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Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java

M.C. Ricklefs

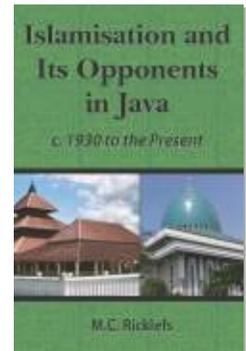
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CHAPTER 1

Islamisation in Java to c. 1930¹

The Javanese developed a sophisticated literary and religious culture and were governed by sophisticated elites long before Islam made its first recorded appearance in Javanese society in the 14th century. This earlier civilisation was inspired by Hindu and Buddhist ideas and left behind legacies of art, architecture, literature and thought that continued to impress both Javanese and outsiders. There may well have been Muslims travelling in Java before the 14th century and there may have been Javanese converts to Islam, but all we can know is that the first evidence of Javanese Muslims is a series of gravestones beginning in 1368–9. These appear to record the deaths of Javanese of the aristocratic (perhaps royal) elite at the court of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom of Majapahit in East Java, at the very height of its glory, who were Muslims. One theme that recurs throughout the history of Javanese Islam is the role played by elites. Only rarely is this a history of bottom-up religious change.

Creating the Mystic Synthesis

The early development of Islam in Java is poorly documented, but 16th-century manuscripts suggest both that Islam was accommodating itself to the Javanese cultural environment and that it was not. On the one hand is

¹ This chapter summarises briefly my books *Mystic synthesis in Java: A history of Islamisation from the fourteenth to the early nineteenth centuries* (Norwalk: EastBridge, 2006) and *Polarising Javanese society: Islamic and other visions c. 1830–1930* (Singapore: Singapore University Press; Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press; Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007). Details may be sought in those volumes. Only direct quotations will be footnoted in this chapter.

evidence of a hybrid culture in which being Javanese and being Muslim at the same time was seen as unproblematic, a culture in which older local terms for God, prayer, heaven and soul prevailed over their Arabic equivalents. On the other is evidence that people were expected to choose between being Muslim and being Javanese. All that this tells us is that Islamisation was a contested and complicated matter in this early period. Two processes seem to have gone on at the same time: foreign Muslims settled locally and became Javanese, while local Javanese embraced Islam and became Muslims. Legends about this period tell of nine saints (the *wali sanga*) who were the first to bring Islam to Java. Their graves became places of pilgrimage and through their legends they remain today symbols of how some people think Islamisation should take place, by a process of accommodation with local culture. But there is no reliable historical evidence at all about these men or their doings.

The court in the interior was still Hindu-Buddhist when the Portuguese apothecary Tomé Pires visited the north coast of Java in 1513. He was much impressed by the grandeur of the court (which he knew through its reputation): ‘They use *krises*, swords, and lances of many kinds, all inlaid with gold’ and had ‘stirrups all inlaid with gold, inlaid saddles, such as are not to be found anywhere else in the world’, he wrote.² A Javanese

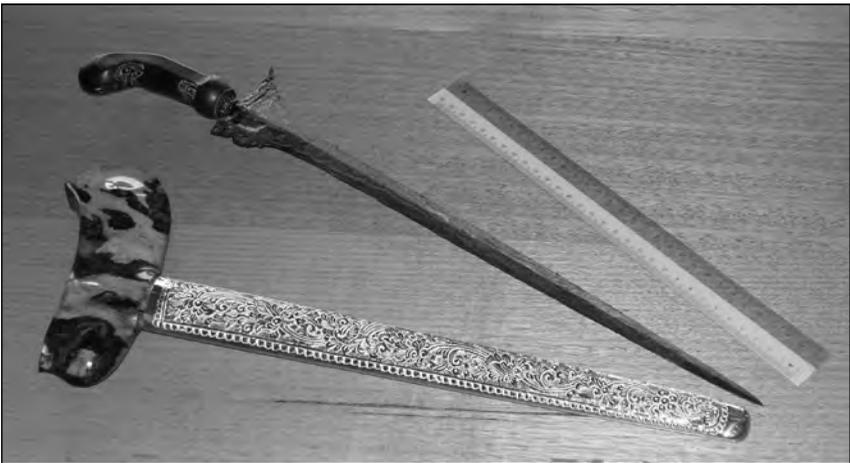


Illustration 1 *Kyai Wali*, a Javanese *kris* with its scabbard; reputedly a 15th- or 16th-century blade made by the *wali* Sunan Giri, with a 19th-century Surakarta hilt

² Armando Cortesão (ed. and transl.), *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires and the book of Francisco Rodrigues* (2 vols; London: The Hakluyt Society, 1944), vol. 1, pp. 174–5.

nobleman from the court whom he saw in person had ‘three handsomely caparisoned jennets with stirrups all inlaid, with cloths all adorned with richly worked gold, with beautiful caparisons’.³ This court fell to an alliance of local Muslim lords c. 1527, but its reputation and styles continued to be influential thereafter.

By the early 17th century, the ruling dynasty was that of Mataram (the area of present-day Yogyakarta). There the greatest king of post-Majapahit Java, Sultan Agung (r. 1613–46), acted to reconcile *kraton* and Islamic traditions. He continued his royal liaison with the most powerful of Central Java’s indigenous (and definitely not Islamic) deities, the Goddess of the Southern Ocean (Ratu Kidul), but he also took decisive steps to make his court a more Islamic one. In 1633 he made a pilgrimage to Tembayat, where is found the holy grave of Sunan Bayat, regarded as the *wali* who introduced Islam to the Mataram area and whose grave-site had been the centre for resistance to Agung’s rule, which he crushed. Agung is said to have communed with the saint’s spirit, which taught him secret mystical sciences; thus were Bayat’s powers attached to the monarchy. Agung also abandoned the Old Javanese Indian-style Śaka calendar for a hybrid Javanese dating system using Islamic lunar months, an act which no doubt was also supernaturally potent. He reconciled with the princely family of Surabaya which had been his main opponent while he was building his empire by marrying one of his sisters to the senior surviving Surabaya prince, whose ancestry reached back to one of the most senior of the *walis*. With this prince’s assistance, Agung introduced major works of Islamically inspired literature into the court canon that were themselves thought to have magical potency. One of these works, *Kitab Usulbiyah*, claimed that reading or writing it was equivalent to fulfilling two of Islam’s five pillars — undertaking the pilgrimage to Mecca and giving alms — and also to going on Holy War. In this work, the Prophet Muhammad is depicted as wearing the golden crown of Majapahit, thus bringing together two powerful Islamic and Javanese symbols.

Agung’s reconciliation of Islamic identity with Javanese royal traditions was not pursued with similar enthusiasm by his successors. For several decades, rebellions against the dynasty largely justified themselves in the name of Islam. From the 1670s, Madurese, Makasarese and other non-Javanese became involved in the wars in Java. The beleaguered dynasty turned to the Dutch East India Company for military support. The Company’s

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 191–2.

intervention enabled the dynasty to survive, but it also enhanced the religious aspect of rebellions — for now the dynasty's enemies could see it supported by *kafirs* — and played a major role in the Company's own bankruptcy at the end of the 18th century.

After decades of destructive civil wars in which religious identity played a major role, a second reconciliation of the *kraton* and Islamic sensibilities took place in the reign of Pakubuwana II (r. 1726–49). The prime mover here was the young king's aged, blind and pious Sufi grandmother Ratu Pakubuwana (b. c. 1657, d. 1732). Inspired by the example of Sultan Agung, she had new versions of the magically powerful works of his reign recomposed in the court. She made it clear in the introductions to those versions that she herself was particularly blessed by God and that these books deployed supernatural power which would both bring her own life to perfection and make perfect the reign of her grandson, making of him the ideal Sufi king. There were indeed *kraton*-led efforts to make the society more devoutly Islamic. The people were commanded to be diligent in attending the mosque on Fridays, gambling was outlawed at the court (with an exception for cock-fighting) and there is some evidence of the hands of thieves being amputated. Pre-Islamic doctrines, works of literature and other practices were, however, preserved within the court, but they were understood as being properly Islamic. This Islamisation project was idiosyncratic in other ways as well. Opium was banned (in theory) but the court's taste for European wine, liquor and beer was evidently unabated.

Pakubuwana II, however, was no ideal king. He was young, inconstant, foolish and probably rather stupid. His court disintegrated into deadly cliques that he could not manage. When war began between the Dutch East India Company and locally domiciled Chinese with their Javanese allies in 1740, the king first sided against the Company. He attacked, besieged and eventually compelled the surrender of the Company fortress at his court city of Kartasura, forcing the surviving Europeans to convert to Islam. He was now the conquering Sufi king of Holy War, bringing low the Christian *kafirs*. But changing military circumstances then made him think that this had been a mistake, and that it would have been wiser to side with the Company after all. Tentative steps towards reconciliation produced disaster, since neither the Company nor the rebels could now trust him. He found that his own court became the target of the rebels; in 1742 the *kraton* fell to them and Pakubuwana II took flight. Now the Company was prepared to deal with him, since he was prepared to offer whatever the Company might ask to restore him to his throne. Eventually the Company and its Madurese and Javanese allies prevailed and Pakubuwana II was restored to his battered

court, which he soon abandoned. He seems also to have abandoned any enthusiasm he had for further Islamising efforts or demonstrations of muscular piety. He moved to his new court of Surakarta in 1746.

The following years spawned more conflict, notably the rebellion of Png. Mangkubumi, who fought the forces of Pakubuwana III (r. 1749–88) and the declining Company to a standstill. Mangkubumi was proclaimed as a king in his own right, took the title of Sultan Hamengkubuwana I (r. 1749–92) and established his new court of Yogyakarta in 1755–6. Surakarta's domains were further subdivided in 1757 when the flamboyant Png. Mangkunagara I (r. 1757–95) was given a sizeable territory. Yogyakarta's lands were divided further in 1812, when a substantial portion was hived off by the British interim administration and given to Png. Pakualam I (r. 1812–29). The once-great kingdom of Mataram thus came to consist of two senior courts — those of the Sultan of Yogyakarta and the Susuhunan of Surakarta — and the two subsidiary but substantial principalities of the Pakualaman and the Mangkunagaran. Together these were what the Dutch called the *Vorstenlanden* (principalities).

During these years of tumultuous politics, the reconciliation of Javanese and Islamic identities, beliefs and styles produced what I have termed a 'Mystic Synthesis'. Within the capacious boundaries of Sufism, this synthesis rested on three main pillars:

- a strong sense of Islamic identity: to be Javanese was to be Muslim;
- observation of the five pillars of Islamic ritual: the confession of faith (*Shahada*), five daily prayers in the direction of Mecca (*salat*), giving alms (*zakat*), fasting during the month of Ramadan (*puasa* or *pasa*) and the pilgrimage to Mecca (the *hajj*) for those who were able to undertake it; and,
- despite the potential contradiction with the first two, acceptance of the reality of local Javanese spiritual forces such as Ratu Kidul (the Goddess of the Southern Ocean), Sunan Lawu (the spirit of Mount Lawu, essentially a wind-god) and a host of lesser supernatural beings.

This synthesis is illustrated in one of the important Sufi works of the time, the 'Gift addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet' (*al-Tuhfa al-mursala ila ruh al-Nabi*), which was written in the court of Yogyakarta and derived ultimately from the work of the Gujarati scholar Muhammad ibn Fadli'llah al-Burhanpuri (d. 1620). The Javanese-language text departs from the Arabic original in ways consistent with the Mystic Synthesis: having encountered

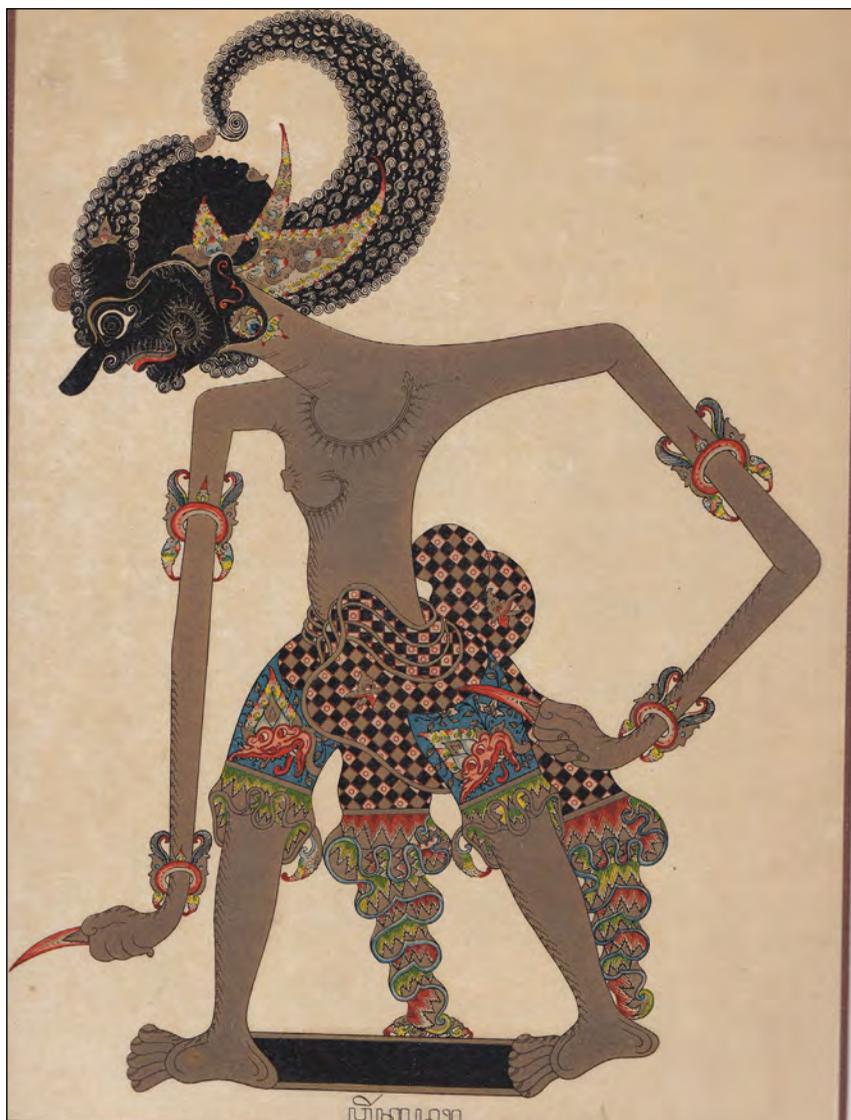


Illustration 2 Depiction of the *wayang* character Bima (Werkudara)
(from Pigeaud, *Javaanse volksvertoningen*, 1938, pl. 102)

difficulty in setting out the Sufi doctrine of seven stages of emanation, the writer resorted to the Hindu-Javanese metaphor of the relationship between Vishnu and Krishna. Older-style arts such as the *wayang* shadow play, with its stories taken mainly from the Hindu-Javanese epics, also continued to be patronised. Yet all of this was within a context in which the sense of being Muslim was evidently powerfully felt across Javanese society. Similar compromises of faith and practice could be found across the Islamic world in the period before the reform movements of the 18th and particularly 19th centuries.

There is very limited evidence from this period for the religious life of Javanese outside *kraton* circles, but what we do have mostly confirms widespread observation of Islam's five pillars. One account is a description of Gresik in East Java in 1822 by A.D. Cornets de Groot, who was Dutch Resident there. He wrote,

The main points of the Islamic faith, which are carried out by many, are the *Shahada* [Confession of faith], the *sembayang* [daily prayer], the *puasa* (fast), the *zakat* [alms], *fitrah* [contribution at the end of the fast] and *hajj* [pilgrimage]. ... The *puasa* (fast) is carried out by most Javanese of all classes.⁴

Further support for this view comes from J.W. Winter, who had worked in Surakarta as a translator since the late 18th century and wrote a report in 1824. His observations of Javanese Islam combine insights with ignorance and are not always to be taken at face value. Nevertheless, it is of interest that in a section entitled 'Superstitions', he wrote, 'I'm not saying that the Javanese don't practice well their religion of the faith of Muhammad, which is professed by them across the whole of Java. Its adherents are devoted to it as strongly as possible.'⁵

Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles was Lieutenant Governor of Java during the interim British administration of 1811–6 and wrote a famous *History of Java*. 'Pilgrimages to Mecca are common', he noted, and 'every village has its priest, and ... in every village of importance there is a mosque or building set apart adapted to religious worship'. He also reported the practice of circumcision of both boys and girls, the latter said to 'suffer a slight operation,

⁴ A.D. Cornets de Groot, 'Bijdrage tot de kennis van de zeden en gewoonten der Javanen', *TNI* vol. 14, pt. 2 (1852), pp. 271–2.

⁵ J.W. Winter, 'Beknopte beschrijving van het hof Soerakarta in 1824', *BKI* vol. 54 (1902), p. 82.

intended to be analogous'.⁶ A rather dissenting picture was presented by John Crawfurd, who was also in Java during this time. He was a shrewd observer but also a sternly judgmental Scottish Protestant, who condemned the Javanese as 'semibarbarians'.⁷ He said further,

Of all Mahomedans the Javanese are the most lax in their principles and practice. ... Neither the prayers nor the fastings of the Indian islanders, commonly speaking, are very rigid. The lower orders know little, and care less, about these matters. ... The pilgrimage to Mecca is frequently undertaken by the Javanese, and all the other Mahomedan tribes, less on account of piety, than on account of the distinctions and immunities which the reputation of the pilgrimage confers among a simple and untaught people.⁸

Taking all of the Javanese and foreign evidence together, it seems to me clear that the depiction of the Mystic Synthesis here captures the essence of Javanese Islam as of, say, 1800–30. It also seems likely that — despite some conflict of evidence on this aspect — many Javanese of all classes adhered to it.

The culminating symbolic expressions of the Mystic Synthesis were a great book and a great man. The former is the monumental *Serat Centhini*, written in the court of Surakarta in the second decade of the 19th century at the behest of the Crown Prince (later Susuhunan Pakubuwana V, r. 1820–3). This work — containing something over 200,000 lines of verse — is full of variety and subject to real problems of analysis, but certainly depicts a Javanese society in which Islam (as understood locally) was central. One of the characters in the text declares,

Already embracing this holy religion [Islam]
is every blade of grass in the land of Java,
following the Prophet who was Chosen.⁹

⁶ Thomas Stamford Raffles, *The history of Java* (2 vols; 2nd ed; London: John Murray, 1830), vol. II, pp. 3–4.

⁷ John Crawfurd, *History of the Indian Archipelago, containing an account of the manners, arts, languages, religions, institutions, and commerce of its inhabitants* (3 vols; Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Co., 1820), vol. I, p. 47 and elsewhere.

⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 260–71.

⁹ [Pakubuwana V] *Serat Centhini (Suluk Tambangraras): Yasandalêm Kangjêng Gusti Pangeran Adipati Anom Amêngkunagara III (Ingkang Sinubun Paku Burwana V) ing Surakarta* (ed. and transl. Kamajaya; 12 vols; Yogyakarta: Yayasan Centhini, 1986–92), stanza 66:3.

The great man was Png. Dipanagara of Yogyakarta, a son of the later Sultan Hamengkubuwana III (r. 1810–1, 1812–4).¹⁰ He spent much of his earlier years away from the *kraton*, which he saw as an environment deeply corrupted by, among other things, the European presence and general irreligiosity. He withdrew from this atmosphere and spent time at the estate of his pious great-grandmother the Ratu Ageng (the widow of Sultan Mangkubumi). There he studied works of Islamic inspiration as well as literature from the pre-Islamic Old Javanese heritage, a range of inspirations consistent with the Mystic Synthesis. He formed relationships with pious Islamic communities in the countryside. Around 1805–8 he had an inspirational experience in which he met several major spirits — local deities, the *wali* Sunan Kalijaga and Ratu Kidul — which convinced him that he had been selected to be the purifying leader of an age of devastation in Java, which would usher in the messianic time of the *Ratu Adil*, the Just King. Over the following years, the situation at the court and in the countryside deteriorated, while further visions came to Dipanagara. In one such, according to his autobiographical account, Dipanagara met the *Ratu Adil* himself, who said that the prince was tasked to conquer Java and that his mandate was the *Qur'an*. His final visions occurred during the fasting month of Ramadan in April–May 1825, when he was told that God had bestowed certain titles upon him, including *Eruakra*, the title which Javanese messianic traditions ascribe to the *Ratu Adil*.

In 1825 a final break occurred between him and the *kraton* with its Dutch allies, and the devastating Java War (1825–30) began. With widespread support amongst both aristocratic and commoner Javanese, Dipanagara initially did serious damage to the ill-prepared Europeans. Eventually, however, the latter gained the upper hand. This was no minor conflict. In the course of the fighting, the government side lost about 8,000 European soldiers and 7,000 Indonesian, and at least 200,000 Javanese died. But it became clear that Dipanagara could not prevail. In 1830 he agreed to meet the Dutch side for negotiations: it is unclear what he really expected to happen, but in any case he was arrested and sent into exile, where he died 25 years later.

The Java War was the last major resistance to Dutch dominance in Java. In its wake, the truly colonial period of Javanese history began, and

¹⁰ Since the publication of my *Mystic synthesis* book, an outstanding and authoritative study of Dipanagara has at last been published: Peter Carey, *The power of prophecy: Prince Dipanagara and the end of an old order in Java, 1785–1855* (VKI vol. 249; Leiden: KITLV Press, 2008).

with that came dramatic political, social, religious and cultural change. By the 1850s, the three pillars of the Mystic Synthesis — the identification of being Javanese with being Muslim, the widespread observation of Islam's five pillars and the acceptance of the reality of local spirit forces — were all coming under challenge.

Polarising Javanese society

By the time that Dipanagara was sent into exile, reform movements were already arising in the Islamic Middle East and having an influence in Sumatra, but not yet among the Javanese. The Wahhabi movement began in Arabia in the 18th century, bringing a fierce martial puritanism to the task of restoring Islam to its original perfection. From the 1780s a reform movement began to spread in Minangkabau (West Sumatra); in 1803–4 it became more violent under the leadership of people known as the Padris. They were inspired in large part by the Wahhabis, whose movement they knew from their experience of the *hajj* to Mecca, which the Wahhabis conquered in 1803. A civil war followed in Minangkabau which by 1815 resulted in near-total victory for the Padri side. The Dutch were invited to intervene by defeated Minangkabau aristocrats, however, and they did so in 1821, precipitating the drawn-out Padri War which only came to an end in 1838 with final Dutch conquest and the imposition of colonial rule.

In Java, the end of the Java War in 1830 allowed the Dutch at last — after over two centuries of involvement there — to impose a true colonial regime. They implemented what is called the Cultivation System (*cultuurstelsel*), a means to wring profit from Java's peasantry through various compulsory mechanisms for growing export crops. The Javanese administrative-aristocratic elite (*priyayi*) were engaged in administering this 'system' (really a wide variety of local arrangements) and rewarded for their contribution. The *cultuurstelsel* also fostered a nascent Javanese middle class, for there were many tasks that were needed but which were not government monopolies. Tasks such as pottery- and gunny sack-making, smithing, brick-laying, textile production, entertainment, agricultural processing, fishing and fish-farming, land transport, shipbuilding and similar trades, even some sugar cane harvesting, were sectors in which local entrepreneurship could develop.

At the same time, Javanese population began to grow remarkably. Already since the ending of Java's civil wars in the mid-18th century population had been growing. This was probably at a rate in excess of 1 per cent per annum, and perhaps even substantially in excess of that rate, already in the third quarter of the 18th century (or so it seems, recognising the inadequacies

of the statistical records for that period).¹¹ In the 19th century the population took off, rising from something like 3–5 million at the start of the century and approaching 24 million by 1890. These figures cover the whole of Java, encompassing areas that were majority Sundanese in West Java and majority Javanese in Central and East Java, with substantial Madurese population in the last area particularly. In the 1870s the ethnic Javanese were estimated (there had not yet been a census) to total about 11.5 million. These colonial and demographic revolutions produced considerable social dislocation.

Not only such political and social change, but also religious change came to the Javanese in the 19th century. For the first time Christian missions had some success after the end of the Java War. There were only a few missionaries from Europe and they had a limited effect, but there were several pious lay Christians of Indo-European background — competent in Javanese and sympathetic to Javanese culture — who began to produce significant numbers of converts. The first and most flamboyant was the Russian-Javanese Conrad Laurens Coolen, who became in effect the first Javanese Christian *kyai*. Both his teachings and his personal life scandalised pious Europeans, but he was more effective than they in producing a community of Javanese Christians. Even more effective were indigenous Javanese Christians who, after embracing this new faith, also presented it in ways that were explicable within Javanese cultural contexts. The most colourful was Ky. Ibrahim Tunggul Wulung — the Christian *kyai* with long flowing hair, wispy beard and supernatural powers who conversed in riddles and had been converted by magical phenomena. A distinction was observed between *Kristen Jawa* (Javanese Christians) who were followers of these indigenous figures and *Kristen Londo* (Dutch Christians) who had been converted by the Europeans. The most influential of all was Ky. Sadrach, who produced the largest Christian communities in Central Java before his death in his late 80s in 1924. Some Javanese Muslims objected to the spread of Christianity. Between 1882 and 1884, almost all the churches built by Sadrach's followers were burned down, but such incidents diminished thereafter. By 1900 there may have been some 20,000 Christians in Central and East Java. The Christians thus represented less than 0.1 per cent of the Javanese population, but they had established that being Javanese did not necessarily mean being Muslim.

¹¹ This complicated issue is not discussed in my *Polarising Javanese society*. For a full discussion, see my paper 'Some statistical evidence on Javanese social, economic and demographic history in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *Modern Asian Studies* vol. 20 (1986), no. 1, esp. pp. 28–30.

Social change among the Javanese, particularly the emergence of a nascent middle class, encouraged the spread of Islamic reform movements. The increasing financial resources of this group enabled more of them to go on the *hajj*. While 19th-century colonial statistics are not to be taken too seriously, it is worth noting that in 1850, so far as the Dutch knew, only 48 people went on the *hajj* from Javanese-speaking residencies but by 1858 that number was 2,283. In the later years of the century and into the early 20th, it was normal for between 1,500 and around 4,000 to go on the pilgrimage each year, with 7,600 going from Javanese-speaking residencies and Madura in 1911. The Javanese middle class in towns and cities also often had business and other links with local Arab communities, which constituted another channel for disseminating ideas about Islamic purification.

Reform movements were not universally welcomed and the Mystic Synthesis continued to have a large following. There are multiple works from the 19th century reflecting this synthesis and not a few that criticise the more reformist ideas then spreading. In his famous poem *Serat Wedhatama* ('Superior wisdom'), the modernising prince and poet Mangkunagara IV (r. 1853–81) admonished his sons,

If you insist on imitating
the example of the Prophet,
O, my boys, you overreach yourself.
As a rule you will not hold out long:
seeing that you are Javanese,
just a little is enough.¹²

Mangkunagara IV also criticised those 'young people who boast of their theological knowledge' and should be 'reckoned as frauds': 'Oddly enough they deny their Javaneness / and at all costs bend their steps to Mecca in search of knowledge'.¹³

Religious boarding schools (*pesantren*) — key institutions, as we will see throughout this book — became a significant feature of Javanese life in the 19th century. There have been various suggestions (none of them supported by reliable evidence) that the *pesantren* was an ancient feature of the Javanese countryside. In fact none are known of before the 18th century and it is only in the 19th century that they became a major phenomenon. In

¹² [Mangkunagara IV,] *The Wedhatama: An English translation* (ed. and transl. Stuart Robson; KITLV working papers 4; Leiden: KITLV Press, 1990), pp. 30–1, with minor departures from Robson's translation.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 36–7.

1863 the colonial government recorded nearly 65,000 professional religious (mosque functionaries, teachers at religious schools, etc.) and 94,000 students at religious schools. By 1872, those numbers were 90,000 and over 162,000 respectively. In 1893 there were reckoned to be some 10,800 religious schools in Java and Madura with over 272,000 pupils. Many of these schools merely taught Qur'anic recitation by rote and elementary Islam, and in many the Mystic Synthesis version of Islam remained. But some taught more advanced topics and more reformed, more orthodox and *shari'a*-oriented Islam, and many played a role in the deeper Islamisation of the Javanese — at least of those Javanese who were receptive to the message.

Sufi brotherhoods (*tarekats*) also underwent reform in the 19th century. The Naqshabandiyya (of the Khalidiyya branch) was particularly significant; it seems to have been introduced in Javanese areas around the 1850s–60s. The Qadiriyya wa Naqshabandiyya (combining the practices of those two orders) was also new around that time. Both of these gave greater emphasis to the need for adepts to adhere to the five pillars of Islamic ritual, countering the antinomian inclinations of some other Sufis. They were also more anti-Christian and played a role in leading some anti-colonial uprisings, all of which were crushed. The Shattariyya and other orders also had followers among Javanese. So also did various messianic movements, especially in the 1880s.

Some of Java's Islamic reformers were conspicuous in their denunciation of older Javanese ideas. The most extreme example was Ky. H. Ahmad Rifa'i (or Rifangi), the founder of a movement known as Rifa'iyah or Budiah. He returned from the *hajj* to Java in the 1840s and established a *pasantren* at Kalisalak south of Tegal on the *pasisir* (north coast). In his numerous writings he sought to cleanse local Islam from what he regarded as unlawful innovations. He denounced *wayang* and other Javanese entertainments as un-Islamic. He did not, however, reject Sufism as some other contemporary and many later reformers did, but insisted on Sufi practices being reformed of deviant ideas and local innovations. He objected strongly to Javanese officials who were prepared to work for the *kafir* Dutch rulers and did not recognise as valid a marriage conducted by a *pangulu* (mosque head) appointed by the colonial government. He and his followers withdrew from the corrupted (in their eyes) society around them and built their own mosques. Rifa'i did not call for physical resistance against the colonial regime, but he was regarded as a threat by both the regime and the *priyayi* elite who worked for it. So he was exiled to Ambon in 1859, where he died in 1876. His movement continued after his exile and even in contemporary times is said to have some 7 million followers, particularly on the *pasisir*.

Pious and devout Javanese Muslims called themselves *putihan* (the ‘white ones’), but there were a good many Javanese who were not prepared to accept these new and more demanding versions of Islam; they were dubbed the *abangan*, ‘the red (or brown) ones’.¹⁴ This originated as a term of contempt used by the pious *putihan* in the mid-19th century — it is not documented before that time — but the *abangan* came to wear it comfortably. The first references known to me of the use of this term are in Dutch missionary reports from the 1850s.

The term *abangan* seems to have become more regular in its meaning of nominal, non-observing Muslims as the years passed, and to have spread across the Javanese-speaking heartland. As it did so, *abangan* lifestyle seems to have evolved away from the widespread observance of Islam’s five ritual pillars that had marked the Mystic Synthesis. The Dutch missionary Carel Poensen, who spent some 30 years in Kediri, described a dynamic Javanese society in the 1880s, with more reformed Islam influencing *putihan* life while the *abangan* were withdrawing from previous religious practices:

The influence of Islam is active in ever greater degree, at the cost of the previous religious life. ... The truth is that, indeed, very many people are ever more penetrated by Arabic or Islamic concepts in a more or less unrecognised way. But among the great majority there flows another current¹⁵ which, under the influence of present circumstances, causes the

¹⁴ I repeat here points I made in *Polarising Javanese society* (p. 84 n1) and elsewhere about the etymology of this term. A folk etymology claims that *abangan* (a *ngoko* or ‘low Javanese’ term) derived from the name of one of the *walis* of Javanese Islam, Seh Lemah Abang, who was martyred for disclosing secret doctrines to the uninitiated, but there is no evidence for this. However unorthodox his methods, as a saint of Islam, Lemah Abang would certainly have been regarded as one of the *putihan*. The irrelevance of this etymology is confirmed by noting that in *krama* (‘high Javanese’) Lemah Abang’s name is given as Seh Siti Jenar, yet the *abangan* were never called *jenaran* in *krama*, but rather *abritan* (*krama* for ‘the red ones’). More recently, an Islamised etymology has also been suggested. This posits that *abangan* derives from *aba’an*, from the Arabic verb *aba* (to reject, refuse). This is unacceptable on 3 grounds: (1) it is grammatically unsound; (2) at the time the term emerged, contemporary sources describe it as meaning ‘red’, not ‘rejectors, refusers’; and (3) again, in *krama* Javanese the term is *abritan*, whereas if it were from the Arabic, we would expect the Arabic word to be used in both *ngoko* and *krama*.

¹⁵ Poensen’s Dutch term is *stroom*, which in modern Indonesian would be translated as *aliran*, the term that, as we will see, was indeed used for such political-social-religious categories in the 20th century.

previous — in many ways naïve — religion more and more to be lost to the people. Basically, people are beginning to become less religious and pious.¹⁶

The differences between *putihan* and *abangan* became profound, as differences in religious style were mirrored in broader social differences. In general (repeating my own summary from *Polarising Javanese society*),¹⁷ the *putihan* were wealthier, active in business, better dressed, had better homes, seemed more refined in manners, avoided opium and gambling, observed the pillars of Islam, gave their children more education and disciplined them more. The *abangan* were poorer, were not involved in trade and did not provide their children with education. *Abangan* still observed some religious activities, but did so in the name of village solidarity. Whereas the *putihan* read Arabic works and discussed the Islamic world's affairs, the *abangan* watched *wayang* performances and other entertainments in which indigenous spiritual forces were at work. The two groups mixed with the like-minded. These were worlds far apart from one another and becoming more so. They were distinguished by religious style, social class, income, occupation, dress, education, manners, cultural life and the mode of raising children. Because many of Java's money-lenders were from the *putihan* and many of their debtors were *abangan*, their interactions carried the seeds of conflicting interests. In the early 20th century, this mix would be made more volatile by the addition of political competition.

Yet another important development within the *priyayi* elite contributed to this breaking-up of Javanese society into contending groups. In some ways, what we observe in 19th-century Java is a competition between two forms of globalisation and modernisation: on the one hand, international Islamic purification movements and, on the other, European colonialism and its attendant baggage of scientific and technological advances. As the *priyayi* elite became more familiar with their Dutch overlords, more literate (because of limited but expanding educational opportunities for the elite), more familiar with the outside world of Asia, Europe and North America and more clear about what sorts of conduct would most promote their careers in the colonial context, most opted for European-style modernity over Islamic reform. For many this meant continuing their adherence to

¹⁶ C. Poensen, 'Iets over den Javaan als mensch', Kediri, July 1884, in *Archief Raad voor de Zending* (het Utrechts Archief) 261; also in *Mededeelingen van wege het Nederlandsche Zendelinggenootschap*, vol. 29 (1885), p. 49.

¹⁷ P. 102.

the Mystic Synthesis style of Islam. It was extremely rare for *priyayi* to convert to Christianity: that was something that happened mainly among commoners. Around 1870, a *Bupati* put his continuing commitment to remaining a Muslim in notably more instrumentalist than spiritual terms. He had expressed enthusiasm for all things Dutch. His European interlocutor therefore asked whether this meant that he would convert to Christianity. He replied, 'Ah, ... to tell the truth, I would rather have four wives and a single God, than one wife and three Gods'.¹⁸ There were, it seems, some things upon which the Europeans could not improve.

In Java's larger towns and cities, a rather hybrid society grew up, consisting of *priyayi* Javanese, Europeans and wealthier Chinese, all self-consciously modern, with Javanese (or sometimes Malay but never Dutch) as their common language. Their dress, their houses and their entertainments reflected this hybridity: Javanese *priyayi* wearing military jackets or formal European cutaway tuxedo jackets (without tails), with Dutch decorations on the chest if they had them, and fine *batik* wraps below. They read about the new discoveries of science and about events outside Java. They hung family photographs on their walls and chandeliers from their ceilings, and joined Europeans and elite Chinese at *thé dansant* and book-reading clubs. Their distance from both pious Muslim Javanese and the heavily burdened *abangan* peasantry grew. They were fascinated by the discoveries of European archaeology and philology, which tended to depict pre-Islamic Java as a 'classical' age (implying an analogy with views of European history).

Among some of these *priyayi* there even grew a specifically anti-Islamic idea — that the conversion to Islam had been a civilisational mistake and that the key to true modernity was to combine modern knowledge à la Europe with a restoration of Hindu-Javanese culture. Islam was seen as the cause of the fall of the greatest expression of that culture, the kingdom of Majapahit. In the 1870s, writers in Kediri encapsulated these ideas in three remarkable works of literature, *Babad Kedhiri*, *Suluk Gatholoco* and *Serat Dermagandhul*, which denounced and ridiculed Islam. The last of these prophesied that rejection of Islam would happen four centuries after the fall of Majapahit — this perhaps having been written to commemorate the establishment of a government school for the elite at Probolinggo in 1878, 400 years after the traditional date for the fall of Majapahit — and even that the Javanese would then become Christians.

¹⁸ Quoted in [C.E. van Keesteren] v.K, 'De Koran en de driekleur', *Stemmen uit Indie* no. 1 (1870), p. 46.

In the early 20th century the Islamic reform movement was strengthened by Modernism, which added another layer to the polarised devout community. Modernism denied that the four Sunni Schools of Law were authoritative guides to understanding Islam, seeing them more as sources of medieval obscurantism, and sought to return directly to the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* to understand God's revelation, mobilising human reason in this task. Modernism was thus open to modern social styles and, above all, to modern forms of education. The *hajj* numbers by now were considerable, with the number of pilgrims from Javanese-speaking areas and Madura at the level of 8,000–15,000 per annum in most years from 1912 to 1930. The pilgrimage and a range of publications together constituted major vehicles for the spreading of Modernist ideas. Modernism was almost entirely an urban phenomenon. In 1912 Muhammadiyah was founded in Yogyakarta. It grew to become the foremost Modernist Islamic organisation in Indonesia, with schools and welfare organisations across the archipelago. It was active in advocating its reforming views and resisting Christian missions (whose methods it often copied). We will see much of Muhammadiyah in this book. Muhammadiyah eschewed political involvement, but many Modernist individuals did not. The Traditionalist *kyais* of the countryside wanted little or nothing to do with Modernism. In 1926 they founded their own organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), to defend the interests of Traditionalism, another organisation about which we will have much to say in this volume.

Now the categories within this increasingly polarised society became politicised, and thus deeper and more socially dangerous. From 1901 the Dutch adopted the so-called Ethical Policy, which was meant to put the interests of Indonesians higher on the colonial agenda. This meant *inter alia* more education and even encouragement for local organisations to develop — if, of course, they were not a threat to the colonial regime. *Priyayi* who doubted that Islamisation had been a good idea took the lead in creating the first modern political organisation, Budi Utomo, in 1908. It was soon eclipsed by more active, less conservative organisations. Sarekat Islam was founded in 1912. Its evocation of Islam in its name was really little more than a notification that its members were Indonesians (and thus Muslims) while the colonial authority was not, but over time it came to be dominated more by Modernist politicians. Its followers were often more motivated by their animosity towards the *priyayi* elite and Chinese than by any other issues.

A radical organisation initially led mainly by Europeans developed into an Indonesian- (in fact mainly Javanese-)led Communist organisation in 1920; in 1924 it adopted the name Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI,

the Indonesian Communist Party). Its constituency was found among the *abangan*, both among the growing proletariat in Java's cities and among the peasantry. The Communists were very aware of the Javanese heritage which they wanted to attach themselves to. On the walls at PKI's Semarang congress in 1921 hung portraits of Dipanagara and of his lieutenants Kyai Maja and Sentot, alongside those of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg. PKI was, however, an organisation with inadequate coherence and internal discipline and was subject to government surveillance and infiltration. In 1926–7 it stumbled into an uprising against the colonial regime that was an utter failure and led to the party being crushed — the first of three such devastating episodes in its history (we will later see those of 1948 and 1965–6).

In the wake of PKI's destruction, a young charismatic leader named Sukarno — later to become the first president of independent Indonesia — founded a new nationalist party in 1927, which in 1928 became the Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI). Its constituency, too, was mainly *abangan*. But the failed PKI uprising rattled the Europeans. The colonial government stepped back from the degree of liberality previously displayed under the Ethical Policy. Political organisations were closely watched and shut down at will. Sukarno and others were in and out of jail and internal exile. The government — with the support of most of the *priyayi* administrators — did all they could to prevent anti-colonial agitators gaining access to the masses in the cities or countryside. Meanwhile internecine squabbles amongst the tiny anti-colonial elite remained frequent and bitter.

This was Javanese society polarised as it entered the hard years of the Great Depression.