

CRITICAL APPROACH OF GUS BABA TO SHEIKH SITI JENAR'S THOUGHT IN THE NUSANTARA TAFSIR METHODOLOGY

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Abstract: Sheikh Siti Jenar's thoughts on *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* often cause controversy in the Nusantara Islamic tradition, especially related to the concept of *wahdatul wujud*, which is considered to equate humans with God. KH Ahmad Bahaiddin Nursalim (Gus Baba), as one of the contemporary scholars of Nusantara, provides criticism of this thought through a unique interpretive approach in the Nusantara interpretation methodology. This study uses a qualitative approach with literature studies and text analysis of Gus Baba's works and relevant sources on Nusantara interpretation and Sufism. The *ijmālī* and contextual interpretation approaches applied by Gus Baba are also analyzed to understand his criticism of Sheikh Siti Jenar. This paper aims to describe and analyze Gus Baba's critical approach to Sheikh Siti Jenar's thoughts in Nusantara interpretation. The research results show that Gus Baba rejects claims that contradict sharia, particularly the teachings of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*, emphasizing the importance of balancing sharia and the essence of Islam Nusantara. Gus Baba's approach, which prioritizes contextualization and accessible language, makes his interpretations relevant to the people of the archipelago.

Keywords: Gus Baba, *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*, Sheikh Siti Jenar, Sufism, Tafsir Nusantara, *Wahdah al-Wujūd*.

Abstrak: Pemikiran Syekh Siti Jenar tentang *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* sering menimbulkan kontroversi dalam tradisi keislaman Nusantara, khususnya terkait dengan konsep *wahdatul wujud* yang dianggap menyamakan manusia dengan Tuhan. K.H. Ahmad Bahaiddin Nursalim (Gus Baba), sebagai salah satu ulama kontemporer Nusantara, memberikan kritik terhadap pemikiran tersebut melalui pendekatan tafsir yang khas dalam metodologi tafsir Nusantara. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan studi literatur dan analisis teks terhadap karya-karya Gus Baba dan sumber-sumber yang relevan mengenai tafsir dan tasawuf Nusantara. Pendekatan tafsir *ijmālī* dan kontekstual yang diterapkan oleh Gus Baba juga dianalisis untuk memahami cara kritiknya terhadap Syekh Siti Jenar. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan dan menganalisis

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pendekatan kritis Gus Baha terhadap pemikiran Syekh Siti Jenar dalam tafsir Nusantara. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Gus Baha menolak klaim-klaim yang bertentangan dengan syariat, khususnya ajaran *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*, dengan menekankan pentingnya keseimbangan antara aspek syariat dan hakikat dalam Islam Nusantara. Pendekatan Gus Baha yang mengedepankan kontekstualisasi dan bahasa yang mudah dipahami membuat tafsirnya relevan dengan masyarakat Nusantara.

Kata-kata Kunci: *Gus Baha, Manunggaling Kawula Gusti, Syekh Siti Jenar, Tafsir Nusantara, Tasawuf, Wahdah al-Wujūd.*

Introduction

The study of Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia has undergone significant development, particularly with the emergence of a distinctive Nusantara style of interpretation that is adaptive to the local socio-cultural context. Nusantara interpretation is not merely a literal interpretation of the Qur'anic text but also prioritizes a hermeneutic approach that takes into account the diverse historical, cultural, and social contexts of Indonesian society. Therefore, the study of Qur'anic hermeneutics is becoming increasingly relevant as an interpretative method capable of bridging the classical text with contemporary realities.¹

Hermeneutics is etymologically derived from the Greek word *hermeneuein*, meaning “to interpret” or “to interpret.” In the context of Qur'anic studies, hermeneutics refers to the process of understanding and interpreting the revealed text by taking into account various contextual aspects so that the meaning contained can be presented vividly and relevantly.² The hermeneutic approach avoids rigid and dogmatic interpretations by creating a space for dialogue among the text, the interpreter, and the socio-cultural context in which the interpretation is carried out. Qur'anic hermeneutics developed by modern and contemporary scholars, such as Naṣr Ḥamid Abū Zayd, has emphasized the importance of reading the Qur'an with a critical and contextual method so that one can discover moral and legal messages appropriate to the times.³

In the Nusantara tradition, Qur'anic interpretation takes on a distinctive character, emphasizing local cultural values while adhering to the principles

1 Lilik Faiqoh, “Vernakularisasi dalam Tafsir Nusantara: Kajian Atas Tafsir Faid al-Rahman Karya KH. Sholeh Darat al-Samarani,” *Living Islam: Journal of Islamic Discourses* 1, no. 1 (2018): 85, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ljid.v1i1.1247>; Erlan Dwi Cahyo, “Ushul Tafsir and Qawaid Tafsir Nusantara: A Review of Nawawi Al Bantani’s Book of Tafsir Marah Labid,” *Syariati: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur’an dan Hukum* 8, no. 2 (2023): 153–62, <https://doi.org/10.32699/syariati.v8i2.4249>.

2 Faisal Haitomi, “Menimbang Hermeneutika Sebagai Mitra Tafsir,” *Nun: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Tafsir di Nusantara* 5, no. 2 (2020): 45–69, <https://doi.org/10.32495/nun.v5i2.90>; Naufalin Cahyaningsih Herlini, “Analisis Hermeneutika Pesan Dakwah Habib Husein Ja’far Al-Hadar di Channel Youtube Cahaya untuk Indonesia” (Skripsi, UIN Prof. K. H. Saifuddin Zuhri, 2023), <https://repository.uinsaiizu.ac.id/17753/>.

3 Nur Huda, Nur Hamid, and Muhammad Khoirul Misbah, “Konsep Wasathiyah M. Quraish Shihab dalam Tafsir Al-Misbah (Analisis Hermeneutika Hans-Georg Gadamer),” *International Journal Ihya’ Ulum al-Din* 22, no. 2 (2020): 198–231, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ihya.22.2.6768>.

of sharia and sufism. Therefore, Nusantara interpretation often integrates elements of sufism, local history, and socio-cultural values as part of a living Qur'anic interpretation process. One figure frequently referenced in Nusantara interpretation and sufism is Sheikh Siti Jenar, whose thinking is highly controversial. The concept of "*Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*" (The Unity of God), which he advocated, emphasized the essential unity between the servant and God, considered to obscure monotheism and giving rise to serious theological controversy in Indonesian Islamic history.⁴

Additionally, consider Sheikh Siti Jenar's mystical interpretation of Al-Fātiḥah. In Sheikh Siti Jenar's view, Al-Fātiḥah is one of the keys to the validity of those who practice the practice of unity of the people of *Ian Gusti* (worship). Therefore, one must understand the mystical meaning of Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah. According to Sheikh Siti Jenar, the recitation of Al-Fātiḥah is said to be the oldest recitation of all true words of the soul. Al-Fātiḥah means opening, namely by understanding and practicing Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah, one can open the true gateway to unity of the people of *Ian Gusti*.⁵

A critical approach to the thought of Sheikh Siti Jenar can then be seen in the tafsir developed by Gus Baha, a contemporary cleric who advocates a balance between the inner meaning of sufism and sharia law. Gus Baha attempts to mitigate the risk of extreme claims that could potentially lead to spiritual arrogance by emphasizing the understanding that, despite an inner closeness to God, humans remain created beings with existential limitations. This approach positions Gus Baha as an interpreter who employs the Nusantara tafsir methodology in a hermeneutic, moderate, and critical manner.

Gus Baha' does not verbally convey the presence of hermeneutic nuances in some of the interpretations he makes. However, in one of his sermons, he states that the text is a lifeless object. In some circumstances, it will not contribute anything to life or to the course of human thought independently. Therefore, reading the text literally without making any other efforts is equivalent to leading oneself into error. The text is a lifeless object. This is the mistake of the Khawārij. They read the Qur'an and understand it by focusing only on the text, without following the sayings of the scholars. The text must be accompanied by the sayings of the scholars. The text is not a methodology. The meaning of the text will remain as it is (Tabligh Kata Channel, 2019). Gus Baha' also often cautions his students and audiences not to understand the Qur'an only through its translation. The language of translation sometimes cannot represent the intended meaning of the text. Other

4 Rukiah Abdullah and Mahfudz Masduki, "Karakteristik Tafsir Nusantara (Studi Metodologis Atas Kitab Turjumun al-Mustafid Karya Syekh Abdurrauf al-Singkili)," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 16, no. 2 (2015): 141, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.2015.1602-01>; Mohammad Rafli, "Tinjauan Tafsir Ulama Nusantara dalam QS. An-Nur:32 tentang Perjudian Perspektif Trilogi Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI)" (Thesis, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, 2024), <http://etheses.uin-malang.ac.id/69339/>.

5 Dalhar Shodiq, Abdul Munir Mulkhan, and Sasrawijaya, *Intisari Ajaran Syekh Siti Jenar: Wibdatul Wujud dalam Pemikiran Islam-Jawa* (Yogyakarta: Narasi, 2015).

fields of knowledge are needed as support for achieving optimal understanding. Gus Baha consistently encourages Muslims to keep learning and memorizing. The Islamic heritage, especially the legacy of the scholars, deserves to be reexamined by the next generation.⁶

This research aims to examine how Gus Baha applied the hermeneutic approach and methodology of Nusantara interpretation in interpreting the thoughts of Sheikh Siti Jenar, particularly in the context of Indonesian Sufism. In this research, we examine through the media both YouTube and the study of Tafsir Gus Baha's. So far, Gus Baha does not have his own interpretation. This research also explores the implications of Gus Baha's hermeneutics for contemporary Qur'anic and Sufism studies, and how this approach can bridge dialogue between radical local religious traditions and moderate and contextual sharia.

The study of hermeneutics has evolved from its origins as a theory of scriptural interpretation to an interdisciplinary approach that combines the social sciences and humanities to interpret religious texts in a lively and contextual way. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, for example, emphasized the importance of understanding the Qur'an as a text born from the socio-historical context of Arab society in the 7th-century Arab society. Therefore, any attempt at interpretation must take into account the cultural, political, and social context in which the revelation was delivered.⁷

In Nusantara, hermeneutics takes a unique form as it integrates with local traditions and longstanding Sufi practices within the community. Tafsir targets not only the apparent meaning but also the inner meaning and spiritual values characteristic of Nusantara Sufism. In the eyes of Qur'anic scholars in Indonesia, the name Isiah Gusman is no longer unfamiliar, especially with his debut writing of the comprehensive book *Khazanah Tafsir Indonesia: Dari Hermeneutika hingga Ideologi*, which has become a reference for most scholars in the field of the Qur'an. In this book, Gusman explains: first, the history of Qur'anic studies in Indonesia; second, the techniques and methods of writing and hermeneutics in Indonesian Qur'anic interpretation; third, new horizons and perspectives in Indonesian Qur'anic exegesis; and fourth, the ideology behind and interests involved in writing Qur'anic interpretations in Indonesia.⁸

6 Uzlifatul Laily, Abd. Rahman, "Nalar Ayat-Ayat Politik Kebangsaan: Studi Kritis atas Kontekstualisasi Penafsiran Gus Baha", *JSQT: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 1, no. 2, (2022): 254–80, <https://doi.org/10.59005/jsqt.v1i2.235>.

7 Sri Wahyuni, "Tafsir Al-Mu'awwidzayatn Kyai Yasin Asmuni: Ideologi, Spiritualitas dan Pendekatan Hermeneutik," *Journal of Islamic Scriptures in Non-Arabic Societies (JISNAS)* 2, no. 2 (2025): 127–38, <https://doi.org/10.51214/jisnas.v2i2.1559>; Muhammad Himmat Riza and Vika Rachmania Hidayah, "Hermeneutika dalam Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Studi Penafsiran Surat Al-Ahzab Ayat 59," *Tanzil: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an* 4, no. 2 (2022): 83–94, <https://doi.org/10.20871/tjsq.v4i2.186>.

8 Gusman, *Khazanah Tafsir Indonesia: Dari Hermeneutik hingga Ideologi* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2013), xxi–xxiv; Lia Fadhliah, "Kajian Kesarjanaan Tafsir Indonesia: Analisis Perbandingan Cara Kerja Isiah Gusman, Ervan Nurtawab, dan Jajang A. Rohmana", *Nun: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir di Nusantara* 10, no. 1 (2024): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.32495/nun.v10i1.408>.

Additionally, Sahiron Syamsuddin divides the hermeneutic stream in terms of interpretation of the meaning object into three categories: objectivist, subjectivist, and objectivist-cum-subjectivist. According to him, with the presence of these dominant interpretative schools, there is a parallelism in the current Qur'anic exegesis.⁹ Furthermore, in the Indonesian archipelago, hermeneutics takes on a unique form because it is integrated with local traditions and Sufism, which have long been rooted in Islamic practices. Interpretation addresses not only the external meaning but also the inner meaning and spiritual values that characterize Nusantara Sufism. Therefore, responding to the controversial thoughts of Sheikh Siti Jenar requires a context-sensitive hermeneutical method to avoid extremist interpretations or dogmatic simplifications.

Gus Baha, as a contemporary scholar, played a key role in developing an interpretation that accommodated a balance between the inner meaning of sufism and the demands of sharia, thus providing a critical yet inclusive perspective on controversial ideas such as those of Sheikh Siti Jenar. Gus Baha's stance demonstrates that Qur'anic interpretation in the Nusantara context is not merely a reproduction of a classical text, but rather a real need for building social and spiritual harmony in Indonesia's pluralistic society.

Methodologically, this study will employ a qualitative approach with a textual analysis of Gus Baha's works and lectures, as well as literature on Sheikh Siti Jenar and Tafsir Nusantara. A hermeneutical approach will be applied to uncover the structure of textual understanding, the sociocultural context, and the spiritual and theological values contained in Gus Baha's interpretation. Thus, the research findings are expected to contribute to the development of progressive and contextual studies of the Qur'an, interpretation, and Indonesian Sufism.¹⁰

The Thought of *Wahdah al-Wujūd* “*Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*” of Sheikh Siti Jenar in the View of Gus Baha

Wahdah al-wujūd is a complex and controversial theme among its scholars. It is often translated into Indonesian as “*kesatuan eksistensi*” (unity of existence), or “unity of being” in English. This translation is not always accurate and is difficult to comprehend fully.¹¹ The term holds a mysterious meaning, similar to the

9 Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika dan Pengembangan Ulumul Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Pesantren Nawesea Press, 2009), 26; Hani Zahrani, Rubini, “Pendekatan Hermeneutika dalam Pengkajian Islam”, *Saliba: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Agama Islam* 6, no. 2 (2023): 194–210, <https://doi.org/10.54396/saliba.v6i2.662>.

10 Aishah Khoirunnisa and Ahmad Atabik, “Ngaji Bandongan: Tafsir Jalālyn Gus Baha Study as A Paradigm of Online Acculturation of Turats and Social Media,” *Jurnal At-Tibyan: Jurnal Ilmu Alqur'an dan Tafsir* 9, no. 1 (June 2024): 72–86; Iqlima Fahrurnisa, “A YouTube Sebagai Media Dakwah Kreatif (Analisis Wacana Kritis Ngaji Online Gus Baha),” *Afada: Jurnal of Islamic Communication* 1, no. 01 (June 2023): 01–27.

11 Zainuddin Abdullah, “Tanbih Al-Masyi Menyoal Wahdatul Wujud: Kasus Abdurrauf Singkel di Aceh Abad 17 Karya Oman Fathurahman (Review Buku),” *Mumtaz: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an dan Keislaman* 3, no. 2 (2019): 280–88, <https://doi.org/10.36671/mumtaz.v3i2.45>;

complexity of understanding “The One” or “To Hen” in Neoplatonism. Scholars of this concept note that “*waḥdah al-wujūd*” encompasses two aspects: first, it refers to God, and second, it refers to the universe beyond God. In its first sense, “*waḥdah al-wujūd*” means “True Existence” (*wujūd ḥaqīqī*), “*al-wujūd al-ḥaq*,” or “*wājib al-wujūd*” (Necessary Being).¹²

Among researchers, there is an external review (from outside) of Sufism and Sufis who often relate it to traditions outside Islam. However, the Sufi community bases its knowledge and practices on the primary source of Islam, which is the Qur’an. Some of them consider Sufism or Irfan as another form of Qur’anic interpretation. In practice, the main and highest achievement of the Sufis in revealing the secrets of their gentle spiritual experience is interpreting the Qur’an.

In *‘ulūmul al-Qur’ān* and tafsir methodology, Sufi tafsir is recognized and known as *tafsīr ishārī*, *tafsīr faydī*, *ta’wīl*, and *tafsīr bāṭinī*. Many efforts have been made by Sufis to adapt their teachings and doctrines through Qur’anic tafsir to assert that their knowledge and actions remain within the framework of religion. More than that, the teachings of *sulūk* (spiritual journey) and Sufi truth are believed and assured as the inner layer of the truth of Islam and the Qur’an. This claim tends to provoke strong reactions from the general public and particularly disturbs the “comfort” of legal scholars.¹³

Especially regarding the doctrine of *waḥdah al-wujūd* or Unity of Being, many Sufis maintain this doctrine even though they are declared infidels, persecuted, subjected to inquisitions, imprisoned, and even sentenced to death by religious courts. As the highest achievement of spiritual experience and practice, *waḥdah al-wujūd* is clarified and adapted by Sufis as an essential part or even an authentic representation of the principle of *tawḥīd* (God’s oneness).¹⁴ Many verses are referred to show the consistency of this doctrine with the Qur’an, although most of these verses imply *waḥdah al-wujūd* implicitly. The question remains: Is there any verse that explicitly states *waḥdah al-wujūd*? In parallel with “There is no god

Oman Fathurahman, *Tanbih Al-Masyi; Menyoal Wahdatul Wujud, Kasus Abdurrauf Singkel di Aceh Abad 17* (Bandung: Mizan, 1999).

12 Kamaruddin Mustamain, “Ontologi Tasawuf Falsafi dalam Konsep Wahdatul Wujud Ibnu Arabi,” *Rausyan Fikr: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Ushuluddin dan Filsafat* 16, no. 2 (2020): 267–81, <https://doi.org/10.24239/rsy.v16i2.630>; Dzulfikar Akbar Romadlon, Nur Hadi Ihsan, and Istikomah Istikomah, “Ibn Arabi on Wahdatul Wujud and It’s Relation to The Concept of Af’al-ul ’Ibad,” *Tsaqafah* 16, no. 2 (November 2020): 179–200, <https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v16i2.4901>.

13 Ihsan Abdillah and Mochammad Rizky Baihaqi, “Ragam Corak Tafsir: Tafsir Sufi,” *Ma-shadiruna Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur’an dan Tafsir* 3, no. 1 (2024): 23–30, <https://doi.org/10.15575/mjiat.v3i1.33927>; U. Abdurrahman, “Metodologi Tafsir Falsafi dan Tafsir Sufi,” *Adliya: Jurnal Hukum dan Kemanusiaan* 9, no. 2 (2015): 245–68, <https://doi.org/10.15575/adliya.v9i1.6166>.

14 Matussein Haji Jumat, “The Doctrine of Wahdatul Wujud: The Issue of Contamination of the Study of Islamic Sufism with Greek Philosophy,” *Journal of Social Transformation and Regional Development* 2, no. 3 (2020): 214–21; Arizul Suwar and Dahri Dahri, “Metodologi Studi Tasawuf: Wahdatul Wujud Hamzah Fansuri,” *Tadabbur: Jurnal Peradaban Islam* 4, no. 2 (October 2022): 138–50, <https://doi.org/10.22373/tadabbur.v4i2.300>.

but Allah,” Sufis formulate this monotheistic statement in the narrative of *wahdah al-wujūd* as: “There is nothing except Allah” (*mā thamma illā Allāh*).¹⁵

1. *Wahdah al-Wujūd* of Sheikh Siti Jenar

As a figure, Sheikh Siti Jenar appears to emphasize more the symbolism of his main teachings, namely the knowledge of perfection (*ilmu kasampurnan*), the knowledge of the origin of creation (*ilmu sangkan-paran ing dumadi*), the origin of human beings, and the place to which humans will return. Human beings, biologically, are created only from red soil, which functions as a container (a place) where the soul resides during this worldly life. Therefore, the human body is not eternal and will decompose back into the earth. The remainder is the spirit of Allah, which, after the perishing of the body, will reunite with eternity. This is called *manungsa* as a form of “*manunggaling rasa*” (the unity of feelings into God).¹⁶

Manunggaling Kawula Gusti means that within humans there is a spirit that originates from God’s spirit, in accordance with the Qur’anic verse that explains the creation of humans: (*Remember*) *when your Lord said to the angels, “Indeed, I will create a human from clay.” Then, when I have proportioned him and breathed into him My spirit, fall to him in prostration.* (Q.S. *Ṣād* [38]: 71–72).¹⁷

Thus, the human spirit has the potential to unite with God when worship of God occurs. It is the difference in interpretation of this Qur’anic verse by Sheikh Siti Jenar’s disciples that caused the polemic—that within the human body dwells God’s spirit—which is the controversy around the *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* doctrine. However, if observed, this teaching is essentially spiritual (*kebatinan*) in a broad sense, which emphasizes the psychic or inner aspect rather than the external aspect. Therefore, some conclude that the conception of the purpose of human life is nothing other than the unification of humans with God (*Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*).¹⁸

According to Sheikh Siti Jenar, for those who have attained unity with the essence of life or the Divine Being, all forms of worship are falsehood. Since God is free from natural laws, humans who unite with God’s essence will achieve immortality that does not experience decay. The concept of *Manunggaling*

15 Nur Isra’ Ahmad, “Internalisasi Tasawuf Falsafi Fana dan Wahdatul Wujud dalam Pendidikan Islam,” *Al-Zayn: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial & Hukum* 3, no. 3 (July 2025): 2782–92, <https://doi.org/10.61104/alz.v3i3.1735>; Faiha Kamila Kharisma Hakim and Salwa Nur Faidah, “Wahdatul Wujud: Pengertian, Tujuan, dan Tokoh-Tokoh Pengembangnya dalam Pemikiran Tasawuf,” *Mushaf Journal: Jurnal Ilmu Al Quran dan Hadis* 5, no. 1 (March 2025): 263–68.

16 Rahmat Abdullah and Abdul Munir Mulkhan, *Syekh Siti Jenar: Pemutarbalikan Sejarah, Perjalanan Hidup, dan Ajarannya* (Solo: Aqwam, 2012), 12.

17 Ahmad Albar and Yuda Septiawanansyah, “Ajaran Sunan Bonang Tentang ‘Padudoning Kaulo Gusti’ Sebagai Bantahan ‘Manunggaling Kaulo Gusti’ Ajaran Syaikh Siti Jenar,” *Qolamuna: Keislaman, Pendidikan, Literasi dan Humaniora* 1, no. 1 (July 2024): 9–18.

18 Dwi Afrianti, “Transformation of the Spread of the Manunggaling Kawula Lan Gusti Concept in Javanese Society from the 16th Century AD to the 21st Century AD,” *International Journal of Islamic Khazanah* 9, no. 1 (2020): 29–34, <https://doi.org/10.15575/ijik.v9i1.9018>.

Kawula Gusti by Sheikh Siti Jenar is also called *uni nong aning unong*. This concept is further explained as: “The union of servant and Lord is like a mirror and the person who looks into it. The reflection in the mirror is the servant.” Some elder scholars and spiritual masters believe that God is very close to humans—so close that some say Allah dwells within humans, in the pure heart (*qalbu*). They base this on the following verse: “We created man, and We know what his soul whispers to him. And We are closer to him than his jugular vein.” (Q.S. Qāf [50]: 16).¹⁹

Some elders and spiritual masters feel content that they have united with Allah, whom they know, see, and witness within themselves, in the pure heart of their conscience. They are the adherents of the *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* understanding. Allah is existence, and existence is Allah. In Imam Ghazali’s explanation, existence (*ada*) essentially belongs to God, while everything besides God has borrowed existence (*al-wujūd al-musta‘ār*). Therefore, everything other than Allah essentially does not exist and is not real. When “existence” is predicated or ascribed to something other than Allah, then the predication and statement are not literal but metaphorical and figurative. Thus, the statement “I exist” is a metaphorical expression whose true meaning is “I am God.”²⁰

Based on brief research, it appears there is no literal text explicitly stating this. Both Sufi scholars and non-Sufi scholars and mufasssirs almost unanimously agree on this absence. The originator of *waḥdah al-wujūd*, Ibn ‘Arabi himself, and Mullā Ṣadrā, who philosophized this doctrine, have so far not presented a single verse explicitly stating “There is no god but Allah” or “I am God” in their interpretations, philosophical works, or Sufism.

In a brief review, there is a relatively short note in *al-Furqān fī Tafṣīr al-Qur’ān*, the work of Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ṣādiqī, which emits the flavor of *waḥdah al-wujūd* from Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 38.²¹

At first glance, there appears to be nothing strange in this verse. The second part, “and I do not associate with my Lord anyone,” is a common phrase found throughout the Qur’an, such as in Q.S. *Āli ‘Imrān* [3]: 64, Q.S. *An-Nisā’* [4]: 36, Q.S. *Ar-Ra’d* [13]: 36, Q.S. *Al-Ḥajj* [22]: 26, Q.S. *Al-Jinn* [72]: 20. The sixth verse immediately following in the same chapter also repeats this phrase. The impression is different from what appears in the first part of this verse. Merely observing it already disturbs the mind. Besides the fact that no verse in the Qur’an has a phrase so similar to the wording of the first part of this verse, the literal and explicit

19 Yusep Andrianto et al., “The Concept of Manunggaling Kawula Gusti in the Theological View of Georg Kirchberger,” *Mysterium Fidei: Journal of Asian Empirical Theology* 1, no. 2 (June 2023): 116–26, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10115569>.

20 Endik Firmansah and Simon Simon, “Implementasi Makna Immanuel dalam Bahasa Jawa dengan Konsep Makna ‘Manunggaling Kawula Gusti’ dalam Islam Tasawuf,” *Melo: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 3, no. 2 (2023): 128–46, <https://doi.org/10.34307/mjsaa.v3i2.139>.

21 Ammar Fauzi Heryadi, “Ayat Wahdatul Wujud (1): Al-Kahf [18]: 38, ‘Aku Dialah Allah,’” *QURANIKA*, 2022, <https://quranika.com/ayat-wahdatul-wujud-1-al-kahf-18-38-aku-dialah-allah/>.

meaning seems odd: “*But I am indeed Allah, my Lord...*”²²

Not only is there no distinction, but this verse gives an impression of unity and identity between “*I*” (the human) and God. The Sufi phrase “*I am God*” corresponds to “*... I am indeed Allah.*” The first part of this verse is considered a *waḥdah al-wujūd* testimony often repeated by several Sufis, such as Abū Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj of Persia in his famous phrase, “*anā al-ḥaqq*” (“I am the Truth” [God]), including the Persian origin Sufi in Java, Sheikh Siti Jenar, in his expression, “*Manunggaling Kawula Gusti.*”²³

2. *Waḥdah al-Wujūd* of Gus Baba

Listening to one of Gus Baba’s lectures about how to know Allah reminds one of Gus Baba’s childhood when he wanted to know Allah. At that time, it was very difficult for Gus Baba to recognize Allah even though the teachers at the *madrasah ibtida'iyyah* introduced Allah through His essential attributes using poetic models, such as existence (*wujūd*), eternity (*qidam*), and everlastingness (*baqā'*), up to the attribute of being a speaker (*mutakallimān*). With those explanations, for example, existence means to be. Allah having the attribute of existence means Allah exists. The existence of Allah is the existence of this universe. Something that exists must have a creator. The Being who created this universe in the Islamic tradition is called Allah. That is why the first verse revealed by Allah is “*Read in the name of your Lord who created, created man from a clinging substance.*” This means that in the early Islamic period, God was still referred to as *rabb* (Lord), and later the name Allah was used, for example, by mentioning the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.²⁴

Gus Baba has his own way of knowing Allah, one of which is by comparing Allah with other objects of worship. For example, when some worshipped Prophet Isa and his mother (Maryam), the Qur'an commented on both in Q.S. Al-Mā'idah [5]: 75: “*The Messiah, son of Mary, was but a messenger; messengers before him have passed away. And his mother was a supporter of truth. They both used to eat food. See how We make clear to them the signs; then see how they are deluded.*” This verse from Q.S. Al-Mā'idah [5]: 75 Meaning: The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a Messenger, indeed many Messengers have passed away before him, and his mother was a truthful woman, both of them used to eat food. See how We explain to them (the people of the book) the signs (of Our power), *mukhalafatu li al-ḥawāḍith* (Allah differs from His creatures).²⁵

22 Liris Purwa Maharsi and M. Kholid Muslih, “Nilai Egaliter Pada Novel Syekh Siti Jenar Karya Agus Sunyoto,” *Risalah Jurnal Pendidikan dan Studi Islam* 9, no. 1 (March 2023): 1–14, https://doi.org/10.31943/jurnal_risalah.v9i1.394.

23 Abdul Muaz, “Syekh Siti Jenar, Manunggaling Kawula Gusti dan Konteks Kekinian Kita,” *Jurnal An-Nufus* 2, no. 2 (2021): 1–13.

24 *Gus Baba Tentang Sunan Kalijaga Bongkar Rahasia Syekh Siti Jenar*, directed by Bangkit TV, 2021, 16:55, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6zOr3uqu9Y>.

25 Sholikhul Huda, “Wahdatul Wujud Syekh Siti Jenar Dibahas Gus Baba, Ilmu Manunggaling Kawulo Gusti yang Ditawarkan Kalijaga,” *Klik Bondowoso*, 2022, <https://klikbondowo->

Gus Baha views the concept of *wahdah al-wujūd*, or what in Javanese tradition is called *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*, with caution and critique from the perspective of true Islamic teachings. Gus Baha views the concept of *wahdah al-wujūd*, or what is called *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* in the Javanese tradition, with caution and critique from the perspective of true Islamic teachings. He criticizes the *wahdah al-wujūd* concept taught by certain figures, such as Siti Jenar. According to Gus Baha, this concept is not in line with Islamic teachings because it risks leading to self-worship rather than worship of God. In true Islamic teaching, worship is directed only to Allah.

Believing in the existence of a unity between humans and God can cause serious misunderstandings. Gus Baha argues that, in any case, the *wahdah al-wujūd* doctrine cannot be true. After all, there was a time we did not exist. From non-existence to existence, that is proof that we are creatures. He emphasizes the importance of avoiding false doctrines and following true Islamic teachings. Gus Baha says, “*As creatures, if you need to eat, then eat. Intend it as worship, and, Insha Allah, every breath, every meal, every sleep will become worship.*” Furthermore, Gus Baha affirms that *wahdah al-wujūd* teachings were not accepted by Prophet Muhammad or the Wali Songo. The *wahdah al-wujūd* view is considered incompatible with their emphasis on obedience and submission to God.²⁶

According to Gus Baha, the concept of “*Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*” (*wahdah al-wujūd*) is a belief born from excessive self-pride towards God, rather than a true union between servant and God. He explains that the teachings upheld by Sheikh Siti Jenar cause misunderstanding, where its followers become overly confident that they are God, not servants of God. Gus Baha emphasizes that although there is a concept of inner unity with God, it is a blessing granted only to chosen servants and must be understood through divine knowledge and mysteries, not through excessive self-confidence.²⁷

Gus Baha’s view on *wahdah al-wujūd* affirms that this doctrine is a deviation that can blur the boundaries between humans and God. Therefore, it has been theologically and historically rejected by orthodox Islamic authorities, including the Walisongo, who are role models in Javanese Islamic tradition. Gus Baha warns Muslims to always adhere to the principle that Allah is the One God and humans are His creatures, so the concept of absolute unity between the two is unacceptable in faith practice.

Gus Baha uses both logical reasoning and traditional Islamic arguments

so.pikiran-rakyat.com/jelajah/pr-1884759792/wahdatul-wujud-syekh-siti-jenar-dibahas-gus-baha-ilmu-manunggaling-kawulo-gusti-yang-ditawarkan-kalijaga.

26 Laili Salimah, “Orang Islam Wajib Waspada Konsep Manunggaling Kawula Gusti, Gus Baha: Aliran Wahdatil Wujud Gak Mungkin Benar,” Bondowoso Network, 2023, <https://bondowoso.jatimnetwork.com/khazanah/1829119481/orang-islam-wajib-waspada-konsep-manunggaling-kawula-gusti-gus-baha-aliran-wahdatil-wujud-gak-mungkin-benar>.

27 Kurusetra, “Gus Baha: Syekh Siti Jenar Mengaku Tuhan, Tapi Kalah Bertarung dengan Sunan Kalijaga,” kurusetra.republika.co.id, 2022, <https://kurusetra.republika.co.id/posts/157179/gus-baha-syekh-siti-jenar-mengaku-tuhan-tapi-kalah-bertarung-dengan-sunan-kalijaga-pg3>.

to counter claims of absolute unity between humans and God. He argues that such claims often stem from excessive spiritual self-confidence or an immature understanding. Logically, he points out that humans originate from non-existence (*nihil*) and acquire existence only through God's creation, so there must always be a clear distinction between creator and creation that cannot be blurred or equated. He emphasizes the necessity of maintaining this distinction to avoid theological error: humans cannot be literally united with God because that would negate this fundamental creator-creature boundary. This is supported by the classical Islamic framework that maintains God's transcendence and absolute uniqueness.

Gus Baha also stresses the importance of balancing the esoteric knowledge of *haqīqah* (spiritual essence) and the exoteric practice of sharia (Islamic law). He teaches that spiritual insight without adherence to sharia can lead to deviation, while rigid legalism without spiritual depth can become hollow ritualism. Thus, true understanding and practice require both to run together, ensuring that high spiritual knowledge remains within the boundaries of orthodox Islamic faith to prevent misguidance. In summary, his argument is a combination of logical necessity (the cause-and-effect distinction between creation and creator), theological principles of Islam (maintaining divine transcendence), and practical guidance (balance between inner knowledge and outward law) to refute claims of absolute spiritual union with God that ignore these essential boundaries. This stance aligns with his frequent advice to seek knowledge with humility and to integrate both the spiritual and legal dimensions of Islam holistically.

Thus, Gus Baha invites Muslims to understand the teachings of Islamic mysticism and spirituality correctly, while maintaining the purity of tauhid and rejecting teachings that may lead to polytheism or improper worship. He stresses that closeness to Allah must be accompanied by humility and recognition of humans' position as created beings, not God, so that the relationship between servant and Creator remains clear and correct according to authentic Islamic teachings. This approach also prevents Muslims from falling into the *waḥdah al-wujūd* view, considered dangerous to faith.²⁸

This explanation of Gus Baha's perspective on *waḥdah al-wujūd* and *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* reflects a critical and cautious stance toward teachings that contradict the principle of Islamic tauhid. This attitude is an important lesson for Muslims in maintaining the purity of creed and practicing spirituality truly based on shariah and authentic Islamic sources. This text refers to Gus Baha's explanations in various studies and lectures about Sufism and the history of Islam in Java.

Gus Baha's Critical Approach to Sheikh Siti Jenar's Thought through the Nusantara Tafsir Methodology

Gus Baha's critical approach to Sheikh Siti Jenar's thought, through the Nusantara tafsir methodology, emphasizes a balance between deep understanding

28 *Wahdatul Wujud Syekh Siti Jenar* || *Gus Baha Terjemah Indonesia*, directed by Masvis Media, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IqT4lUlv5tk>.

of Sufism and strict adherence to shariah, along with a rejection of extreme claims about the absolute unity between man and God. Gus Baha responds to Sheikh Siti Jenar's teachings, particularly the concept of "*Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*" — which states that man and God are one unity — as a form of radical Sufi belief that potentially deviates from tauhid (Islamic monotheism). Gus Baha explains that this teaching arises from an overly confident attitude "*GR*" meaning overly self-confident) In which a person believes that God absolutely dwells and unites within himself, thus considering himself equal to God.²⁹

In the Nusantara tafsir methodology that Gus Baha practices, he stresses the importance of understanding the Qur'an thoroughly and contextually without rushing into misleading mystical interpretations. Gus Baha reminds us that the understanding of the servant-God relationship must maintain the correct concept of tauhid, namely the oneness of Allah, without equating creatures with the Creator. To strengthen this critique, Qur'anic verses often cited to criticize the literal inner union of man with God include: *First, Q.S. Al-Ikhlāṣ* [112]: 1-4): "*Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begets not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him.*" *Second, Q.S. Al-An'ām* [6]: 102-103): "*That is Allah, your Lord; there is no deity except Him, the Creator of all things, so worship Him. And He is Disposer of all things ... (103) Vision perceives Him not, but He perceives [all] vision; and He is the Subtle, the Acquainted.*"

These verses affirm the absolute oneness and unique nature of Allah, which cannot be equated with His creatures, while rejecting ideas of union that blur the distinction between Creator and creation. Gus Baha urges us to understand the essence of God and humans in ways consistent with the principles of shariah and tauhid in Islam, and to reject extreme mystical claims that may damage faith (*'aqidah*). Thus, through the Nusantara tafsir methodology, Gus Baha critiques Sheikh Siti Jenar's teachings by referring to strong tauhid principles, inviting Muslims to understand the human-God relationship harmoniously within the framework of shariah and healthy local culture.

In the Nusantara tafsir methodology, Gus Baha applies a hermeneutic approach that considers the socio-cultural context and Islamic values in Indonesia. He does not reject Sufism as an important spiritual dimension but warns against excessive spiritual claims without strong sharia foundations. Gus Baha cites the story of Sheikh Siti Jenar when summoned by the Wali Songo; Sheikh Siti Jenar refused his own existence by saying, "*Here there is no Siti Jenar, only Allah!*" According to Gus Baha, this is the main problem that led to Sheikh Siti Jenar's teachings being deemed heretical and resulting in strong opposition from scholars and the Wali Songo.³⁰

Gus Baha emphasizes that although in Sufism there is a concept of spiritual

29 Huda, *Wahdatul Wujud Syekh Siti Jenar Dibahas Gus Baha, Ilmu Manunggaling Kawulo Gusti Yang Ditawarkan Kalijaga*.

30 *Hujjah Gus Baha' Bertemu Murid Siti Jenar (Aliran Wahdatul Wujud/Manunggaling Kawulo Gusti)*, directed by Rachart Channel, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7P-pl68TC_Ww.

closeness and unity with God (such as *wahdah al-wujūd*), humans cannot essentially equate themselves with Allah. He reminds us that humans are creatures who “did not exist” before becoming existent, so it is impossible to equate oneself with God. Methodologically, Gus Baha uses a tafsir approach that is not only literal but also understands the inner meanings and cultural contexts alive in the Nusantara, making his interpretation moderate and inclusive.

In Gus Baha’s view, extreme spiritual claims like those put forward by Sheikh Siti Jenar can cause spiritual arrogance (*‘ujūb*) and theological chaos, damaging human relations with God and society. Therefore, Gus Baha always emphasizes the importance of maintaining balance between *ḥaqīqah* (inner essence) and shariah (external rules). He advises that Sufi experiences remain within the framework of shariah obedience and awareness that humans are created beings with limitations, not entities that blur the boundary between Creator and creation. Gus Baha’s approach through the Nusantara tafsir methodology also reflects a “living Qur’an” and contextual interpretation, meaning that tafsir is not only about interpreting classical language and texts but also relating them to Indonesia’s plural and dynamic socio-cultural conditions. This approach is crucial to avoid extremism and rigidity in Sufi practice and spiritual understanding among Nusantara Muslim communities.³¹

According to Gus Baha, Sheikh Siti Jenar’s thought from the perspective of Indonesian Sufism is a critical reflection of radical, controversial teachings in the history of Islam in Nusantara. Sheikh Siti Jenar is known for the concept of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*, which claims that humans (servants) and God are absolutely unified. This view is often associated with the *wahdah al-wujūd* doctrine, which posits God and creatures as an inseparable single entity. However, Gus Baha argues that this teaching is dangerous if approached without balance, especially when a person hastily and confidently claims unity with God, thus considering himself God.

Gus Baha also clarifies that *wahdah al-wujūd* (unity of existence), as in Sheikh Siti Jenar’s context, is not absolutely correct because, in reality, humans never truly become God. For example, Gus Baha narrates that Sheikh Siti Jenar “lost” in the spiritual war against Sunan Kalijaga, symbolically demonstrating that Siti Jenar’s divine claims cannot be justified. Gus Baha reminds us that inner experience and spiritual knowledge (*ma’rifat*) must be positioned within the framework of shariah to avoid turning into heresy or spiritual claims that cause social and theological conflict.³²

In the Indonesian Sufi perspective discussed by Gus Baha, Sufism aims to

31 Febriyanto, “Kewalian Syekh Siti Jenar di Mata Gus Baha,” *BangkitMedia*, February 14, 2021, <https://islam.bangkitmedia.com/kewalian-syekh-siti-jenar-di-mata-gus-baha/>; Roby Indra Muldiansyah, “Pandangan Masyarakat Tentang Makam Syekh Siti Jenar di Semanding Tuban, Kemlaten dan Bukit Amparan Jati Cirebon: Kajian Sejarah Lisan,” *Qurthuba: The Journal of History and Islamic Civilization* 4, no. 1 (2020): 63–84, <https://doi.org/10.15642/qurthuba.2020.4.1.63-84>.

32 Febriyanto, “Kewalian Syekh Siti Jenar di Mata Gus Baha.”

awaken people to inner closeness with God, but always with awareness that humans are finite created beings who must be humble (*tawāḍuʿ*). Gus Baha stresses that Sufi teachings must maintain both dimensions: spiritual depth and fidelity to shariah. This approach keeps Sufism relevant and inclusive in the Nusantara Islamic tradition without causing major polemics like those surrounding Sheikh Siti Jenar.

Gus Baha employs a hermeneutic method and a Nusantara-style tafsir that prioritizes balance between the Qurʾanic text, local cultural context, and spiritual values. In his interpretation, Gus Baha reads the spiritual phenomenon of Sheikh Siti Jenar as part of the Sufi understanding journey that must be carefully critiqued so it is not misunderstood or used as a basis for personal divinity claims. This approach also protects Indonesian Muslims from falling into the trap of extreme spiritual misconceptions by emphasizing that the claim of absolute unity between God and creatures is impossible according to Islamic creed (*ʿaqidah*).

Implications for Qurʾanic Studies and Sufism in Indonesia

According to Sheikh Siti Jenar, the Qurʾan consists of two types: the “dry book” and the “wet book.” The dry book refers to the written Qurʾan, which serves as a guide to understanding the verses of God in an outward, literal manner. Meanwhile, the wet book is the Qurʾan stored within the human heart. The written sacred book is like empty soil that must be plowed, fertilized, and planted to grow and be beneficial. Therefore, a “wet” or living Qurʾan in a person’s heart is necessary. The dry book, as a formal formality of sharia, must meet the right seed, namely, a pure heart, and be cultivated correctly. This is the essence of the *sālik*—a person who has a clean heart and wholeheartedly directs their soul toward Allah.

This forms the basis of Sheikh Siti Jenar’s thought in harmonizing sharia with *maʿrifat* (spiritual knowledge). Regarding sharia, one special aspect in reaching *maʿrifat* is prayer (*ṣalāt*). In his Qurʾanic interpretation, prayer is divided into two kinds, as stated in the verse: “Preserve all your prayers, and [especially] the middle prayer. Stand before Allah devoutly.” In the Javanese Islamic tradition, “your prayers” refer to the sharia or outward prayers, while the “middle prayer” means the prayer of the heart. Outwardly, prayer is performed with physical movements such as standing, reciting Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah, prostrating, sitting, and so forth, involving all parts of the body. This is called physical prayer and is the first part, the outward aspect. The second part is the *ṣalāt wuṣṭā*, which mystically is understood as the prayer of the heart or inner prayer.³³

The term “*wuṣṭā*” means middle or center, because the heart is located in the middle of the self, so this prayer is called the prayer of the heart. The purpose of prayer of the heart is to obtain peace and calmness of the soul. True prayer and worship are the prayer of the heart—a state of full devotion (*khushūʿ*) in facing life. If the heart is negligent and not devout, then the outward movements, including

33 Nugroho Dwi Yanto, “Gus Baha: Syekh Siti Jenar Ngaku Jadi Allah SWT, Tapi Kalah Perang dengan Sunan Kalijaga,” *Populis*, June 20, 2022, <https://populis.id/read25216/gus-baha-syekh-siti-jenar-ngaku-jadi-allah-swt-tapi-kalah-perang-dengan-sunan-kalijaga>.

recitations and physical actions, become less meaningful and cannot lead a person closer to Allah.

Outward prayer has limitations, such as requiring specific places, times, bodily conditions, special clothing, and so forth. Conversely, spiritual prayer is not limited by time or space. The spiritual prayer takes place within the heart, with a congregation consisting of inner elements that perform remembrance (*dhikr*), its imam is strong will and intention, and its qibla (direction) is Allah. This is called *salat daim* by Sheikh Siti Jenar—a continuous and unbroken prayer. However, this can only be achieved after consistently and perfectly performing the obligatory prayers (*ṣalāt farḍu*). After that, one may proceed to the stages of *salat tarek* and *maʿrifat*.

Therefore, it is inappropriate for someone who has reached the level of *maʿrifat* to neglect the obligatory prayers. By harmonizing outward and inward worship, one achieves perfect worship that integrates heart and soul in meeting Allah. In the spiritual dimension, such a person becomes an expert in *maʿrifat* who has reached the highest level of knowing Allah. Essentially, prayer is a spiritual journey toward Allah. Sheikh Siti Jenar, in his *maʿrifat*, is known for the concept of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* (the Unity of Servant and Lord).³⁴

The hermeneutic and tafsir methodology implications of Gus Baha for Qurʾanic studies and Sufism in Indonesia are significant in establishing a balance between deep spiritual understanding and adherence to Islamic sharia. Gus Baha is known for developing a tafsir approach using a global (*ijmālī*) method that is not too detailed, blending classical sources like *Tafsir Jalālayn* and works of other scholars, but also relating them to the unique socio-cultural context of Nusantara (the Indonesian archipelago). His tafsir is delivered in a relaxed manner with humorous elements, making it easy for the wider community to understand while strengthening the connection to moderate and inclusive Islamic values.

Gus Baha's hermeneutic approach places the Qurʾan as a living text (*living Qurʾan*) that must be interpreted not only textually but contextually, in accordance with the dynamics of Indonesian society and local culture. Thus, tafsir is not rigid or dogmatic but a living dialogue among the text, the interpreter, and the community, adjusting to contemporary conditions. This also allows Gus Baha to subtly criticize radical Sufi thoughts like those of Sheikh Siti Jenar without denying the spiritual values contained generally in Sufism.

In the context of Sufism, the primary implication of Gus Baha's approach is rejecting extreme spiritual claims that erase the boundary between God and humans, such as Sheikh Siti Jenar's "*Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*." Gus Baha emphasizes the importance of maintaining balance between the inner dimension (*ḥaqīqah*) and the outward dimension of sharia as legal rules, so that Sufism remains a healthy spiritual path that does not lead to spiritual arrogance or deviation. This approach reinforces the understanding that spiritual experience must always remain within

34 Nurul Jumadissaniyah Sitorus and Sayed Muhammad Ichsan, "Menilik Aspek Kebahasaan Mistik dalam Ajaran Manunggaling Kawula Gusti Syaikh Siti Jenar," *Jurnal Sathar* 1, no. 1 (2023): 11–22, <https://doi.org/10.59548/js.v1i1.39>.

the corridor of moderate creed (*'aqidah*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*), consistent with the adaptive and inclusive Nusantara Islamic tradition.

The hermeneutic and tafsir methodology implications of Gus Baha for Qur'anic and Sufism studies in Indonesia are crucial in maintaining balance between inner mystical understanding and adherence to Islamic sharia. Gus Baha is known for using an *ijmālī* (global) tafsir method that prioritizes social and cultural context and local Nusantara wisdom, making his tafsir not merely a literal text but alive and relevant to contemporary Indonesian society.

In Qur'anic studies, Sheikh Siti Jenar's approach opens space to understand the Qur'an not only textually or literally (dry book), but also intuitively and esoterically as living in the heart (wet book). This demands tafsir approaches integrating spiritual and inner dimensions so that Qur'anic interpretation touches Sufi and *ma'rifat* dimensions. This is relevant in Nusantara tafsir studies, adapting local cultural contexts with Islamic teachings, as also critiqued and developed by modern Indonesian Sufi thinkers.

However, Sheikh Siti Jenar's thought also presents challenges for Sufi and Qur'anic studies in Indonesia because it is potentially considered deviant by orthodox groups, including the historical Walisongo, who rejected the literal union claim between man and God as contradictory to tauhid and Islamic sharia principles. Therefore, studying Siti Jenar's thought encourages critical dialogue between local tradition and formal Islamic teachings, offering insight into pluralism and spiritual diversity in Indonesian Islam. From the Sufi perspective, Sheikh Siti Jenar enriches spiritual understanding by awakening awareness of humanity's essential unity with God through inner experience, differing from ritualistic approaches that emphasize outward sharia. This inspires Sufi studies, accommodating local dynamics and increasingly opening space for inclusive and humanistic Sufi interpretation.³⁵

Thus, the implications for Qur'anic and Sufi studies in Indonesia highlight the importance of developing a multidimensional approach that respects cultural, historical, and local spirituality contexts while maintaining a balance between strict sharia and flexible *ma'rifat*. Sheikh Siti Jenar's thought invites researchers to deeply explore Indonesia's spiritual heritage and offers reflection on the relationship between sacred texts, religious practice, and mystical experience in Nusantara Islam.

Conclusion

Gus Baha's approach to the thought of Sheikh Siti Jenar within the Nusantara tafsir methodology shows a firm critical stance while remaining contextually thoughtful. He rejects the idea of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*—Sheikh Siti Jenar's teaching of the absolute unity between God and creation, which is broadly a manifestation of the doctrine of *wahdah al-wujūd* that he considers dangerous

35 Bagus Wahyu M. Zulva and Bambang Purnomo, "Perubahan Variasi Suluk Syekh Siti Jenar dalam Film Sunan Kalijaga dan Syekh Siti Jenar," *JOB (Jurnal Online Baradha)* 18, no. 2 (2022): 649–68, <https://doi.org/10.26740/job.v18n2.p649-668>.

because it blurs the essential boundary between Allah and humans. Gus Baha regards Sheikh Siti Jenar's claim, "Here there is no Siti Jenar, only Allah," as a serious error violating the principle of tauhid and doctrinally mistaken, since this claim resembles asserting that man is God, whereas in Islam, God is the One and Absolute and totally distinct from His creation.

In the tafsir methodology he develops, Gus Baha prioritizes the principle of sharia as the benchmark for the success and correctness of religious understanding. He warns of the danger if someone is too hasty or overly confident (in Gus Baha's terms, "too quick or GR") in considering themselves already united with God without undergoing a profound spiritual and Islamic legal process. Teachings that merge the Creator and creation in such a way have the potential to mislead Muslims into deviation.

Gus Baha uses a tafsir approach called *ijmālī*, which is concise, meaningful, and centered on the social and cultural context of the diverse Nusantara. This approach makes his tafsir easily understandable for the wider community without sacrificing scholarly depth and firmness of creed. In his lectures and studies, Gus Baha often presents historical narratives that Sheikh Siti Jenar was once tried by the Walisongo, who represented the strength of Islamic law and authentic local tradition, and subsequently defeated in a "spiritual war" by Sunan Kalijaga, showing that the traditional scholars did not authentically accept Sheikh Siti Jenar's claim of divinity.

Furthermore, Gus Baha places great importance on maintaining balance in Nusantara Islam between sharia and *ḥaqīqah* (inner essence). The essence of *tasawwuf* must be accompanied by clear sharia and should not overstep religious boundaries literally. Gus Baha's methodology ensures that spirituality in tafsir does not become a means of doctrinal deviation due to overly free or radical interpretations. Local wisdom and the tradition of the saints, such as the Walisongo, are given a respectful place in his writings, but never at the cost of violating the principles of authentic Islamic faith.

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