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Dakwah and indigenous culture; The dissemination of Islam


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Indonesian youth, Vice-President General Try Sutrisno pointed out to his audience when he opened the national congress of the Islamic youth organization Ansor in September 1995, must live up to their own national culture and history. Should they fail in this, their lives could be thrown into chaos by the fast flow of information and the attractions offered by a global lifestyle. His speech was just one of many such admonishments that could be read in Indonesian newspapers or watched on TV in recent years. Sometimes actions speak louder than words. Recently a crusade was launched to ban foreign words from public display – lettering on signboards, buildings and the like – resulting in incomprehensible notices in which certain words were covered over by white paint or a white sheet.

Warnings against harmful and pervasive cultural and political influences from abroad have become even more frequent of late as the ominous year 2000 draws closer. Sometimes the West is mentioned as the source of such evils; on other occasions it is merely implied. To Muslims in a non-western country it is obvious that it is the West, and in particular the United States, that is meant. The people who draw attention to the disruptive effects of globalization are more often than not members of the elite, which, when all is said and done, is partly a military elite. As the aforementioned example indicates, this elite includes four-star generals who are used to lunching or dining in five-star hotels and to whom travelling to the United States, Australia and Europe, to mention only the most far-away destinations, has become routine. It seems exceptional when such admonitions do not come from persons whose daily lives are the perfect illustration of what life in the global village looks like. The poor certainly do not have the money to follow the new lifestyle. The Indonesian government's recent 'I love Indonesian food' campaign, for instance, is aimed at those who have enough money to eat at McDonald's and other restaurants that offer the whole gamut from fast food to French cuisine. Not many Indonesians can afford such outings. They have to eat at home or have Indonesian food at warung or food stalls.

1 Republika 12-9-1995.
2 I would have liked to include here a list of Islamic literature in Indonesia published in the past five years or so lashing out at a decadent, egotistical Western lifestyle, but lack of space precludes such aspirations.
When Indonesians do not use the term 'globalization' to reject western notions of democracy and human rights (which run the risk of gaining a growing following through exposure to international mass media), they usually use it in a cultural and social sense, stressing the consequences for day-to-day behaviour and the dangers threatening Indonesian norms and values. The fear of the supposed implications of globalization and the desire to maintain social tranquillity and to have others preserve a traditional way of life are reminiscent of the attitudes of the colonial Dutch in the first decades of the century, when European education was made accessible to an increasingly wider circle of Indonesians. Describing their outlook, a civil servant, the Resident of Menado, wrote in 1926: 'The European who seeks his livelihood in these regions and consequently comes into contact with the native population, can but feel sympathy for the real nagareeman, the simple peasant, who gives him no cause for offence, whom he finds likeable. In the case of the more developed people, his opinion undergoes a change. He views their expressions with more insight, with more understanding, as a kind of impudence, a kind of undesirable intellectual trend. He turns his back on these 'so-called' developed people, as he calls them. In his opinion they do nothing but harm. They poison the simple hearts of the tranquil population toiling on the land.'

This is but one of many examples of the lamentations of the Dutch, confronted with Indonesians who had started to adopt Dutch manners at the close of the last century, though some of the early Indonesian nationalists attempted to distance themselves from too close an association with the colonial administration by describing these manners as international, and even dared to address the Dutch in the Dutch language. New and faster means of communication and the emergence and spread of Malay-language newspapers was instrumental in all this. Nor should the role of the humble bicycle be forgotten. Fitted with pneumatic rather than iron tyres since 1890, and within the reach of an ordinary person's purse only a couple of years thereafter, the bicycle gained enormous popularity. In Europe it became 'the Working Man's Friend' (Briggs 1990:420), and it began its advance in the Archipelago as well. In 1898, in order to prevent Indonesians from suffering sore feet, the Resident of Surabaya generously gave the natives in his charge special permission to wear shoes when cycling. Now they, too, were free to enjoy the new craze that cycling had become.

After some time the elation evaporated, and many Indonesians, including those who had enthusiastically espoused western suits, haircuts and furniture as a mark of emancipation, also began to wonder whether borrowing such elements of foreign culture would not put them in danger of losing their own identity. The epoch in which this happened, the first two

decades of this century, was a time of rapid social change. The Dutch were not the only inhabitants in the colony to be baffled by what was happening. Indonesian nationalists and religious leaders were equally perplexed. They wondered where it would end, and whether culture and society as they knew it would not be on the losing side. As anyone who visits Indonesia nowadays can witness, their fears were unfounded. Western clothing did become accepted, though not in all circles or for every occasion, yet Indonesians have not become imitation westerners. This follows what J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong has noted is one of the basic characteristics of the peoples of the Archipelago, namely their remarkable resilience when confronted with ‘mighty cultural influences from abroad’ (De Josselin de Jong 1935:14). After a period in which foreign civilizations appear to be gaining the upper hand there is a revival of the earlier culture, with old and new elements becoming embedded in a new, unique setting. This happened when Hindu-Buddhism became the prevailing religion, and again after Islam was introduced. Each time, De Josselin de Jong points out, re-‘Javanization’ followed (De Josselin de Jong 1935:15-20).

Western influences have never succeeded in eliminating Indonesian cultures. They thrive at those moments that are considered to be of special importance in a person’s life: at marriage ceremonies for instance, and on religious occasions. Nor have social and political stability been much affected, as warnings against the dire effects of globalization would imply (though some think otherwise, blaming many of the social wrongs and political opposition in present-day society on exposure to foreign culture). During the last couple of decades an opposite trend has emerged which itself can be linked to faster and easier ways of communication, and appears to belie the worries about an erosion of social norms. As in other Islamic countries, religious life in Indonesia is clearly blooming. In Java, invariably mentioned as an island where Islam has its own distinct ‘non-Islamic’ features, there is a renewed interest in the lives of the wali songo, the nine saints, to whose religious zeal the initial spread of Islam in the island is attributed. A great deal of attention is devoted to the way the saints disseminated Islam – to their dakwah or missionary activities.

A good example of this tendency emerged in the festivities surrounding the opening of the second Istiqlal festival in Jakarta, which ran from the end of September until the middle of November 1995. In the week preceding the opening of the festival by President Soeharto, people in Java had the opportunity to watch two processions. In East Java, the bedug (the large drum about one metre long and seventy-five centimetres in diameter), used to announce the times of prayer at the Sunan Ampel mosque, began its peregrinations by making a tour of the province, travelling from the Sunan Ampel mosque in Surabaya, through such centres as Sidoarjo, Pasuruan,
Malang, Blitar, Kediri, Jombang, Mojokerto and back to Surabaya. A few days later the drum was once again mounted on an open truck to be transported to Rembang. There the procession met up with a second procession, which had started its journey in Surakarta. In that city, replicas of two age-old Sekaten pusaka gamelan, heirlooms normally kept in the palace of the Susuhunan, had been mounted on four trucks. Accompanied by palace soldiers, a rebana (frame drum) group performing Islamic music and representatives of Islamic organizations, the gamelan had travelled north via Purwodadi and Blora. From that point, a joint procession featuring the bedug and the gamelan journeyed through Pekalongan, Cirebon and Bandung to the Istiqlal mosque in Jakarta. Nine people dressed in jubbah joined the procession for part of the route.

The bedug, the tradition-hallowed gamelan leading the procession and the route it followed all made unmistakable reference to the Nine Saints and the special way they had tackled the Islamization of Java. The whole event takes us back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when people in insular Southeast Asia were becoming acquainted with two new viable, alien cultures. First Islamic missionary activities gained impetus, which would finally wield the strength to accomplish the Islamization of most of Malaysia and Indonesia, as well as part of the Philippines. When this process was well-entrenched, the first European ships began to ply the international sailing route from the Middle East and India to China. Their appearance along the shores of Southeast Asia presented western culture as yet another challenge to well-established local customs and beliefs.

Even more significantly, the gamelan point directly to the methods used by the Nine Saints to propagate the faith. The gamelan of the palace of the sunan of Surakarta are a direct reference to Sunan Kalijaga and the sekaten celebrations held to commemorate the birthday of the Prophet which he and the other saints' initiated. At Demak, the capital of the first Islamic kingdom in Java, Sunan Kalijaga is said to have introduced the practice of adapting these festivities to Javanese taste, thus attracting more people. Special gamelan were built and positioned in front of the mosque of Demak, which, according to the legends, had been built in a joint effort by the saints. The music — which some sources claim was composed by
Sunan Kalijaga and Sunan Giri (Soelarto 1993:12-3)\(^6\) — was to supplement the *rebana* performance. Enticed by the sweet notes of the *gamelan*, people would be drawn to attend the celebrations, at which the *wali* presented their religious instructions (Salam 1960:43; Hasyim 1974:23). To hear the music properly (or to watch *wayang* performances), people had to enter the yard of the mosque, where the *wali* had placed themselves at the entrance gate or on the verandah to preach. On such occasions Sunan Kalijaga is said to have taught about 'the similarities to Buddhism', by no means 'condemning the Buddhist religion and customs' (Soelarto 1993:14).\(^7\) Some of the stories relate that people were asked first to pronounce the Islamic confession of faith before passing through the entrance gate (‘just like an admission ticket’ is how a number of the present-day authors explain this to their readers), and go on to explain that once a person had entered the yard of the mosque he had to perform the ritual ablutions (Fattah 1985:56; Hasyim 1979:53).\(^8\) Others simply note that many people attended and consequently were converted (and subsequently circumcised) (Soelarto 1993:14; Hasyim 1974:21).

Tales of this sort that are still popular recount how the *wali songo* set out to propagate Islam and succeeded attracting an increasing number of people. They tell us how, especially in later centuries (it is not always possible to pinpoint exactly when these stories began to circulate), people in Java viewed the relationship between Islam and the cultural traits identified as Javanese.

One of the salient features of the literature about the *wali songo* that has appeared in the last ten or so years is that the main differences still characterizing Javanese society with regard to the arrival of Islam are traced back to the way the *wali songo* propagated Islam. It is a well-known dichotomy, by no means alien to scholarly literature. On the one side there are the *santri* or *putihan*, the white ones, the people sometimes referred to as *Muslim fanatik* (though one should not interpret this term too definitively), who stress a strict adherence to religious rules. Representing another way of looking at matters are the *abangan*, the red ones, sometimes also called KTP (*kartu tanda penduduk*) Muslims or identity-card Muslims, though again that qualification has to be handled with a certain reserve; these are Javanese for whom pre-Islamic customs and beliefs are still important.\(^9\)

\(^6\) According to tradition the instruments created were the Kyai Gunturmadu and Kyai Nagawilaga.

\(^7\) Citing KAP, a manuscript by Widyobudoyo, *Riwayat Sekaten*.

\(^8\) Yet another story (Kafanjani n.d.:115) relates how Sunan Kudus, upon inviting Hindus and Buddhist to the mosque, did not ask them to wash their feet, hands and faces because on an earlier occasion this had dissuaded many from accepting the religion.

\(^9\) Stories and literature about the *wali songo* usually also relate the fate of Siti Jenar; another of the legendary early missionaries, who preached a heterodox form of mysticism and because of this was sentenced to death by the *wali*. Like later mystics who exhibit similar pantheistic beliefs and sometimes shocking behaviour in their defiance of Islamic law, he is still venerated.
The difference, it is argued, dates back to the time of the *wali*, who supposedly did not agree on the way to accomplish the Islamization of the areas in which they were preaching the new faith. Tradition recounts a difference of opinion among them about the approach to be taken. Some of them, the 'white ones', Sunan Giri in particular, wanted to follow a rigid path banning everything that was not strictly in accordance with Islam. Recently published accounts maintain that Sunan Giri was 'very extreme', not given to compromise with the existing set of religious beliefs (Hasyim 1979:56; Fattah 1985:39). Others, the 'red ones' – Sunan Kalijaga, Sunan Muria and Sunan Kudus, for instance – are said to have been much more willing to compromise with Javanese culture in order to better disseminate the new religion. Adopting this path, their missionary activities would meet with less opposition and the faith would more easily spread (Hasyim 1983:53-6; Kafanjani n.d.:61-3). They were, as one author puts it, 'more Javanese' than the representatives of the other group (Hasyim 1983:71). According to the literature that describes *dakwah* methods, their aim was to avoid a confrontation and the concomitant social upheaval and clashes that might result. They advocated a gradual, long-term adjustment of society to orthodox Islam.

Regarding these differences in approach, a number of examples are traditionally presented of the way the 'moderate ones' accepted old practices, giving them a new Islamic meaning or at least trying not to trample on the sensitivity of the Hindu-Buddhist people they were trying to convert. Sunan Kalijaga, Sunan Kudus and Sunan Muria are all depicted as having accepted the rituals and *selamatan* connected with the commemoration of a person's death on specific days: important junctures such as anniversaries and the 40th, 100th and 1000th day after a person had passed away. The fruits of their effort, it is stated, were that the traditional customs of burning incense and dedicating offerings were gradually replaced by prayers and the recitation of verses from the Koran. Food originally intended as offerings for the soul of the deceased was distributed among the guests. Most telling is a story about Sunan Kudus, according to which he prohibited the slaughtering of cattle in order not to offend the Hindu population of Kudus (Amar 1992:14; Salam 1989:85; Kafanjani n.d.:112).

Yet the adjustment of certain Javanese cultural traits to Islam is attributed to the *wali* of the second, less compromising group as well. The saints are all said to have agreed to the transformation of popular art forms (the special Mulud *gamelan* performance has already been mentioned), to make sure that these were no longer in defiance of religious precepts. There are claims that the shape, even the introduction, of the *wayang kulit* figures can be attributed to their efforts. The *wali*, realizing

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10 Another example mentioned is the *selamatan* when a woman is three months pregnant. Kafanjani n.d.:114; Salam 1989:83; Hasyim 1974:30; Hasyim 1983:69.
that its popularity made the wayang an important vehicle in their missionary activities, but – and in this respect Sunan Giri in particular seems to have been most persistent – finding the representation of the human image in its puppets repugnant, created a new type of wayang. In it the puppets no longer closely resembled a human form, thus bringing the wayang into conformity with the Islamic ban on the portrayal of images of living creatures.\footnote{Similarly, a new style of wood carving has been attributed to them for the same reasons.} They did so not only because people outside the court were very fond of wayang performances, but as tradition has it, Raden Patah, the founder of the first Islamic kingdom in Java, was also an incontrovertible fan – that is, of the wayang beber, where the tale unfolds itself on a long scroll (Bastomi 1992:97; Hasyim 1974:25). At the same time, of course, Islamic stories were developed to replace those with a Hindu-Buddhist content. Usually it is Sunan Kalijaga who is honoured with having transformed the wayang (and of having designed the gunungan, the ‘mountain’, marking the beginning and end of a wayang performance and its interludes); but Sunan Giri, who initially is said to have been in favour of banning wayang entirely as un-Islamic, is said to have played an important role in this as well (Bastomi 1992:97; Fattah 1985:52). The beginning of the use of wayang kulit as a means of dakwah is sometimes traced back to the festivities connected with the inauguration of the Demak mosque, giving Sunan Kalijaga the honour of being its first dalang (Hasyim 1979:53; Khalid n.d.:59). Others point to the Mulud celebrations at Demak, where wayang performances were held on the verandah of the mosque (Fattah 1985:55).

This is not the place to venture into the symbolic meaning of the processions that preceded the Istiqlal festival mentioned at the beginning of this article. The heirlooms that were displayed relate to a period, still remembered with pride in Java, during which the Islamization of the island took concrete form. The wali are venerated as the heroes who accomplished this conversion. The stories circulating about them also relate to the miracles they performed, and to this day their graves are still places of pilgrimage. Not without reason, both the governor of East Java and the chairman of the committee that organized the Istiqlal festival cautioned that the bedug and gamelan were no more than ordinary objects, unquestionably of great historical value but without spiritual power. They admonished the people that during the procession these relics should not become objects of veneration, with people touching or kissing them or succumbing to emotion and bursting into tears on seeing the procession pass by.\footnote{Republika 9-9-1995.} Yet, much to the dismay of some Muslims, such scenes did take place. In Pekalongan, pregnant women, even those who had performed the hajj, it was reported, tried to caress the Sunan Ampel bedug in order to obtain a blessing.
The *wali* are remembered as being instrumental in founding the first Islamic kingdom in Java and in waging war on the last Hindu realms. Yet they also function as cultural heroes, the creators of what nowadays are considered to be the representations *par excellence* of Javanese culture. Apart from the *wayang*, the nine saints are said to have used and adopted other popular art forms in their attempts to spread the faith (Bashah 1993:103). Javanese *gamelan* music in its present form is attributed to their efforts, in particular those of Sunan Bonang (Sunyoto n.d.:102-3). Another of the missionary activities to which they almost all are said to have devoted themselves was the composition of Javanese songs. One of these, the work of Sunan Giri, was 'a hit' in its own day according to a recent newspaper article. Their influence is traced even in children's songs and games, *pencak silat*, and the lay-out of Javanese cities (Kafanjani n.d.:104-5; Sunyoto n.d.:97). And, though, it is also inferred that it was they who were at the root of the *abangan-santri* distinction, the nine saints are presented as propagators of the faith who simultaneously behaved with tact and moderation, accepting existing culture wherever possible. They 'protected and built upon' existing customs (Ahnan 1994:69), did not trespass upon the sensibilities of the people (Amar 1992:13), and did not 'threaten, criticize, or frighten the population by the introduction of various kinds of prohibitions or by issuing religious rulings banning all elements of local culture' (Bashah 1993:102). They based their missionary activities on their 'painstaking observations and studies of the contemporaneous society' (Salam 1989:83).

The practices ascribed to the *wali songo*, and the way they figure in classical historical chronicles such as the *Babad Tanah Jawi* and the *Sajarah Banten*, testify to a continuum between the pre-Islamic past and the new faith. Sometimes that link is obvious. According to the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, Raden Patah, the Islamic ruler of Demak, is the son of Brawijaya, the last king of the Hindu-Buddhist empire of Majapahit, whom he defeats in battle. In the same chronicle, the *wali* legitimate the founding of Mataram and its future rulers, and thus also the present royal houses of Surakarta and Yogyakarta that stem from that empire. Senapati, the legendary founder of Mataram, is informed by Sunan Giri that it is Allah's will that the sovereign of Mataram govern over Java (Olthof 1987:102). A similar assurance is given by Nyai Rara Kidul, the Goddess of the Southern Ocean and ruler of the spirit world. She tells Senapati that his prayer to Allah will be answered and that he and his descendants will rule over Java (Olthof 1987:80).

Similarly, animistic beliefs and Hindu elements, sometimes still recognized as such but given an Islamic meaning, continue to manifest themselves in an Islamic setting. The theme of continuity between the two

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religions, a theme allegedly present in the sermons of *wali* like Sunan Kalijaga in their attempts to convert the Javanese, is expressed in its most extreme form by a heterodox Islamic mystic. He said: 'Between Buddhism and Islam there is no difference. They are two in form but one in name'.\(^{14}\) This aphorism can be read as justifying the warning attributed to Sunan Giri and the other *wali* who shared his reservations about adopting too tolerant an attitude towards observances that run counter to the teachings of Islam. They realized that at a later stage, once Islam had become the accepted religion, it might be more difficult to eradicate such beliefs, which by then would have become accepted as an integral part of Islam by people lacking the benefit of proper religious schooling.

Islam became the religion of the state and of the people. This is revealed in the *Babad Tanah Djawi* in its description of the end of Majapahit. After he has overthrown his father (who upon his defeat ascends to heaven), Sunan Ampel informs the victorious Raden Patah that Sunan Giri must first occupy the throne of Mataram for forty days to cleanse it of the traces left by the heathen ruler (Olthof 1987:31). Yet the old ways and beliefs lived on and found their way into tradition. Justification for their survival is apparent in many examples from daily life as well as in the chronicles and traditions handed down by previous generations. It can also be discerned from a less well-known legend about Raden Patah. Only by presenting him first and foremost as a Javanese, and not as a Muslim, was it possible to depict him as a legitimate ruler. According to the legend recounted by De Graaf, Raden Patah either fell ill or lost consciousness each time he tried to sit down on the throne while dressed as a hajji. Only after he had put on his Javanese royal headdress and ear ornaments could he do so unscathed (De Graaf 1949:84).

Legitimizing royal power thus became a concept which drew on Islamic as well as pre-Islamic notions, both of which are manifest in chronicles such as the *Babad Tanah Jawi* and in the court ceremonies performed to this day. Court and ruler function as guardians of Javanese culture as well as of Islam and of Islamic law. References to Nyai Rara Kidul coexist with references to Islam, the latter highlighted at the impressive *garebeg* processions, held during colonial times on days of Islamic festivals such as the Mulud celebrations in which the ruler played a key role.\(^{15}\) At court and outside the palace among the common people this set the stage for a kind of struggle for cultural hegemony between Islamic and pre-Islamic notions, as the story about Raden Patah illustrates. Within different periods and among different social groups one of the two notions always gained the upper hand. An emphasis on Islam may alternate with an upsurge of pre-

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\(^{14}\) This saying is from Ki Ageng Pengging, a pupil of Siti Jenar (Zoetmulder 1935:347).

\(^{15}\) The end of Dutch colonial rule also seemed to signify the end of large-scale court ceremonies. In many cases it was the 1970s before such celebrations were revived, albeit in a more modest way.
Islamic beliefs and cultural manifestations, and vice versa.

That the two cultural and religious traditions are so elegantly married in the chronicles and in the stories about the *wali songo* is itself the result of this competition and an indication of the viability of the old beliefs. Their joining up is a compromise. Following C.C. Berg, Jay argues that the *Babad Tanah Jawi* was 'composed during the succeeding Mataram period [...] by court intellectuals intent on syncretizing Islam with earlier Hindu-Javanese learning' (Jay 1963:7). This equilibrium comes under attack immediately one of the two is emphasized to the detriment of the other. It may be Islamic leaders who take the lead in this, calling for a purer adherence to the faith, but any tendency to emphasize the Javanese background may have similar effects.

This trend is recognizable even in the early history of Mataram. Its expansion, along with efforts to subjugate outlying regions, gave rise to different views about what the rightful place of Islam in the kingdom should be. Mataram's growth could only be brought about by the political demise of the coastal regions of Java, where Islam had flourished first. The opposition expressed itself in the Mataram court emphasizing Hindu-Buddhist concepts within an Islamic setting and, conversely, the coastal regions championing strict adherence to Islam, though themselves not being completely free of pre-Islamic influences.\(^\text{16}\) Successive rulers of Mataram at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century had to cope with religiously inspired opposition and rebellions on the north coast of Java. Fierce resistance to the expansion of Mataram came from such places as Surabaya, Demak and Tuban. It was also particularly strong in Giri, which though only a small state had developed into the spiritual centre of Islam in the Archipelago. It was the place where, as VOC officials put it, the 'Pope' of Islam in this quarter of the world resided. The *Babad Tanah Jawi* recounts that the ruler of Giri condemned the East Javanese rising up against the ruler of Mataram, Sultan Agung (r. 1613-1646) because he believed it was the will of Allah that Mataram rule over Java. Nonetheless, the struggle was a very real one, eventually leading to the conquest of Giri by Mataram. Sultan Agung's successor, Amangkurat I (r. 1646-1677), was equally plagued by religiously inspired opposition. He dealt with this by summoning Islamic leaders to his court and killing many of them, together with their wives and children. Dutch sources claim that between 5000 and 6000 people fell victim to his purge (Ricklefs 1981:67). The murders took place at a time when, to quote again one of the recent publications about the *wali songo*, a Hindu-flavoured

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\(^{16}\) Whether this really was, as Jay (1963:9) states, a reinstatement of 'traditional Javanese learning and state ritual' (a 'Javanization' in the sense used by De Josselin de Jong), or the continuation of existing practice, is a question that is difficult to answer because of the lack of historical evidence revealing the depth of the original Islamization. Of more importance is that the opposition exists at all.
Islam had gained prominence, with the Hindu aspect more solid than the Islamic (Hasyim 1979:97). After much bloodshed throughout the course of the seventeenth century, the final, political victory could only be gained by the VOC coming to the assistance of the rulers of Mataram.

Since then the tension has never really disappeared. Dakwah activities of a more radical tone and nature calling for a strict adherence to the prescripts of Islam have at times upset the equilibrium. Sometimes this was a peaceful process, but at other times during the colonial period it was accompanied by subversive notions that attacked both life at court and Dutch rule. In the years of the governor-generalship of Herman Willem Daendels, for instance, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Susuhunan of Surakarta called for action against 'the roaming of priests and pilgrims' who, claiming to be descendants of Muhammad, traversed his territory preaching and blatantly inciting popular opinion against his rule. About fifty years later this phenomenon again attracted the full attention of the colonial government, who viewed it as a potential threat to law and order.17

Protest movements against the Dutch presence, even at the time of the VOC, and protests against indigenous rulers often took an Islamic form. Rebels stressed a strict adherence to orthodox Islam. In their daily lives they expressed this by performing their religious duties more faithfully than they had done in the past, by trying to eradicate un-Islamic behaviour, and by replacing their traditional (or western) dress with a style they considered to be more in keeping with Islam. Conversely, those stressing their Hindu-Javanese background at times tried to block the progress of Islam or attempted to diminish its religious, social and political influence. This is what happened in the days of Mataram and again during the first half of the twentieth century. The nationalist movement that took shape during this period manifested itself not only in a longing for an Indonesian nation but also in an emphasis in certain quarters of society on Javanese nationalism. Representatives of this latter trend tended to see Islam as the antithesis of this ideal. Mangkunegara VII was among those at that time (1918) who deplored the 'Islam preachers', accusing them of destroying Java's distant cultural past (Van Miert 1995:95). For him and others like him, the essence of this culture lay in Java's Hindu-Buddhist background and not in Islam. Consequently, in organizations such as Boedi Oetomo which they saw as vehicles to promote their cause, they did their utmost to prevent Islamic influence (Van Miert 1995:134). Their desire was also given expression in the founding of the Hardo Poesoro movement, with branches at various places in Java. The purpose of the movement was to free the members from Islam and to restore the old customs as they had existed, it was phrased, 'in the days of Buddha' (Sarekat Islam 1975:352).

17 Arsip Nasional Jakarta B 6-7-1859-yl.
Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo, one of the most famous radical nationalists of his day, praised Islam for its egalitarian tendencies and its contribution to the eradication of the caste system but attacked it for 'its tyrannical decisions, which have doomed our arts to death'.

Still, it would be a mistake to treat 'Javanese' and Islamic beliefs as complete opposites. For many, including those who favoured one or the other, both elements are well integrated into one and the same system. Sultan Agung, for instance, while waging a cruel war against his Islamic opponents, did not hesitate to send a deputation to Mecca in order to get formal approval for assuming the title of Sultan (Ricklefs 1981:44). The same phenomenon can be observed during the Java War between 1825 and 1830, when the rebellious Prince Diponegoro presented himself simultaneously as a champion of Islam and of Javanese culture, both of which he saw as imperilled because of the increased political and cultural Dutch presence. Prince Diponegoro was steeped in both Islamic and Javanese culture, which made him an ideal figure to unite Islamic and traditional Javanese resistance to Dutch rule. He was a devout Muslim, portrayed after his exile as studying Islamic mystical texts. Yet he could not embark on his rebellion without appealing for support from the Goddess of the Southern Ocean, indicating that it was his destiny to become ruler of Java (Ricklefs 1981:111). He called for a Holy War, and as a Dutch Resident puts it in the Babad Dipanagara: 'It is a sham, his giving himself over to religion, and often going away to perform asceticism. He is hand in glove with the santri,' with the religious community (Carey 1981:19). At the same time, as a member of the ruling dynasty he saw limits to the political hegemony of Islam. In the course of his rebellion he lost part of his following among Islamic religious leaders because he differed with them about the role to be accorded to Islam.

What happened in relations between court and protagonists of Islam was also reflected in society at large. In and outside the court, wayang tales based on Hindu epics continued to be performed, being even more popular than those relating Islamic stories. In cities and in the countryside, many of the older, pre-Islamic beliefs survived, sometimes taking on an Islamic form and sometimes not. In colonial times, their observation of such traits even led some Dutch observers to argue that many Javanese were in fact not Muslims at all but adhered to what the Dutch called a Javanese religion. Nowadays, the selamatan are performed as they are thought to have been sanctioned by the wali, sufficient reason for Geertz to identify this communal meal with the abangan version of Islam in Java and to start his discussion of this variant as follows: 'At the center of the whole Javanese religious system lies a simple, formal, undramatic, almost furtive, little ritual: the slametan (also sometimes

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18 De Expres 23-1-1914, 27-1-1914.
called a *kenduren*') (Geertz 1976:11). The second major trait he identifies is the 'extensive and intricate complex of spirit beliefs, and of a whole set of theories and practices of curing, sorcery, and magic' (Geertz 1976:5). These two examples can be supplemented with the veneration of the Goddess Dewi Sri, the protectress of rice, and other religious beliefs with pre-Islamic origins.

The 'strange behaviour' (in the words of the Islamic magazine *Panji Masyarakat*) and 'excesses' (as someone else even described it) engaged in by pregnant women during the passing of the *bedug* procession in 1995 also fits into this picture. K.H. Ali Yafie, a prominent leader of the Nahdlatul Ulama, the large Islamic organization, found it difficult to understand why many Muslims still showed such retrograde behaviour in 'our age of technology', the age of rapid globalization as others would call it. Such acts, bordering on *syirik*, polytheistic beliefs, one of the major sins in Islam, testified to the fact that Hindu influences were still far from absent. This posed a challenge to *dakwah*, K.H. Ali Yafei continued. If it indeed turns out that the processions are having a negative effect, this should be the first and last time that they are held.19 Another Islamic leader took a harsher view. He denounced the processions as a stimulus for Muslims to engage in polytheistic activities, observing that they 'damaged the morals of the Islamic community'. If it was thought advisable to have the objects displayed at the Istiqlal mosque, it would have been much better simply to pack them in a container and transport them to Jakarta. The *gamelan* came under further attack because of the special ceremonies and customs that surround them.20

Closely resembling the heterodox practices and concepts of the courts, these popular sets of beliefs followed in the villages sometimes incur the wrath of Muslims who strictly propagate a purer form of Islam, but this also is a matter of degree, in accordance with the basic tenets of the faith. Islamic movements that tried to transform society in the direction of Islam, turning part or most of the new religious zeal against the indigenous ruling class and the Dutch, was a phenomenon much feared by the Dutch colonial overlords. Such efforts met with varying degrees of success and their lasting effects differed. Periods of intensified religious life were followed by a restoration of the old ways. Political and economic motives interfered, prompting people to flock to Islamic reform movements for motives that were not entirely religious. Though worried by such manifestations of Islamic revival, especially early in this century, Dutch colonial officials gradually began to realize that the strength of an apparently greater Islamic zeal would begin to ebb again sooner or later. In the cultural rivalry between religion and local tradition, people would once more revert to their old ways. One such moment was in the early 1910s, when

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the Sarekat Islam was founded. Having as one of its main objectives the assiduous promotion of proper Islamic behaviour, it was the first Indonesian nationalist organization to have a massive following with branches all over Indonesia. Significantly, on their way to Sarekat Islam meetings some of the religious leaders first went to the graves of the wali songo to pray for the organization and its members (Sarekat Islam 1975:336).

Indeed, it was an era in which a greater attendance at religious meetings could be observed, and in some regions an enlargement of the mosque was even contemplated. Gambling and drinking were denounced, and there were reports (though rare ones admittedly) that selamatan and the playing of the gamelan had been condemned, or that the suggestion had been made that shops – except those selling food – be closed on Fridays.21 On one occasion Sarekat Islam members intervened to prevent the playing of a gamelan at a feast to celebrate the circumcision of a small boy. Next day, to compensate the relatives of the boy, they handed over five guilders. That gesture, the Advisor for Native Affairs wrote in a report to the Governor-General, did not satisfy the family, especially not the mother, who had angrily let it be known that she did not see eye to eye with the behaviour of her more zealous fellow-villagers.22 The expression of rebellious thoughts and the occasional disturbance – though initially directed mostly against Europeans and Chinese and not yet against the indigenous ruling elite – were also part and parcel of these actions. Alarmed and fearing a showdown, many Dutch and Chinese bought weapons, certain that an uprising was in the making. Some civil servants were less panic-stricken. They were confident that the upsurge in religious feeling would not last and that those who had been influenced by it would soon return to their former lives.23 The Resident of Semarang explained to the Governor-General that because there were no fanatical Muslims in his district, the new movement would gradually die a natural death.24 Another resident could not hide his satisfaction when his prediction that within a few months ‘calm would follow the storm’ proved true.25 Some years later, writing about the same period, the Resident of Batavia also noted that ‘the flaring up of the sense of piety fizzled out and people were

21 Bupati of Tuban to Resident of Rembang 25-7-1913, Rinkes to Idenburg 4-10-1913 (Sarekat Islam 1975:200, 235; ARA, MvK (Ministerie van Koloniën), V(erbaal) 4-12-1915-48, 9-3-1916-26).
22 Rinkes to Idenburg 4-10-1913 (Sarekat Islam 1975:224).
23 As the Sarekat Islam attracted people from all walks of life, it should come as no surprise that at the end of 1913, the board in Nganjuk in Central Java decided to admit only strict Muslims. The decision was taken after a meeting during which some board members, as a Dutch civil servant reported, had had a wee drop too much, while other members indulged in gaming with dice, drinking and entertaining ladies of easy virtue (Resident Kediri to Governor-General 4-11-1913; ARA, MvK, V 27-3-1914).
24 Resident Semarang to Governor-General 12-5-1913 (Sarekat Islam 1975:137).
25 Resident Kediri to Governor-General 4-11-1913 (ARA, MvK, V 27-3-1914).
again Mohammedan as the ancestors interpreted it'.

Most of the examples presented in this paper are from Central and East Java, areas usually referred to when the syncretist character of Indonesian culture or religion is discussed. But this does not mean that the incorporation of existing beliefs and practices could not be found elsewhere. It is a general phenomenon, not confined to Java or to Islam. Seeking confirmation about the Buginese in South Sulawesi, a region at present usually associated with a stricter form of Islam, we can still read that at the beginning of this century (in line with what Dutch observers said about the majority of the Javanese) they were heathens to the core. The veneration of saints and of sacred heirlooms was presented as examples of such apostasy. Referring to this phenomenon, a French scholar, Ch. Pelras, has suggested that the syncretism also observed there can be traced back to the efforts made by early Islamic preachers active in South Sulawesi to see that their religion was accepted by the Buginese and Macasarese rulers. Like the Javanese wali, they too followed a gentle, gradual approach (Pelras 1985). The belief in sacred heirlooms, traced back to divine rulers who descended from heaven, and veneration of the Goddess of Rice lived on.

At moments when religiosity and correct Islamic behaviour are stressed – and such a trend is again observable at present – religious duties are observed more assiduously. Condemned as sinful are gambling, the consumption of alcohol, indulging in certain art forms and the like. These are combatted, while certain 'western' economic ideas and social customs are denounced. These phenomena are the objects of a fairly generally held consensus regarding religious directives. Part of the dakwah activities is aimed at dealing with such matters. Everything becomes much more complicated when moving into the sphere of beliefs. For those who adhere to them, they are often unquestioningly considered to be an integral part of Islam, while for those trying to purify religion they are abhorred as examples of superstition and heterodoxy. Or, as noted in a recent study about beliefs surrounding pregnancy and birth in rural Aceh, such villagers on the whole are faithful Muslims, but because they are not well-versed in the faith and tend to equate such customs with Islam, they transgress (Hasan 1977:121-2). This is the area in which Islamic leaders engaged in dakwah religious disputes disagree about the best way to proceed, sometimes even resulting in deep rifts within the devout Islamic community.

At present, satellite television, electronic mail and the internet make for fast worldwide communication. These new technologies are greeted

26 ARA Memorie van Overgave Resident Batavia 1918.
27 De Locomotief 23-12-1913.
28 It would be a mistake, however, to equate all calls for religious reform with what in the West has become associated with Islamic fundamentalism. It has also been argued that present-day economic and social notions have to be taken into account, and that for instance the law of inheritance, which is disadvantageous to daughters, must be changed.
with a mixture of admiration and awe. Many enthusiastically embrace the new possibilities; others express their apprehension over where it will all lead. Periods like the present, in which intensified cultural contacts seem to change existing society forever, have many counterparts in the past. People in the early decades of the twentieth century marvelled at the many technical innovations, including the bicycle, which within a short span of time was fully accepted by many as an ordinary device. In those same years, as at present, a rise of nationalism all over the world was linked to the increase in volume of world trade over previous decades (*Handelingen* 1913-14, II:149). At the same time, the Dutch Islamic scholar Snouck Hurgronje blamed 'the thousand-fold increase in means of communication' for growing Islamic subversion in the Netherlands Indies, which he claimed originated in the Ottoman empire (Snouck Hurgronje 1915:111). Going further back in history, conservative Javanese, witnessing the advance of Islam and of western culture, must have despaired at the disappearance of their own civilization. Indeed, it would be a surprise if a dominant foreign, international culture had not had an impact on people living in other regions. As the example of the dissemination of Islam in the Indonesian Archipelago shows, local culture in such instances is usually more resilient than is often assumed.

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