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| **Dialectic of Politics and Spirituality in the Islamic Thought of Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti JenaR** |
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| **Abstract** |
| *This study aims to critically examine the differences in Islamic thought and political orientation between two central figures of the Walisongo, namely Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar, who have thus far been predominantly studied from the perspectives of da'wah and mysticism alone. Sunan Gunung Jati is known for his structured approach to da'wah and power-oriented strategy, while Syekh Siti Jenar offers an egalitarian spirituality that liberates from socio-religious domination. This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach based on literature review, using a historical and contextual hermeneutic framework to explore the differences in Islamic thought and political orientation between the two figures. The study shows that the thoughts of Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar represent two major paradigms in local Islam: the integrative approach and the emancipatory approach. Sunan Gunung Jati integrates Islam with political power and culture to form a stable socio-political order. In contrast, Syekh Siti Jenar emphasizes spiritual liberation and rejects the domination of external authority, presenting a form of Islam that is egalitarian and reflective. The dialectic between the two becomes an important legacy in shaping the plural and contextual character of Islam in the Indonesian Archipelago.* |
| **Keywords:** | *Islam Nusantara, Islamic Thougt, Political Orientation, Sunan Gunung Jati, Syekh Siti Jenar* |

**Introduction**

Studies on the teachings and Islamic mysticism within the Walisongo tradition have been widely conducted by scholars. They have explored and published various historical data on the major role of the Walisongo saints in the Islamization of the Indonesian Archipelago. However, amid the abundance of literature focusing on the da'wah and Sufi aspects of Walisongo, in-depth studies discussing the dialectics of thought and political orientation among its figures remain relatively rare. In fact, the intellectual richness of the Islamic heritage in the archipelago lies not only in its spiritual values but also in the diversity of perspectives on power, leadership, and the social structures that were either built or critiqued by these figures.

This study seeks to examine the differing views and da'wah strategies of two prominent and contrasting Walisongo figures: Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar. Sunan Gunung Jati is known as both a religious and political leader, who utilized power to strengthen institutional da'wah. In contrast, Syekh Siti Jenar emerged as an independent Sufi closely associated with the lower social classes, advocating for egalitarian spiritual liberation and often regarded as challenging the established socio-religious order. These differences in social positioning and da'wah approaches shaped the nature of their Islamic thought—both in delivering teachings and in interpreting the relationship between humans, religion, and power.

The contemporary condition of Muslim society in the digital era further reinforces the urgency of this kind of study. In a time when religious lectures are easily accessible, social media often reproduces religious figures that contribute to the polarization of Islamic understanding. In this context, revisiting the thoughts of two historical yet still relevant figures—Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar—is an important step in offering alternative Islamic narratives that are peaceful, reflective, and grounded in local wisdom.

The success of the Walisongo’s da'wah in the past cannot be separated from the Sufi teachings they carried—teachings that were flexible, dialogical, and easily embraced by the public. In this regard, Sunan Gunung Jati developed a structural approach through the Syattariyah Sufi order, while Syekh Siti Jenar adhered to an individualistic Sufistic path through the Akmaliyah order, representing two distinct expressions of Islam in responding to tradition, authority, and spirituality. These differences are important to reexamine, especially in today’s Indonesian Islam, which tends to be normative and lacks space for transformative spirituality.

This study focuses on exploring how the differences in Islamic thought and political orientation between Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar are manifested in their actions, teachings, and social strategies. By tracing their social backgrounds, traditional texts, and religious expressions, this study aims to contribute to a more inclusive, historically grounded, and contextually relevant understanding of Islam Nusantara for the dynamics of today’s Muslim society.

**Method**

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach based on library research, using the historical method as its primary framework. The stages of this method include the selection of research subjects, heuristic (data collection), source verification, interpretation, and historiography. The main objective is to explore and analyse the nature of Islamic thought and political orientation developed by Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar within their socio-historical context, by tracing textual records, discourses, social actions, and religious dynamics in 15th–16th century Javanese Muslim society.

**Data Collection**

Primary data sources include classical manuscripts and local historiographical documents such as *Purwaka Caruban Nagari*, *Serat Siti Jenar*, as well as oral historical accounts and living traditions in the Cirebon community. Secondary data are obtained from contemporary academic literature discussing Walisongo thought, Nusantara Sufism, the relationship between Islamic scholars and rulers, as well as Islamic social and political theory. These texts are not only treated as normative sources but also as representations of power structures, social conflict, and the unique cultural expressions of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago.

**Data Analysis**

The research process follows the historical method in five stages: (1) selecting the subjects of study, namely Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar, (2) heuristic—collecting both primary and secondary sources, (3) verifying the credibility and validity of sources, (4) interpreting texts within their social and theological contexts, and (5) composing historiographical narratives that reflect the intellectual and socio-political roles of the two figures. The interpretation phase uses a contextual hermeneutic approach to examine the symbols, doctrines, and spiritual-political practices developed by both figures.

This analytical framework is reinforced by a critical reading of the socio-political dynamics in the context of local Sufism and da'wah. Sunan Gunung Jati’s integration within the royal structure of the Cirebon Sultanate reflects an institutional and formal character, while Syekh Siti Jenar’s position outside the official system represents a discourse of liberation and resistance against centralized authority. Therefore, this study not only analyzes textual sources but also observes social dynamics, cultural expressions, and symbolic strategies as forms of ideological communication and struggle.

In the context of Islamic political thought, the study is guided by the concept of *ri‘āyah syu’ūn al-ummah* (safeguarding the affairs of the Muslim community), as formulated by Muslim thinkers such as Din Syamsuddin and Azyumardi Azra, and further supported by the theoretical framework of Eickelman and Piscatori, who view Islamic politics as a religious social practice. Sunan Gunung Jati is analyzed through an integrative approach between religion and politics, while Syekh Siti Jenar is interpreted as a symbol of resistance and opposition to hegemonic power. This interpretive method is crucial in understanding the symbolic meanings in their teachings, such as *petatah-petitih*, the concept of *manunggaling kawula-Gusti*, Sufi orders, and communication strategies that reflect two contrasting yet complementary patterns of Islamic thought in the historical tradition of Islam in the archipelago.

**Findings and Discussion**

The historical and socio-cultural context of Cirebon plays a crucial role in understanding the dialectic of Islamic thought between two prominent Nusantara figures: Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar. Although they lived during the same period, they occupied vastly different social positions. Sunan Gunung Jati, also known as Syarif Hidayatullah, was a scholar and noble of the Prophet Muhammad's lineage who succeeded in uniting religious and political authority through the establishment of the Islamic Sultanate of Cirebon. He was appointed Sultan to succeed Prince Cakrabuana and gained legitimacy from the Demak Sultanate. With a broad Islamic education from Mecca, Egypt, Pasai, and East Java, he built a system of governance grounded in Islamic values and propagated it through a network of Islamic learning and culturally familiar methods for the local population.

In contrast, Syekh Siti Jenar emerged as a Sufi figure outside the official structures of power. In classical manuscripts such as *Serat Siti Jenar*, *Kropak Ferrara*, and *Negara Kretabhumi*, he is portrayed as a spiritual teacher who conveyed the concept of divine-human unity through *manunggaling kawula-Gusti*. Unlike Sunan Gunung Jati, who was accepted by the political elite and integrated into the governmental system, Syekh Siti Jenar was considered deviant and controversial. However, among the common people (*wong cilik*), he was seen as a symbol of spiritual liberation who opposed social domination and the unequal relationship between the people and the ruling class. He is believed to have had a strong Sufi background, having studied in Baghdad, and returned to Java to spread a more esoteric and transformative form of Islam.

This divergence in social backgrounds significantly influenced how each figure was positioned within society. Sunan Gunung Jati was widely accepted due to his dual legitimacy—both religious and political—which made his teachings more easily institutionalized. He utilized local language and cultural symbols, including *petatah-petitih* (traditional proverbs), as da'wah tools and incorporated traditions like *Panjang Jimat* and *Sekaten* to integrate Islamic values into local cultural practices. In his role as sultan, his teachings held not only spiritual weight but also served as binding socio-political norms.

Meanwhile, Syekh Siti Jenar received a more ambivalent reception. On one hand, he was respected by the lower classes for emphasizing equality and spiritual freedom. He even used the term *ingsung* to refer to himself—a term typically reserved for nobility in feudal culture. This was a symbolic act of resistance against the hierarchical social structure. His disciples, such as Ki Cantula and Ki Lontang Semarang, also exhibited non-cooperative attitudes toward royal authority, reinforcing the egalitarian spirit they championed. On the other hand, religious elites and political rulers deemed his teachings dangerous for disrupting the established social order, with some records stating that he was eventually executed by the Walisongo for allegedly spreading heretical ideas.

Thus, the differing social and political positions of Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar reflect two opposing models of Islamic preaching and thought. Sunan Gunung Jati developed a structural and integrative approach, harmonizing da'wah with political authority and local culture. In contrast, Syekh Siti Jenar emphasized individual spiritual transformation, seeking to liberate humans from dependence on external authority and deconstruct oppressive social constructs. Cirebon at that time became a space of dialectical tension between two major poles of Islamic thought—between power and resistance, structural formality and transformative spirituality, institutional acceptance and social defiance.

**Islamic Thought of Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar**

The Islamic thought developed by Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar reflects two sharply contrasting models of da'wah and religious worldview. They represent two major poles within the spectrum of Islam in the archipelago: Sunan Gunung Jati’s thinking is rooted in a structural and political approach that emphasizes social development through cultural authority and power, whereas Syekh Siti Jenar’s thought arises from a deeply personal spiritual drive that stresses inner liberation and esoteric awareness. These differences are not merely about methods of religious propagation but also concern their distinct social and political orientations.

Sunan Gunung Jati is recognized as a figure who combined religious authority with political leadership. He conveyed Islamic teachings through grounded cultural and symbolic approaches, employing local idioms and cultural values familiar to the people of Cirebon. One of his primary tools of da'wah was petatah-petitih, wise sayings rich in moral, spiritual, and social values. These sayings served not only as personal guidance but also as an effective cultural instrument for shaping social life.

The following six groups of petatah-petitih illustrate the breadth and depth of Sunan Gunung Jati’s da'wah vision:

1. Teachings on spirituality and piety

"Ingsung titipna tajug lan fakir miskin. Yen sembahyang kungsi tertaling gundewa. Ibadah kang tetap. Manah den syukur lan Allah. Kudu ngakehaken pertobat." I entrust to you the mosque and the poor. When praying, be strong like a drawn bowstring. Worship must be consistent. Let the heart be grateful to Allah. Repent often.

1. Teachings on social ethics and discipline

"Aja nyindra mubarang. Pemboraban kang ora patut anulungi. Aja ngaji kejayaan kang ala rautah." Do not break promises. Do not defend what is wrong. Do not seek knowledge for dishonest gain.

1. Teachings on life wisdom and personal morality

“Singkirna sifat kanden wanci. Duweha sifat kang wanti. Amapesa ing bina batan. Angadahna ing perpadu. Aja ilok ngamad kang durung yakin. Aja ilok gawe bobat. Kenana ing hajate wong. Aja dahar yen during ngeli. Aja nginum yen during ngelok. Aja turu yen during ketaken arif. Yen kaya den luhur. Aja ilok rarohi ing wong. Den bisa megeng ing nafsu. Angasana diri. Tepo saliro dan adol. Ngoletena rejeki sing halal. Aja akeh kang den pamrih. Den suka wenan lan suka memberih gelis lipur. Gegunem sifat kang panuji. Aja ilok gawe lara ati ing wong. Ake lara ati, namung saking duriat. Aja ngagungaken ing salira. Aja ujub ria suma takabur. Aja duwe ati ngunek.” Avoid bad traits, control desires, respect others, seek halal sustenance, and refrain from arrogance, hypocrisy, or vengeance. Religion is rooted in self-discipline and sincerity.

1. Teachings on courtesy and social relationships

"Den hormat ing wong tua. Den hormat ing leluhur. Hormaten, emanen, mulyaken ing pusaka. Den welas asih ing sapapada. Mulyakeun ing tetamu." Respect your parents and ancestors. Honor, cherish, and preserve heritage. Love fellow beings. Honor guests.

1. Teachings on caution in public life

“Aja anglakoni lunga haji ing Makkah. Aja munggah gunung gede utawa manjing ing kawah. Aja ngimami atau khotbah ing masjid agung. Aja dagangan atawa warunga. Aja kunga layaran iang lautan.” Do not go on pilgrimage to Mecca without readiness. Do not become a preacher or trader without adequate knowledge or purpose.

1. Teachings on self-awareness and eternal wisdom

“Lamun sira kepingin wikan marang alam zaman kelanggengan, sira kudu weruh alamira pribadi. Lamun sira during mikani alamira pribadi adoh ketemune. Yen sira wus mikane alamira pribadi, mara sira mulanga marang wong kang during wikan. Lamun sira wus mikani alamira pribadi, mara sira mulanga gengan iku cedhak tanpa senggolan, adah tanpa wangenan. Lamun sira during wikan alamira pribadi, mara takona marang wang kang wus wikan. Lamun sira during wikan kadangira pribadi, coba dulunen sira pribadi. Kadangira pribadi ora beda karo jeneng sia pribadi, gelem nyambut gawe.” To understand eternal life, first know your inner self. Without self-knowledge, the divine will remain distant. With it, you must teach others. Your inner being is your true companion.

These petatah-petitih show that Sunan Gunung Jati developed a da'wah model deeply integrated with societal life, embedding Islamic values through local traditions rich in meaning. He did not distance himself from power structures; instead, he utilized them as platforms for da'wah and social development. Traditions such as Panjang Jimat and Sekaten illustrate how Islamic teachings were culturally and symbolically internalized rather than enforced through ideological uniformity.

On the other hand, Syekh Siti Jenar positioned himself as a spiritual figure who rejected structural approaches to religion and emphasized the importance of inner consciousness free from institutionalization. His core teaching, manunggaling kawula-Gusti (the unity of servant and Lord), asserts that humans are essentially one with God. This doctrine places spirituality at the centre of religiosity, independent of social intermediaries or formal religious institutions. His rejection of socio-political hierarchy reflects a commitment to individual spiritual freedom. Jenar advocated a personal-transformational approach, believing that divine truth is found through authentic inner search without external spiritual guides. Consequently, his teachings resonated widely among marginalized groups and wong cilik (commoners), who were often excluded from dominant religious institutions. He emphasized that true religiosity lies in the purification of the soul, not in ritual formalism.

According to Abdul Munir Mulkhan, Syekh Siti Jenar’s thought can be categorized into core concepts about God, humanity, life, death, and the path to divine knowledge. His teachings emphasize ma‘rifah—direct spiritual knowledge—over adherence to formal rituals. This view became popular among the lower classes for its message of equality and freedom from religious authority. Mulkhan calls this “Siti Jenar’s gnosis,” deeply rooted in the social consciousness of abangan communities. In his theology, as studied by Mulkhan and cited by Sudirman Tebba, Syekh Siti Jenar portrayed humans as manifestations of the Divine Essence. God, though invisible, is present as radiant light. He possesses twenty primary attributes all united in one Absolute Being. His teaching aligns with the martabat tujuh (seven stages of being), in which the entire universe is a tajalli (manifestation) of God’s essence, with humans as the most perfect form.

In his anthropology, Syekh Siti Jenar stated that each person possesses a divine nature (al-insān al-kāmil), as God's representative on earth (khalīfah Allāh fī al-ardh). The divine spirit breathed into humans is the source of their sanctity and dignity. However, humans are also faced with worldly desires, which must be subdued through the greater jihad—the struggle against the self. Awareness of humanity’s role as khalifah demands obedience to divine laws grounded in revelation and the Prophet’s example. His cosmology views the universe as a macrocosm parallel to humans as microcosms. Both were created by God and will eventually perish. The physical body is a temporary vessel for the divine spirit. Therefore, death is seen as the return of the soul to God, leaving behind the mortal body as a perishable creation to be returned to its Creator.

Through his ideas about divinity, humanity, and the cosmos, Syekh Siti Jenar built a spiritual system that integrates self-awareness, the meaning of existence, and life’s purpose within a framework of radical yet liberating Islamic mysticism. He rejected formalism, championed inner freedom, and offered a worldview in which humans are centres of divine reflection. In the socio-religious context of the archipelago, Jenar’s thought serves as a sharp critique of power structures and offers an alternative voice for those seeking true spiritual freedom beyond official religious hegemony. Thus, the difference in thought and approach between Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar is not merely about contrasting da'wah styles, but about ideological foundations concerning how Islam should be lived, taught, and interpreted in both social and spiritual realms. One built institution as a vehicle for da'wah; the other dismantled structures for inner liberation. Their encounter in the history of Islam in the archipelago reflects the rich, contextual, and enduringly relevant dynamics of Islamic thought.

**The Paradigm of Islamic Politics: Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar**

Sunan Gunung Jati's da'wah was not limited to the Cirebon region but extended to various inland areas of the Sundanese land, such as Luragung, Kuningan, Sindangkasih, Rajagaluh, Talaga, Ukur, Cibalagung, Tasikmalaya, Sumedang, Garut, Bandung, and Cianjur, with Cirebon as the central hub of propagation. Since 1528, he fully dedicated himself to spreading Islam. Although initially met with resistance from local rulers, in time, regional regents in Galuh, Sukapura, and Limbangan accepted Islam and respected him as a spiritual and political figure. His influence expanded not only geographically but also became deeply embedded within the surrounding socio-political structures. He is regarded as the founding figure of the Cirebon Sultanate dynasty, integrating religious leadership with political power.

As noted by Djajaningrat and Ekadjati, Sunan Gunung Jati’s da'wah method involved forging strategic relationships with local rulers. His approach was not confrontational, but cooperative and diplomatic, making the Islamization process more effective. By securing control over local political authority, Islamic propagation was able to advance more widely and gain broader acceptance. For Sunan Gunung Jati, attaining political power was not the goal, but a means to reinforce the spread of Islam. Additionally, as a sultan, he prioritized economic development through an extensive trading network, both within the archipelago and with countries such as Champa, Malacca, China, India, and Arabia. His administration was systematically organized by appointing relatives and religious scholars to governmental positions, marking his success in managing the state while promoting da'wah.

As the first figure to lay the foundation for the Islamic political system in Cirebon, Sunan Gunung Jati ruled from 1479 to 1568 CE. His leadership adopted a model of religious authority in which political power was seen as a manifestation of divine will. In this paradigm, the ruler was not only a worldly leader but also a mediator between the microcosm (human) and the macrocosm (the universe), granting spiritual legitimacy to governmental policies. Sunan Gunung Jati’s political thought positioned power as an instrument for da'wah—by holding socio-political authority, he could disseminate Islam more systematically and broadly. Strengthening the economic sector and trade networks formed the foundation of this political da'wah strategy.

The Islamic paradigm developed by Nusantara scholars—particularly Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar—reflects the complex relationship between spirituality, power, and societal formation. Sunan Gunung Jati presented himself as a figure who unified religious and political authority. After succeeding Prince Cakrabuana and gaining legitimacy from the Demak Sultanate, he promoted Islam through educational institutions, governmental bureaucracy, and trade routes. His da'wah strategy was conveyed not only through formal systems and structures but also through oral wisdoms or *petatah-petitih* that carried moral and spiritual messages. These expressions reinforced his influence within society, not through repression, but by building cultural legitimacy deeply rooted in local traditions. This approach earned Sunan Gunung Jati reverence as both a spiritual and political leader and symbolized the success of Islamic propagation that was adaptive to the socio-cultural context of Cirebon and its surroundings.

In contrast, Syekh Siti Jenar offered a Sufi approach that was critical of formal power. He chose not to place himself within the royal system but became a spiritual educator who directly engaged with the lower classes. His central teaching—*manunggaling kawula-Gusti*—emphasized the essential unity between human and God, serving as a strong critique of social and political hierarchy. He rejected feudal structures and symbols of authority that suppressed inner freedom. In this context, his and his followers' use of the term *ingsung* (a Javanese term for “I,” traditionally reserved for nobility) was a symbolic rejection of social inequality. At the time, commoners were expected to refer to themselves as *kawula* (servant). Syekh Siti Jenar’s political paradigm was culturally transformative; instead of creating formal institutions, he fostered spiritual awareness grounded in values of equality and liberation. His teachings spread widely among marginalized communities who felt excluded from dominant religious structures, evolving into a school of thought that dismantled the singular narrative of power and opened space for an egalitarian and liberating spirituality.

Syekh Siti Jenar’s political ideas can be traced through two key concepts: *ingsung* and *society*. In Javanese language, *ingsung* (or *ingsun*) means “I,” and was socially restricted to aristocracy. Yet, Syekh Siti Jenar broke this linguistic hierarchy, as noted by Manungwijaya in *Serat Siti Jenar* (1917), when he used “ingsung” openly in front of emissaries from the Demak Sultanate—an act of defiance against the subordinated social identity of *kawula*. Similar defiance was shown by his disciples, such as Ki Cantula and Ki Lontang Semarang, who referred to themselves as “ingsung” when addressing prominent figures like Prince Bayat, Syekh Domba, and Kangjeng Maulana Maghribi. This usage was seen as an act of resistance against the prevailing social-political order, and an expression of the courage to advocate for true human equality before God.

Furthermore, Syekh Siti Jenar’s ideas on society reflect a renewal of political thought within the framework of *siyāsah al-shar‘iyyah*. He rejected the *kawula-gusti* system, which subordinated the people to rulers, and proposed a new societal model based on *ummah*—as exemplified by Prophet Muhammad in the early Yathrib community. This vision materialized in the founding of a new settlement in Caruban Larang, designed as a form of social experimentation. The social structure he developed blended the Islamic concept of *ummah* with Javanese cultural realities. He organized society in a triangular form consisting of *qaum*, *ṭā’ifah*, and *qābilah*, centered on the idea of *ṭabaqah* or social layers, suggesting a pluralistic social system while maintaining spiritual equality.

Through his use of *ingsung* and his vision of a society rooted in the *ummah*, Syekh Siti Jenar emerges as a champion of egalitarian values in both socio-political and spiritual contexts. He dismantled feudalism and planted the seeds of equality—values that continue to resonate within Javanese culture. Even the term *ingsun* has transcended its aristocratic origins and become part of a collective consciousness affirming the equal dignity of all individuals. The fundamental difference between the approaches of Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar reflects two models of influence and leadership in the Islamic tradition of the archipelago: one based on state structures and political legitimacy, the other rooted in inner transformation and social critique. Though seemingly opposed, both made significant contributions to the religious dynamics of the archipelago, enriching the legacy of local Islam with diverse approaches that remain dialogical, historical, and relevant today.

**Spirituality as a Reflection of Religious Politics**

The differing spiritual approaches of Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar reflect not only two forms of religiosity, but also two paradigms in viewing the relationship between Islam, power, and society. Sunan Gunung Jati chose the Shattariyah Sufi order, which emphasizes the central role of a mursyid (spiritual guide) as an authoritative figure within a structured hierarchy. This choice was closely linked to his dual role as both sultan and scholar, enabling him to integrate political authority with spiritual leadership. Through an institutionalized system of religious education and pengguron (traditional mentorship), he established a dual legitimacy: as a respected ruler and as an obeyed religious leader. In this context, the Sufi order became a vehicle for cultivating collective piety and maintaining a stable social order based on loyalty to a central authority.

Sunan Gunung Jati’s skill in contextualizing Islamic teachings is also reflected in his use of petatah-petitih—traditional Javanese-Cirebonese maxims or advice that convey the essence of Islamic teachings. This strategy was highly effective in reaching the common people, who generally had no access to Islamic literature in Arabic. By using local language, he simplified Islamic teachings into moral and spiritual messages that were easy to understand and widely accepted. His success was not solely due to his status as a Wali Quthb or sultan, but also to his deep understanding of mass psychology and his ability to tailor his da'wah strategies to the cultural needs of Cirebon society and beyond.

In contrast, Syekh Siti Jenar pursued a more personal and transformative approach through the Akmaliyah Sufi order. He rejected the concept of the mursyid as an authoritative figure, instead emphasizing the importance of inner spiritual awareness as the true guide. His concept of the “invisible mursyid” (mursyid gaib) was a critique of religious structures that he saw as restricting human spiritual freedom. His teachings were egalitarian, anti-hierarchical, and focused on the individual’s freedom to establish a direct relationship with God. Although the language and Sufi symbols he used were complex and often difficult for laypeople to understand, his ideas found resonance among the abangan (non-orthodox Muslims) or wong cilik (commoners), due to his closeness to social groups marginalized by formal religious institutions.

Nevertheless, Syekh Siti Jenar’s teachings became most widely known through his controversial doctrine of ma‘rifah (inner gnosis), particularly the concept of manunggaling kawula-Gusti (the mystical union of servant and Lord), which was at times interpreted as total identification of the self with God. Stories describing him as claiming “I am Allah” (Aku-Allah) created challenges in the public acceptance of his teachings, especially among the uneducated masses. Unlike Sunan Gunung Jati, who grounded Islamic teachings in local symbolic language, Syekh Siti Jenar emerged as a more "transcendental" spiritual figure, whose ideas could only be fully understood by those with advanced Sufi knowledge.

These differences highlight two major currents in the dynamics of Islam in the archipelago: the structural-institutional current represented by Sunan Gunung Jati, and the spiritual-existential current advanced by Syekh Siti Jenar. One sought to build a social order based on authority and cultural symbols, while the other challenged authority and emphasized spiritual freedom as a form of religious autonomy. In this context, the Sufi order became an arena of contestation between power and consciousness, between the construction of an orderly society and the liberation of the authentic soul. Together, they represent the rich and dynamic dialectic of Islam in the archipelago—an ever-evolving tradition that embraces diversity of thought and the potential for continual intellectual and spiritual transformation.

**The Political-Spiritual Dialectic of Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar**

The thoughts of Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar played a crucial role in shaping the character of Islamic religiosity among the people of Cirebon and its surrounding regions, despite their highly different approaches in terms of ideology, da'wah strategies, and political orientation. Sunan Gunung Jati localized Islamic teachings by integrating them with existing power structures and local culture. In texts such as Purwaka Caruban Nagari and various oral traditions, he is portrayed as employing an inclusive and accommodative preaching method, blending Islamic teachings with Javanese-Cirebonese cultural symbols such as petatah-petitih (wise sayings) and the pengguron (teacher-disciple) system. This cultural approach formed institutionalized social norms and presented Islam as not only a spiritual but also a political force. The figure of the leader functioned both as a ruler and as a religious scholar and mursyid (spiritual guide).

In contrast, Syekh Siti Jenar chose a spiritual path that diverged sharply. He rejected the institutionalization of Islam within political structures and emphasized a Sufi approach that prioritized individual spiritual awareness. His teaching on manunggaling kawula-Gusti (the mystical union of servant and Lord) was not only a mystical expression but also a critique of the sociopolitical domination that suppressed inner spiritual freedom. He did not position himself as a formal authority but immersed himself among the common people as a messenger of liberation and equality. His radical views were seen as disruptive to the established religious and political order, and in some historical texts, he was constructed as a deviant and troublesome figure in the eyes of the authorities.

These two approaches reflect differing orientations in interpreting Islamic propagation. Sunan Gunung Jati followed an institutional path, building a structured da'wah system integrated with political power. His closeness to the Demak Sultanate and the Walisongo network strengthened both his spiritual and social legitimacy. His approach emphasized order, social stability, and continuity of tradition. Meanwhile, Syekh Siti Jenar represented a "grassroots" figure who promoted egalitarian spirituality, targeting marginalized communities untouched by formal religious institutions. In this sense, Islam appeared as a transformative force from below rather than imposed from above.

From an epistemological standpoint, Sunan Gunung Jati’s thought can be seen as systemic and pragmatic. He unified politics and religion to create an orderly society governed by spiritual and political authority. He even developed political-economic power to support his da'wah mission, building trade and diplomatic networks with Champa, Malacca, China, India, and Arabia. For him, Islam was not only a moral doctrine but also the foundation of civilization. In contrast, Syekh Siti Jenar emphasized inner experience as the center of divine consciousness. He rejected external authority, including the traditional mursyid, instead promoting the concept of a “hidden guide” (mursyid gaib)—an inner spiritual awareness that directs individuals toward truth.

This paradigmatic difference is also evident in their educational methods. Sunan Gunung Jati built a structured system of religious instruction centered around the figure of a teacher or mursyid as the locus of legitimacy. The pengguron functioned as a center of knowledge transmission and social consolidation. In contrast, Syekh Siti Jenar did not establish formal educational institutions but emphasized personal spiritual journeys and direct experiential encounters with truth. This model produced a reflective form of Islam, free from rigid structures and open to critical consciousness among society.

Analyzed from the perspective of Islamic politics (siyāsah shar‘iyyah), Sunan Gunung Jati used power as a tool for da'wah. The subjugation of local rulers was not intended for political domination alone but was part of a peaceful Islamization process. Political power was subordinate to the goals of da’wah yet still utilized optimally to strengthen Islamic dissemination. On the other hand, Syekh Siti Jenar initiated political reform from below through a societal concept based on the principle of ummah, rejecting the hierarchical kawula-Gusti relationship and replacing it with an egalitarian social order. In this perspective, Siti Jenar's teachings were not only spiritual but also political, as they contained a strong critique of unjust power relations.

In the contemporary context, the thoughts of these two figures represent two faces of Islam in Indonesia. Sunan Gunung Jati embodies an institutionalized Islam embedded in the social and state systems—an Islam that is well-structured and established. In contrast, Syekh Siti Jenar represents Islam as consciousness—a path of inner liberation and a critique of the status quo. Together, they contribute an important dialectic in shaping the character of Islam Nusantara: between structure and movement, authority and awareness, social organization and spiritual autonomy.

Thus, the difference between Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar is not merely about preaching methods or Sufi orders but reflects the tension between two grand paradigms in local Islamic history: the integrative paradigm and the emancipatory paradigm. Though seemingly at odds, both enrich the dynamic and multivocal discourse of Islam Nusantara. Their intellectual legacies are not only essential for understanding local history but also serve as a reflection on the diverse models of religiosity that remain relevant in today’s plural and ever-changing society.

**Conclusion**

The thoughts of Sunan Gunung Jati and Syekh Siti Jenar reflect two major paradigms in the historical development of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago: the integrative paradigm and the emancipatory paradigm. Sunan Gunung Jati exemplified a model of da'wah that systematically combined Islamic spirituality with political power and local culture. Through a structured and accommodative approach, he positioned Islam as the social foundation that governed community life while simultaneously reinforcing the legitimacy of the Cirebon Sultanate. The figure of a leader who also served as a scholar and mursyid fostered stability, continuity of tradition, and institutionalized collective piety. This approach demonstrates that Islamic propagation does not always have to be confrontational but can progress in harmony with established power structures and social institutions.

In contrast, Syekh Siti Jenar presented a more radical, egalitarian, and personal model of religiosity. He rejected the formalization of power within religion and emphasized inner awareness as the path to divine truth. Through his teaching of manunggaling kawula-Gusti, he voiced a call for spiritual liberation from hierarchical social domination, offering an interpretation of Islam that was grounded in the everyday lives of the common people. This emancipatory paradigm served as an alternative voice that challenged the status quo and stressed the importance of existential sincerity in practicing religion. Although they differed in methods and orientation, both figures enriched the legacy of Islam in Indonesia. Their intellectual heritage is not only historically significant but also remains relevant today as a reflection of the ongoing dynamic between power and consciousness, between institution and freedom, in the evolution of Islam.

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