Bantenese society still believe in magical power of *kyai hikmah* or *ahli hikmah*. Some of Bantenese society prefer visiting *kyai hikmah* to solve their practical problems to visiting doctors or using their reasons.

*Kyai* are informal leaders in Bantenese society. They are considered the community's leaders because of several superior qualities. *Kyai* are regarded as community leaders when they are able to serve the community's need concerning religion. He must have charisma and authority; both of these characteristics may be obtained by practicing magic cited from religious sources. Since the majority of Bantenese society believes that there are supernatural aspects in religious doctrines which can be used to meet their practical needs, such as curing diseases, evoking authority ect, *Kyai* as those who have the authority to interpret and transmit religious knowledge, are then supposed to be able to use magical formulae taken from some verses of the *Qur'an*. The trust of the Bantenese people in the *kyai's* capability to do so, according to Tihami, is made use of by several *kyais* to legitimate and maintain their leadership in the community (Tihami, 1992: 175-181).

In connection with this, Zamakhsyari confirms Tihami's view mentioned above. He states that a *kyai* can be a charismatic leader because the community believes that a *kyai* has spiritually superior skills which make it so that a *kyai* can give *karomah* and *barokah* for his followers. However, this belief works only as long as the *kyai* is *wira'i* (a man who always refrains from *shubhah*, from all conduct prohibited by Islam); capable of avoiding contemptible actions both

in the view of Islamic law and according to social norms (Dhofier, 1995:70-71). It seems that the behavioral aspects are crucial for a *kyai* to be a charismatic leader.

From the explanation above, it seems that a *kyai* is recognized and well-respected by the community not only because of his comprehensive understanding of religious knowledge and his good behavior and morals, but also because of his mastering of the occult sciences (*ilmu gaib*) and the use of it for the community's interests.

Dealing with *kyai hikmah* in Banten, in the twentieth century, there were two very famous *kyai hikmah* from Banten. The first one was Ki Amin (KH. Muhammad Hasan Amin) from Cibuntu near Pandeglang (d.1988), the second one was Ki Dimiyati from Dahu in Cadasari (north of Pandeglang). Besides being well-known as *kyai hikmah*, both of these *kyai* were also famous as *tarekat* teachers. The former was a *tarekat* teacher of Qadariyyah and the latter taught *hizibs* of *tarekat Syadziliyah*. 'Numerous stories were talking about both of these kiais' miraculous powers, their clairvoyance, the rapid careers or sudden riches that befell some of those who had won their favours.' (Martin, 1995: 279-282).

Nowadays there are many *kyai* from Banten who practice *ilmu hikmah*, such as K.H. J.M. (Serang), K.H. Fayumi (Serang), K.H. Maksun (Serang), K.H. Enjang (Pandeglang), Salman Farisi (Serang), Yahya Ibn Ma'mun (Serang), Abah Sakin (Serang), Ahmad Abbas bin Ma'mun (Serang), Ubing Al-Maraghi ZA (Pandeglang), and Anis Fuad (Serang). They are well known as *kyai* who posses and practice magical powers used for helping the community's practical needs. Many visitors, both from around and from outside Banten, come to their houses to ask for charms, amulets, *wafak* and other things for various purposes.

There are many kinds of magical practices performed by *kyai hikmah* or *ahli hikmah* in Banten. Aside from curing diseases, relieving possessed people and expelling evil spirits from the body, several of them also practice and provide *susuk*, *ilmu kebal* (invulnerability), *pelet*, *wafak* or *mantera* (magical formula) for trading, getting a job and a good position. Indeed, in the village elections, almost all candidates use their magical power to try to win the elections. Many politicians also come to *kyai hikmah* or *ahli hikmah* for various purposes.

Several classical Islamic texts are used as the sources of *ilmu hikmah* in Banten. To mention some *ilmu hikmah* sources are *Syams al-Ma'arif wa Lathaiif al-'Awarif* and *Manba' Ushul al-Hikmah* of Imam Ab al-Abbas Ahmad bin Ali

Al-Bani, *Mujarrabat al-Dairab* (Fath al-Malik al-Majid al-Muallaf li naf' al-'Abid) of Sheikh Ahmad al-Dairab, *Khazanah al-Asrar Jalalah ah-Adzkar* of al-Sayyid Haqi al-Nazili *Syumus al-Anwar wa Kunüz al-Asrar* of Ibn al-Haj al-Tilimsani al-Maghribi, *Al-Jawahir al-Luma'ah fi Istihdhar Mulük al-Jin fi al-Waqt wa al-Sa'ah* of Syekh 'Ali Ab Hayyullah al-Marzüqi, *Dalail al-Khairat* of Imam Ab 'Abdillah Muhammad bin Sulaiman, *al-Aufaq* of Imam al- Ghazali, *Tashil al-Manafi' fi al-thib wa al-Hikmah* of Syekh Ibrahim bin Abd al-Rahman al-Azraq, *Al-thib al-Nabawi* of syekh Muhammad bin Ahmd al-Dzahabi, *al-Rahmah fi al-Thib wa al-hikmah* of Syekh Jalaluddin Abd al-Rahman al-Suyüthi. *Al-Sir al-Jalil fi Khawaddh Hasbunallah wa ni'mal-Wakil* of Sayyid ab al-Hasan al-Syadzli (Ahmad, 2005:109-110 and Humaeni, 2010: 86).

Dealing with the way or method in obtaining *ilmu hikmah*, there are three methods to obtain *ilmu hikmah*: the first one is by inheritance, when a *kyai hikmah* teaches his *ilmu hikmah* to one or several of his children; the second one is by learning it from other *kyai hikmah* or *kyai tarekat*. The third one is by reading *ilmu hikmah* sources (*kitab*) and self-study (Ahmad, 2005: 94-96). Indeed, a *kiai hikmah* sometimes carries out a great event at a certain time and place to give *ijaza* of *ilmu hikmah* consisting of many *hizibs*, *wafaq*, *amalan* and other magical formulas. In this event, *santri* and non-*santri* who want to obtain this *ijaza* should pay a sum of money as *mahar* (Humaeni, 2009: 94-96).

If we observe the explanation above, magic belongs to religious element. It is asserted by Koentjaraningrat's view that the system of magical science constitutes one of the special elements of religious system, besides the religion itself (Koentjaraningrat, 1998:204). According to him, the system of magical science, in many cases, is often similar to system of religion. Magical science, as system of religion, also recognizes conceptions and its teaching, the magicians and their followers, the sacred places and times, and the techniques that should be done by the performers.

The belief in the supernatural powers of certain religious figures is actually not only prevalent in Banten, but also in Java. Raffles remarks that 'every Arab from Mecca, as well as every Javanese people who had returned from a pilgrimage thither, assumed on Java the character of a saint, and the such persons supernatural powers.' (Raffles, 1978: 3). As a result, they were well-respected by the community; it was not difficult for them to influence and to boost the spirit of society to fight against the Dutch interests. In this regard, from the story of Banten we know that many *kyai*, together with other elements of Bantenese society, performed many insurrections to fight against

the Dutch colonial government and native authorities who were considered to be agents of the Dutch. To provoke the uprisings, many *kyai* or *hajis* made use of their magical power; they even distributed amulets (*jimat*) and *air suci* (holy water for salvation or invulnerability) to their followers. For instance, KH. Tubagus Ismail, one of the leaders of Banten's revolt in 1888, was believed to be a sacred saint who had *ilmu kebal* and was able to manifest himself in different faces and shapes (Djajadiningrat, 1996: 49). Sartono describes how in the morning of 10 July, 1888 one of the leaders of the peasants' revolt, Haji Mohamad Asik, ordered his followers who gathered together in great numbers at Bendung in Banten 'to drink holy water in order to make them invulnerable in battle.' (Dijk, 2005: 17). Furthermore, some religious teachers involved in the communist revolt of Banten in 1926 were arrested and exiled to Boven Digul because of several reasons; they urged their followers to fast for several days and anointed them with holy water to make them invulnerable; they also sold amulets to their followers (William, 1982: 69-79).

### The Kinds of Magic in Banten Society

Generally speaking, magic is functionally classified into two kinds; *white magic* and *black magic*. The former is a kind of magic used to bring benefit and happiness to people, while the latter is used to wreak havoc and bring illness, and to invoke disadvantage and misery on society. However, nowadays this classification is no longer used by anthropologists because the idea of good and bad, right and wrong, fine and evil, advantageous and disadvantageous, beneficial and useless is relative. It means that something is probably regarded as good, fine, advantageous, or beneficial by some people, but not by the others. The line between those concepts is blurred. Indeed, in a society, one kind of magic is sometimes used for two purposes, good and bad.

Even though anthropologists no longer use the terms *black magic* and *white magic*, these terms are more common than other terms for Bantenese people. Bantenese people call 'white magic' as *ilmu hikmah*, otherwise 'black magic' is often called '*ilmu rawayan*'. They believe that magic derived from *kyai*, *ahli hikmah*, and *pesantren* must be quoted from the Qur'an, *hadith*, and some Islamic classical texts (*kitab*s). For instance, when K.H.J.M. (K.H.J.M., 2008) would give magical science (*ilmu gaib*), *wafak* (magical formula written on paper, animal skin, cloth and other materials used for talismans) and amulets to his students or commoners, he would cite *kitab Samsu al Ma'arif*, *Mambail Ushulu lil al Hikmah*, *Abu Basyar al Falaqi*, *Aufaq Imam Ghazali*, and others

as his sources. Hence, many Banten people believe that magic derived from religious figures is white magic (*ilmu hikmah*) because it aims for the happiness and welfare of people, or at least, in the view of KH. Ma'sum Daenuri, its formula, its rite, its techniques and its purpose are not in contradiction with Islamic law (*syari'ah*). (Maksum, 2010). On the other hand, magic derived from non-religious figures, such as sorcerers, witches, fortune-tellers, etc, of which the formula, rite, and meaning are not quoted from *the Qur'an*, *hadith*, or *kitab*, and which is directed toward the suffering and misery of other people, is often regarded as *black magic* (*ilmu rawayan*), or at least, it is not allowed by Islam or it is called, in the term of Burgel, 'illicit magic (*as-sihr al-haram*)' (Burgel, 1988: 31).

Concerning *black magic*, there are two common terms widely recognized by Bantenese society: *teluh* and *tenung* (witchcraft and sorcery). Both kinds of magic often become a hot issue when someone has a disease that cannot be detected by a doctor or treated with modern medical. In connection with the technique and the way of practicing *teluh* (sorcery), there are several kinds of *teluh* recognized in Banten, i.e. *teluh angin*, *teluh banyu*, *teluh geni*, *teluh penjarahan* and *teluh seluruh*.

*Teluh angin* is a kind of sorcery where the technique and the media the sorcerers (*dukun teluh*) use to harm and to kill their victims are the use of several devices such as needles, nails or spikes, broken glass or porcelain, and such kind, which are packed into a bag or a doll and hung on the tree using a black string. They say incantations to deliver their magic to the victims, using wind or air to deliver it. This action is done repeatedly until they are sure that their victims die. *Teluh banyu* is almost the same as *teluh angin*, but the media they use to deliver their magic is water. They usually put magical things into river, well or a glass of water of their victims. Both *teluh angin* and *teluh banyu* are also called *teluh rambat* because both of these sorceries are meant to kill the victims slowly. Moreover, *teluh geni* is the most dangerous *black magic* in Banten because the effect of such magic is faster than other kinds of sorcery (*teluh*). The victims who suffer from this kind of *teluh* will die in a few days, even a few hours. This *teluh* uses a little knife or magical *kris* which is put into a full water glass or bowl. The objects, then, are covered by clothes and the sorcerers say some incantations to these objects. After saying the incantation, the glass cover is lifted. If the knife or *keris* is no longer in the glass, it means that the victims will suffer from this action in a few minutes, even die a few hours later. *Teluh penjarahan* is a kind of sorcery which uses certain cemeteries

as media to harm the victims. The sorcerers will ask the evil spirits living in these eerie places to assist them to kill someone else. *Teluh celuruh* is the least dangerous kind of *black magic*. It aims not to kill the victims, but to make them suffer from itching all over the victims' body so that the victims will scratch their body continuously until it becomes ulcerous which cannot be cured. One who suffers from this *teluh* will not be recovered by a doctor unless the sorcerer himself stops his action or someone else, such as a *kyai*, *ahli hikmah*, or *dukun* who has supernatural powers does it. This *teluh* may use wind, water, cigarettes, cloth and other objects as media to deliver *black magic* to the victims. These kinds of *black magic*, according to Nitibaskara, still existed and became hot issues in the community of Banten during 1985-1990 (Nitibaskara, 1993: 229-231).

Based on the practical goals, Firth classified magic into three types. They are productive magic, protective magic, and destructive magic. (Firth, 1958:124-25). Firth's classification above can also be applied in the case of Bantenese magic. For instance, many people such as salesmen, politicians, businessmen, etc., ask *wafak*, charms, and amulets (*jimat*) from *kyai*, *ahli hikmah*, even from *dukun* in order to achieve their goals. These are examples of productive magic in Firth's sense of the word which exists in Banten. Furthermore, many Bantenese people also come to *kyai*, *ahli hikmah*, and *dukun* to avert misfortune, to secure safety while travelling and to cure their illness, whether it is caused by black magic or not. It means that to protect their life, they still believe in magic. This is protective magic in terms of Firth's categorization. Finally, I can also give examples of 'destructive magic' which can be found in Banten. The practice of sorcery and witchcraft (*teluh* and *tenung*) in the sub-districts Sajira and Bojonegara in Banten show us that Bantenese are also well acquainted with its destructive magic.

### Several Ngelmu in Pesantren of Banten

I have observed that many *pesantren* in Banten, especially the *salafi pesantren*, teach *ilmu gaib* (magic) at certain times, usually on Thursday night and on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of *Muharram*. There are several kinds of magical practices performed by *santri* under the supervision of senior *santri*, *ustadz* or *kyai*. *Sambatan*, *ilmu hadiran*, *ilmu kontak* and *ilmu kekebalan* (*invulnerability*) are the popular magical practices which are often learned and practiced in *pesantren*.

*Ilmu sambatan* (one type of magical practice) is the magical action of inviting any spirit to enter into their body, either the spirit of an animal such

as a tiger, monkey, snake, etc; or the spirit of a person who has died and is considered to possess supernatural power, such as a saint, *kyai*, *buya*; or the spirit of people who are masters in self-defense art (*silat*), such as Bruce Lee. To perform this magic in practice, the *santri* read *khadarat* to the Prophet and his company, Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jaelany, Sultan Hasanuddin, etc; then they read *surah al-Fatihah*, *syahadah*, *sholawat*, and *istighfar* three times, and after that they close their eyes and focus their mind on what kind of spirit they want to invite. While they are praying in their heart, they are spelling the word ‘*hadir.. hadir.. hadir*’ (*Hadir* means ‘be present.’ It is the antonym of ‘be absent.’) continuously until they are convinced that the spirit has entered into their body. If they called the spirit of a tiger, they will act as if they are a tiger, and if they called the spirit of Bruce Lee, they will act as if they are Bruce Lee, and so forth. Finally, to finish the practice of this magic, they read the sentence ‘*laa haula walaa quwwata illa billahi al-alliyil adhiim*’ (there is no power except that of the almighty God). This magic can be performed individually or collectively.

*Ilmu hadiran* is almost the same as *ilmu sambatan*, but the spirit which they invite to come into their body is never the spirit of an animal. They usually invite the spirit of a saint, *kyai*, or their religious teachers who have died. The formula recited and the methods they use to invite the spirit are almost the same as for *ilmu sambatan*. However, *ilmu hadiran* is usually performed by at least two people, in which case one of them acts as the performer who is entered by the spirit, and the others act as *santri* who are not entered by the spirit. The latter could ask many things to the former, considering that he has been entered by the spirit completely.

Furthermore, *ilmu kontak* is a kind of magical practice performed by at least two people, with the purpose of hitting the body from a distance. It is also used to hold back the body blow from others.

*Ilmu kebal* (the science of invulnerability), according to Cees van Dijk, is ‘akin to the practice of magic both white and black.’ (Dijk, 2002:18). It is, in my opinion, similar to *debus*. However, while *debus* nowadays is performed for entertainment or as a traditional art performance, invulnerability (*ilmu kekebalan*) studied in *pesantren* aims to protect the *santri* from the danger either when they are still living in *pesantren* or afterleaving it. Apart from the definition stated by Cees van Dijk above in which *ilmu kebal* can be used both for white and black magic, *ilmu kebal* as learned in *pesantren* is meant for good purposes. *Santri* are usually even warned by their *kyai* not to use it for bad purposes.

However, in practice, some of them sometimes use it for bad ends.

To obtain *ilmu kekebalan* from *kyai*, *santri* is usually given two options: 'mateng' or 'mentah.' The first one means that the *santri* does not have to do any fasting and *wirid*, he just gives a sum of money to the *kyai* as a form of *mahar*. *Mahar* here means a sum of money or things which have to be given to the *kyai*, *ahli hikmah*, or *dukun* as a condition to obtain magic. The second one means that *santri* must fast for several days (There are several types of fasting to possess *ilmu kebal*. The first is fasting as performed in Ramadan, but the numbers of the days are different, sometimes three, seven, or forty days. The second is *puasa mutih*, fasting in which one may not eat anything except rice and water when he breaks the fast in the evening. The third is *puasa mati geni*. It means that *santri* has to stop eating anything, stop talking with anyone, from morning to the next morning or for twenty four hours) and perform *wirid* for a certain amount of time.

In this regard, on every 10<sup>th</sup> day of Muharram, *Kyai Payumi*, a *kyai* of *pesantren* Darul Ulum in Padaricang, Banten, usually invites *santri* who stayed in his *pesantren* as well as from outside, to perform a congregation of *wirid* which begins at 09.00pm and lasts until 02.00am. After performing *wirid*, then he enters into his special room and calls the *santri*, one by one, to come into his room. In this room, he gives some *ilmu gaib* (magical science) to the *santri*, and one of them was *ilmu kebal* (invulnerability). However, even though all *santri* perform *wirid* at that time, not everybody can obtain *ilmu gaib* from him. He does not give it to everybody. He just gives it to certain people whom he considered being the proper people to possess it. Before giving this *ilmu kebal*, while reciting *dzikir*, he usually holds the right hand of the *santri*. If he sees that the *santri* is the proper person to possess it, he recites a *wirid* and rubs the *santri*'s hands, and after that he takes a sharp big machete (*golok*), and slashes the *santri*'s hands repeatedly. After he is sure that the *santri* succeeds in performing *ilmu kebal*, he advises his *santri* not to use it for bad purposes. However, if he considers the *santri* to whom he would give *ilmu kebal* not the proper person to possess it, after holding the *santri*'s right hand he just gives him a glass of water over which a prayer (*do'a*) has been recited. This is the sample of *ilmu kebal mateng* obtained without fasting. However, on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Muharram event, though *santri* could obtain *ilmu kebal mateng*, the *kyai* doesn't ask a certain sum of money as *mahar*. However, if a *santri* intended to give it, the *kyai* would not refuse it. It is an annual activity conducted in his *pesantren*.

Besides some of the magical practices I mentioned above, *pesantren* in Banten also teach *wirid* in the form of *hizib* for magical ends, taken from *kitab Dalail Khairot*. There are some *hizibs* which *kyai* sometimes gives to a certain *santri*, such as *Hizib Nashr*, *Hizib Bahr*, *Hizib Ikhfa*, *Hizib Jailani*, *Hizib Yamani*, *Hizib Autad*, *Hizib Khafiy*, *Hizib Barqi* and *Hizib Nawawi*. *Hizib Nashr* is used to treat crazy people, to cure someone who is possessed by a spirit (*kerasukan setan/jin*), and to cure epilepsy. It is also used for invulnerability and for holding back of belting at a distance (*ilmu kontak*). *Hizib Bahr* is practiced in order to be respected by others, in order to have authority (*wibawa*), and also for invulnerability. *Hizib Ikhfa* is aimed to smash the enemy, to protect oneself from danger, and for invulnerability. *Hizib Jailani* is aimed to be compassionate and loved by others, and for invulnerability. *Hizib Yamani* is aimed to cure various illnesses. *Hizib Autad* is aimed to achieve a wish easily, *Hizib Khafiy* is practiced in order to be safe from those who want to wound us, to get respect from others, and to have authority (*wibawa*), *Hizib Barqi* is meant to snarl the enemy, to make the enemy blind and deaf, etc. *Hizib Nawawi* is aimed to various purposes. (K.H.A.S.,2009 and Thaifuri, 2003: 46-82).

Such kinds of magic are often practiced in traditional *pesantren* in Banten. For instance, Mashadi, when he became a *santri* in *pesantren al-Halimy* in Barugbug, Banten, he had obtained one *hizib*, namely *hizib Khafy*, from his *kyai*. His *kyai* asked him to observe *puasa putih* for seven days, and at the same time he also had to recite the formula of *hizib khafiy* 41 times every night. He said that after he had finished performing the ritual, he felt more confident and he felt that many people favored and loved him. (Mashadi, 2010).

Moreover, a *kyai* who leads *pesantren* 'Sabilu Rosyad' in Banten stated that the magical science (*ilmu gaib*) he teaches his *santri* was derived from several Islamic classical texts (*kitab*s), such as *Samsul Ma'arif*, *Mambail Ushulu lil al-Hikmah*, *Abu Basyar al-Falaqi*, and *Aufaq Imam al-Ghazali*. He said that he usually teaches some kinds of magic to his *santri* once a week or once a month. *Ilmu kontak* (magic for self-defense), *ilmu lengket* (magic for protecting property from robbery), *ilmu merendam* (magic for love), and *ilmu aurad qolbu dinar* (magic for obtaining money easily) are the kinds of magical science he taught his *santri*. (K.H.J.M, 2009). Indeed, he also provides *susuk* (several small pieces of gold or diamond inserted in the face or another part of the body as a magical charm to improve one's beauty, power and etc) and amulets (*jimat*) for those who need them. In 2009, he offered me a little *kris* which can be used for many purposes because of its magical power.

### The Magical Power of Pawang and Bone-Setters in Banten

The society of Banten also recognizes the supernatural power possessed by *pawang*. *Pawang* is someone endowed with magical powers. He is considered capable of stopping or moving rain, and he also can be an animal tamer. They are often used by society on certain occasions, such as wedding parties, circumcision parties, *slametan*, and even for national events. For instance, when Banten province was appointed to be the host of *Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an National XXII* (National Contest of Qur'anic Recitation) on 24-27 June 2008, the governor of Banten ordered the committee to prepare *pawang hujan* as many as possible during the performance in order for the agenda to go well. The committee, therefore, prepared twenty *pawang*s for this event. (Radar Banten Online, 2008: 1). On another occasion, PLTU (the electric power station) of Suralaya, Cilegon Banten, invited some *pawang*s to catch or to chase away three crocodiles which were hanging around the turbine, because they were worried that the crocodiles could destroy the turbine. (Radar Banten Online, 2007:1). Even though after several days there was still no result, this shows that the existence of *pawang* is much needed by local society, by both educated and uneducated people.

Aside from the belief in the supernatural powers of *pawang*, the society of Banten also confers its trust upon magical powers possessed by spirit-masters, bone-setters, masseurs, magicians, etc. For instance, there are two famous bone-setters in Banten; H. Supriyadi in Tapos, Tiga Raksa, Tangerang, and Mas Jaya in Baros, Serang. They often cure patients who come not only from Banten, but also from other areas of Indonesia and even from other countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, Japan, Malaysia, Nigeria, etc. H. Supriyadi admits that he obtained his magical powers from his teacher, K.H. Samaun, being witnessed by Buya Mukri (1860-1959) -one of the *kyai tarekats* who were actively involved in the communist revolt of 1926 in Banten and was said to have much *karomah* and magical powers. H. Supriyadi affirmed that he was convinced to practice his magical ability after observing *wirid al-Waqi'ah*, which he obtained from K.H. Samaun. (Ali, 2007:81-82). Many Bantenese people prefer curing their bone fractures at H. Supriyadi or Mas Jaya's places rather than having it done in the hospital.

### A Magic Tradition of Debus in Banten

J. Vredenburg defines *debus* as 'a performance the manifest function of [which] is to furnish proof of invulnerability.' (J. Vredenburg, 1972: 302).

Hamka describes *debus* as walking on utensils made of glass or porcelain (Hamka, 1980:156), and Umari defines *debus* as a miraculous skill to stand in ecstasy while suffering from a piece of sharp iron which is used to hurt the body or an awl used for mystical self-injury (Umari, 1977:116). The definitions stated by the experts above show great similarity concerning *debus*. All of them see *debus* as a performance of invulnerability by using sharp metal objects.

There are various opinions about the origin of *debus* in Banten. One opinion states that it first emerged in Aceh at the same time as the dissemination of Islam in this region. The performance received much attention from local societies because they had never seen anything like it before. It was said that generally *debus* was performed by propagators who spread Islam into the region as a means to attract attention from society in order to aid conversion to Islam. After *debus* had developed in Aceh, it spread outside Aceh through West Sumatra, and finally came to Banten after many changes that had to do with the local situation and conditions in the new area (Hadiningrat, 1982:32). However, this opinion is contrary to another one that states that *debus* in Banten did not derive from *deboih* in Aceh, but it originated from Banten as a development of *silat* (martial arts) 'al-madad,' (*Al-madad* is an art performance to furnish proof of invulnerability. The name *al madad* refers to its founder, *shaikh Saman AlMadad*. Shaikh Saman is one of the saints whose protection is invoked by certain- but not all- performers of *debus* Banten. A folk dance called *Saman*, that is perhaps based on the lively *dhikr* or *ratib* of the Sammaniyya used to be performed at feasts and parties, often along a show of *silat* (martial arts) and *dabus* (Bruinessen, 1995:184). However, even though *tarekat Samaniyah* had existed and developed in Banten, but it is not clear how this tarekat was spread in Banten (Abrori, 2004:181-215) which also appeared at the same time as the dissemination of Islam in Banten and functioned as a media to spread Islam, like the 'wayang' performance performed by *sunan kalijaga* in Java. The latter opinion was proposed by the performer *debus* from Serang interviewed by Hadiningrat. (Hadiningrat, 1982:32), and it was confirmed by Nitibaskara. Nitibaskara remarks that *debus* started when sheikh *al-madad* came to Banten who intended to disseminate *tarekat Qodhariyya*, with its ritual actions that often include a kind of *debus*. He explains that it was just in the period of sultan Abul Fath Abdul Fatah (Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa), he created the traditional art *debus* used as a means to train and to boost the spirit of the soldiers (*prajurit*) of the sultanate to fight against the Dutch colonial army which was present in this period (Nitibaskara, 1993:155).

Because both '*al-madad*' and '*debus*' always yell out the name of '*al-madad*' before the performance, even though nowadays this action is rarely done by *debus* performers, some people argue that *debus* in Banten is the continuation of '*al-madad*' in Banten, not from *deboih* in Aceh.

Another version claimed that *al-madad* which developed to become *debus* as we can see in practice now in Banten emerged at first in the time of Sultan Hasanuddin. Indeed, it was said that the sultan himself was its creator. He created this art performance after he found out that Bantenese people delighted in the art, especially dealing with invulnerability. (Hadiningrat, 1982:36). Hence, he created the traditional art '*al-madad*' to attract attention from Bantenese society in order to convert people to Islam.

The last version of the stories about the origin of *debus* states that *debus* existed at first in the time of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa. It was said that since he was young, Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa had been fond of different kinds of traditional art. To make his hobby useful, he often created traditional arts such as *dedewaan*, *raket*, *sasaptona*, (*Dedewaan*, *raket*, and *sasaptona* are a kind of traditional arts which are developed in Banten in Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa period) and *debus*, which he himself often performed. It was said that at first, he actually did not intend to create *debus* to show in public as a traditional art performance. He created it as a means to train and to boost the spirit of the soldiers (*prajurit*) of the sultanate to fight against the Dutch colonial army which was present in this period (Hadiningrat, 1982: 36,44).

Moreover, Martin van Bruinessen states that there are many indicators showing that *debus* first developed in the framework of *tarekat*. In Aceh, *debus* (*deboih* or *rapa'i*) is a part of the rituals of *tarekat Rifa'iyah*, while in Banten it deals with *tarekat Qadariyya*' (Bruinessen, 1995,220). However, in another article he writes that the invulnerability techniques known as *debus* in Banten are derived from a number of sources, but the major influence is the *Rifa'iyya*, the *tarekat* that elsewhere too (Turkey, Egypt, India) is renowned for its *debus*-like practices. (Bruinessen, 1995:184). This view is also proposed by Arifin. He notes that '*debus* appeared at the same time with the emergence and the development of *tarekat Rifa'iyah*'.( Arifin, 1993:1). Bruinessen ,furthermore, explains that *debus* in Banten is associated not only with the *Qadariyya - Qadariyya wa Naqsyabandiyah*, to be exact -, but also other *tarekats*, especially *Sammaniyah* and *Rifa'iyah*.

According to J. Vredenburg, there are only three groups of *debus* which are still active in Banten. All of them are located in the regency (kabupaten)

of Serang, more specifically in the sub-regencies (kecamatan) of Walantaka, Cikande and Ciruas. They are all followers of the *Qadiriya tarekat* (J. Vredembregt, 1973: 308-309).

The performance of *debus* in Banten is carried out by a number of performers (*pemain debus*) and lead by a *seh debus*. The instruments, also called *debus*, are basically the same in all three groups. They use awl-like daggers consisting of a wooden hilt with an iron spike running through it, which ends in a sharp point. During the performance, they are accompanied by music made by three large tambourines, three drums, two smaller drums (*talinggit*), and one rattle (*ketjrek*). While playing music, the performers and musicians make a profession of faith by reciting verses from the *Qur'an*.

A performance opens with a recitation of the *surah al-Fatiha* by the entire group. After this the *seh* invokes the special protection and assistance of his group of the prophet Muhammad, of Abd al-Kadir Jailani, and others. Then he prepares some coconut oil, water, *menjan* (incense) and the flowers of the *kembodja*. (Coconut oil and water are considered to have natural magic, therefore both of these are often used by magic performers. Furthermore, *menjan* (incense) and the flowers of the *kembodja* are considered to be the materials which are liked by the spirit, hence they are used very often for practicing magical actions). While doing so, he recites a number of verses from the *Qur'an*, burns some incense and performs various acts of a magical nature. Then the *seh* utters a number of *mantera* (sacred formulae) over the water, and before the performers begin the performance, they take a sip of this water. (Nakip, 2011 and J. Vredembregt, 1973: 308-309).

The following are the actions practiced by *debus* performers during a performance: first are the prefatory actions of singing some songs called 'gembung,' accompanied by playing musical instruments. Second is the performance of *dzikir*, which is recited constantly during the rest of the performance. Third is performing *beluh* or *mocoPAT*, i.e. reciting prayers of adoration to God and the Prophet. Fourth is performing *pencak silat* (martial arts) without using any sharp objects. Fifth are the *debus* actions; jabbing or stabbing *debus* instruments into the stomach, followed by other magical actions such as breaking a coconut by using teeth, frying eggs on the head by using a stove made of the skin of coconut, cutting of parts of the body with sharp objects, burning the body, eating some pieces of glass or porcelain, climbing stairs made of sharp machete (*golok tajam*), etc. (Nakip, 2011 and Hadiningrat, 1982:62-66).

The function of *debus* has changed. In the past, it was used for spreading Islam and for boosting the morale of the Banten soldiers fighting against the VOC. Nowadays *debus* functions as a traditional art performed for entertainment, not only for the local society, but also for people outside Banten, even internationally. As such it can be a media to strengthen the relationship, especially in the tourism and culture sector, between Indonesia and other countries.

### Conclusion

Magic is a part of human's culture which exists not only in a primitive society, but also in the modern one. It will still exist as long as man believes that there is a great power beyond him that can influence and alter the universe.

If we look at the magical and religious reality practiced by most of the Bantenese society, it is probably caused by the impact of *da'wah* (religious proselytizing) conducted by the propagators (*muallim* or *da'i*) who, either consciously or unconsciously, tried to accommodate several Islamic teachings with local traditions that were professed by the Bantenese. Because the propagators knew that the Bantenese people were fond of occult sciences, they tried to disseminate Islam by using magical techniques. As a result, several Bantenese were interested in Islamic teachings as long as they were not seen as eliminating their local culture.

*Debus*, the cultivation of invulnerability to fire and sharp metal objects, is the most conspicuous representative of the magical tradition of Banten since the sultanate period until the present. In the past, this performance was used by the sultan to boost the morale of the Bantenese soldiers fighting against the VOC (Dutch East India Company). Nowadays *debus* functions as traditional art performed for entertainment purposes, not only for the local society, but also for people from outside Banten and even outside Indonesia.

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### Interview

- Interview with K.H. J.M., a kyai of pesantren 'Sabilu Rosyad in Batu Kuwung, Padarincang, Banten. [interviewed on July 25<sup>th</sup> 2008].
- Interview with K.H. Ma'sum Daenury, a religious figure or ulama from Banten (Barugbug, Serang), [interviewed on August 5<sup>th</sup> 2010].
- Interview with K.H. A.S., a kyai of pesantren in Ciomas Serang Banten, [interviewed on August 5<sup>th</sup> 2009].
- Interview with Mashadi, an ex-*santri* of *Pesantren Mambaul Huda al-Halimy*, in Barugbug, Serang, Banten. [interviewed on August 23<sup>rd</sup> 2010].