Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java

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CHAPTER 2

Under colonial rule: Javanese society and Islam in the 1930s

It is rare for significant redirections in history to be associated with a particular year, not just as a convenient metaphor of historians, but as something that was actually visible in events. It is even more unusual for two such turning-point years to occur neatly one hundred years apart. Yet so it was for the Javanese. I observed in the preceding book in this series that, ‘In Java, 1830 was one of those remarkable years that truly mark a historical watershed.’ The changes which followed 1830 are the subject matter of that book and their consequences are captured in its title, *Polarising Javanese society*. A century later, 1930 also stands as a watershed time, for it saw the sudden and dramatic commencement of the hard years of the Great Depression, the Japanese occupation and the Indonesian Revolution, which would together convulse Javanese society for 20 years.

**Social parameters: The census of 1930**

We have a reasonably comprehensive statistical picture of the Javanese in 1930 because the Dutch colonial authorities carried out a census in that year, their first — and last — census covering all of what was to become Indonesia. The data is not entirely reliable but it nevertheless captures important information about Javanese society after a century of intrusive colonial rule, dramatic population growth, intensifying Islamisation and the reactions — not always welcoming — to that Islamisation. Unfortunately for the theme of this book, however, the census data does not include

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information about the social division between the devout sector of Javanese society — the putihan or, as they are more commonly called now, the santri — and the abangan, for whom Islam was little more, and sometimes even less, than a nominal commitment.

The population of Central and East Java, including the royal Principalities (Vorstenlanden) of Central Java, totaled 30.4 million in 1930, of whom about 30 million were indigenous people. The vast majority of these lived in rural areas. The percentage of the indigenous population living in towns and cities was only 6.4 per cent in East Java, 7.4 per cent in Central Java, 9.1 per cent in the Principality of Yogyakarta and 7.2 per cent in the Principality of Surakarta. Very few of these lived in cities of any real size: less than 3 per cent of Central Javanese lived in Semarang, Yogyakarta or Surakarta, the only cities with populations over 100,000 there. Less than 2 per cent of the indigenous people of East Java lived in Surabaya, the only city there with a population over 100,000.

Central and East Java were already heavily populated by 1930, the result of rapid population growth that had begun in the 18th century and was still continuing. The census commented on ‘the enormous population density of Java’.

The overall density of Central Java was 395.6 persons/km², while that of East Java was 314.2. In some regencies very high figures were reached: 860.5 persons/km² in Yogyakarta, 900.2 in Kota Gede, 749.2 in Surabaya, 1051.6 in Tegal outside the town. In some other areas, particularly mountainous regions, the figures were significantly lower. For comparison, in the same period, the population density of the Netherlands was 232.2 persons/km², while in British India, that of Bengal was 223 and Madras 114. By later standards, the Java figures may seem tolerable, for by the time of the 2000 census, the population density of Central Java was 904 persons/km² and that of East Java was 726 persons/km². Some areas had by then reached a density of 2,000 persons/km² or even higher. But already in 1930

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2 Departement van Landbouw, Nijverheid en Handel & Departement van Economische Zaken, Volkstelling 1930 / Census of 1930 in Netherlands India (8 vols; Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1933–6), vol. 2, pp. 4–5; vol. 3, pp. 2–4. Surabaya was then the second-largest city in the Netherlands East Indies, with a population around 342,000, the largest being Batavia/Jakarta with 533,000; H. W. Dick, Surabaya, city of work: A socioeconomic history, 1900–2000 (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies Research in International Studies Southeast Asia Series No. 106, Ohio University Press, 2002), p. 121.


4 Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 7–10; vol. 3, p. 5

5 Information provided by Prof. Gavin Jones, based on the 2000 Indonesia census.
these were seriously heavy population densities, with population growth rates remaining at a high level. Over 1920–30, population grew at an annual rate of 1.81 per cent in East Java, 1.16 per cent in Central Java, 2.25 per cent in the Principality of Surakarta and 1.93 per cent in that of Yogyakarta. The rate for all of Java and Madura was 1.73 per cent. Such rates of growth — if they were maintained — would double the population in about 40 years.

Central and East Java were populated largely by ethnic Javanese. There were significant European and Chinese communities in some of the larger towns and cities, but even there the indigenous population constituted the vast majority, in Surakarta and Yogyakarta for example exceeding 96 per cent of the total. These indigenous residents were overwhelmingly ethnic Javanese, who formed 98.2 per cent of the indigenous population across Central Java and nearly 100 per cent in Surakarta and Yogyakarta.

In East Java, however, the ethnic picture was different as other ethnic groups, particularly Madurese, moved into previously sparsely settled areas. Overall, Javanese constituted 69.4 per cent of the population of East Java while the Madurese amounted to 29 per cent. Some areas — such as Bojonegoro, Madiun and Kediri — remained almost entirely Javanese in ethnic composition. Elsewhere there was significant immigration, particularly into the easterly regencies of Banyuwangi, Jember, Lumajang, Malang and Blitar. By 1930, Bondowoso, Panarukan and Kraksaan had become almost totally Madurese regencies. In Banyuwangi, Probolinggo and Jember, ethnic Javanese had become a minority.

This ethnic diversity in East Java highlights the significant degree of mobility among the population. There were population movements across Java, and particularly from rural areas into towns and cities. The 1930 census recorded that people who lived in major urban areas but were not born there amounted to 40.8 per cent of the population of Semarang, 35.5 per cent of Surakarta, 33 per cent of Yogyakarta and 51.4 per cent of Surabaya, in the last case being similar to the levels reached in the major West Java metropolises of Batavia (51.2 per cent) and Bandung (55.1 per cent).

By 1930 the Javanese had been undergoing a process of Islamisation for over five hundred years, but polygamy (polygyny) was at a low level. Its practice was largely confined to aristocratic circles, which were, in general,
among the least piously Muslim in style. In Central Java, the Principalities and East Java, the proportion of men with more than one wife varied from 1.6 per cent to 2.4 per cent. In some regencies figures were slightly higher, but nowhere did the percentage exceed 3.4. The vast majority (about 95 per cent) of polygynous marriages involved only two wives. We should note that the lowest figures (below 1 per cent) for polygynous marriages in East Java were found in the regencies of Tuban, Lamongan, Gresik, Surabaya and Sidoarjo, while figures just over 1 per cent were found in Nganjuk and Jombang. These areas with low levels of polygyny are usually thought of as quite santri in religious and cultural style, suggesting that even a strong sense of Islamic identity in Java did not involve significant levels of polygyny. Only 0.01 per cent of marriages in East Java involved four wives, the maximum allowed by Islamic law.11

One of the most striking features of Javanese society in 1930 — which would prevail well into the period of Indonesian independence — was a low level of literacy. In such a society, prejudices, stereotypes, symbols, slogans and rumours can be more powerful than more modern kinds of mass communication and persuasion. The overall figures clearly reflect how little had been achieved by the Dutch colonial government’s commitment to education in its post-1901 Ethical Policy. The overall literacy rate (in any language or script) in Central Java was 5.9 per cent, in the Principality of Yogyakarta 4.4 per cent, in that of Surakarta 3.6 per cent and in East Java 4.4 per cent. At regency level in the Principalities of Central Java, the Pakualaman regency had a literacy rate of 22.2 per cent, but from that isolated high figure literacy dropped to 7.5 per cent in Yogyakarta regency, 6.9 per cent in Semarang and so on down to very low levels in the mountainous regencies Gunung Kidul (1.6 per cent) and Wonogiri (1.5 per cent), ‘where the need for education is low or difficult to fulfill’. In the Principalities, the literacy figures were generated largely by the capital cities and their immediate environs; outside such areas, figures never exceeded 5 per cent. Similar patterns were found around the towns and cities throughout Central and East Java. The highest literacy rate at regency level in East Java was in Trenggalek with 8.4 per cent (and 16.5 per cent in the town), whence it dropped to 7.8 per cent in Surabaya (but 12.2 per cent in the city), down to 4 per cent in Malang (15.5 per cent in the town) and thence to a mere 2.4 per cent in overwhelmingly Madurese Kraksaan. It is noteworthy that these overall figures conceal great gender disparity. For example, in the

regency of Surakarta, the overall level of literacy was 9.2 per cent, but for men it was 17.1 per cent while for women it was only 2.4 per cent. In the Mangkunagaran principality, it was 11.4 per cent for men but 1.5 per cent for women. In Trenggalek regency it was 17.3 per cent for men but only 1.1 per cent for women. In other words, in many parts of Java it would have been nearly impossible to find a literate woman.12

Literacy was increasing, but from very low levels, and the coming Great Depression would put a halt to the expansion of government schools in Java. A significant element within the small proportion of the population who were literate, however — varying from about one-sixth to one-quarter in different regions — gained their reading and writing skills outside of any school.13 Anticipating the dramatic social changes which will emerge in the course of this book, we may note here that after 1949 the independent Republic of Indonesia would give high priority to increasing literacy and, particularly from the 1970s, had the resources to make a major impact. By the mid-1990s, literacy rates for the population over the age of ten were 84.5 per cent in Central Java and 79.4 per cent in East Java, with the rate for the whole of Indonesia standing at 87.4 per cent.14

Turning from literacy to occupation data, we can observe that Java in the 1930s was still a largely agrarian society, but that some areas of indigenous industry were well developed. It is noteworthy that, if few women were gaining literacy skills, many were nevertheless active in employment. In Central Java 24.9 per cent of all women were classified as exercising an occupation (beroepsbeoefenaars), in Surakarta 42.1 per cent, in Yogyakarta 45.9 per cent, in East Java 23.7 per cent. Women particularly played a role in the batik industry, notably in the towns of Banyumas, Sukaraja, Purbalingga, Pemalang, Kedungwuni, Lasem, Blora, Wates, Surakarta and the municipality of Pekalongan. In the industrial town of Kota Gede — still famous today as a source of fine silver handicrafts — there were many women involved in trade. Nevertheless, among occupied persons agriculture was still a major area of activity. In Central Java 56.5 per cent of all occupied persons were agriculturalists, in Yogyakarta 41.8 per cent, in Surakarta 54.4 per cent. Plantation agriculture — especially tobacco, coffee, rubber and sugar — absorbed significant mounts of labour, particularly in East Java, and day

12 Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 67–74 (quotation from p. 68); vol. 3, pp. 68–75.
13 Ibid., vol. 3, p. 75.
labourers represented a major employment category (up to 22.6 per cent of employed persons) in some East Javanese regencies.\textsuperscript{15}

The 1930 census provides an interesting snapshot of indigenous employment in the city of Surabaya in 1930:

\textbf{Table 1} Indigenous employment in Surabaya city, 1930\textsuperscript{16}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>% of all employed</th>
<th>Males employed</th>
<th>Females employed</th>
<th>Total employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1,949</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>2,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>19,696</td>
<td>4,111</td>
<td>23,807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>11,656</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>11,830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>9,114</td>
<td>4,109</td>
<td>13,223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal professions\textsuperscript{17}</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1,673</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>2,007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public administration</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>11,998</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>12,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic service</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>7,888</td>
<td>19,259</td>
<td>27,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others\textsuperscript{18}</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>15,208</td>
<td>2,608</td>
<td>17,816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>79,182</td>
<td>30,990</td>
<td>110,165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At this time, Surabaya was one of the leading cities of the archipelago, with a population of 342,000, the second largest city after Jakarta/Batavia. It was a hub of trade and industry with a total indigenous population of 271,275, of whom 40.6 per cent were occupied as set out in the table above. Of those Indonesians, 84 per cent were reckoned to be ethnic Javanese and 13 per cent ethnic Madurese.\textsuperscript{19} Table 1 shows a significant level of indigenous male employment in industry, transportation, trade and public administration and the large, more feminised work force in domestic service. The ‘other’ category showed substantial numbers — a majority male — employed largely as day labourers in various industries, as dock workers

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., vol. 3, p. 90. There is a minor discrepancy of seven persons visible among the various totals, which I have not attempted to correct.
\textsuperscript{17} For example, religion, medicine, law, journalism, i.e., the educated professionals.
\textsuperscript{18} In the census listed as ‘inadequately described’, meaning mainly miscellaneous day-labourers (\textit{kuli rupa-rupa}); Volkstelling 1930, vol. 3, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{19} Of the roughly 20 per cent of the population that was not reckoned as Indonesian, 7.6 per cent were classified as Europeans (a classification which by then included Japanese), 11.4 per cent as Chinese and 1.6 per cent as other Asians; Dick, \textit{Surabaya}, pp. 121, 125.
and so on. Here was an urban proletariat in the making. All of these sectors would be hard hit when the Great Depression came. That episode, combined with the Japanese occupation and the Indonesian Revolutionary war that followed, would so damage Surabaya that it would not recover its former dynamism until the 1970s and 1980s.20

The impact of the Great Depression

The Depression had a major impact upon the people living in Central and East Java, but its effects varied significantly from group to group and place to place.21 In general, as industrial production collapsed in developed countries — where the majority of Indonesian exports went — so that international markets shriveled up, trade went into decline, protectionism spread and the world prices for tropical produce fell, many Javanese saw their incomes, standards of living and future prospects decline precipitously. Although before 1930 there had been some signs that the expansion of Java's economy was reaching its limits, it was the Great Depression that propelled Java and its citizens dramatically into crisis. This was a crisis from which the Dutch colonial state never fully recovered, for it was to be overtaken by the Second World War and Indonesian Revolution before it could do so.

The colonial budget was cut back dramatically in order to contain ballooning deficits.22 Colonial civil servants and school teachers — whether European or indigenous — found their prospects either reduced or indeed at an end. Private enterprise was in no position to offer alternative employment to such people. New graduates coming out of schools and (in extraordinarily tiny numbers) from the few university-level institutions in Indonesia had hardly any prospects of employment. As O'Malley observes, 'The increased clamor for more education that had been so determinedly stirred up was to go largely unheard, and the effort that had already been put into education was to go largely unrewarded, throughout the 1930s.'23

20 On Surabaya's 20th-century history, see Dick, Surabaya, e.g., pp. 464–5.
21 A brief overview of the impact of the Depression on Indonesia may be found in Ricklefs, History of modern Indonesia, pp. 222–4.
23 O’Malley, ‘Indonesia in the Depression’, pp. 80–1. In 1930–1, there were only 178 Indonesians in university-level education in the entire Netherlands East Indies. For a general survey of education policy in this period, see Ricklefs, History of modern Indonesia, pp. 189–93.
Rural living standards fell. As plantation agriculture was cut back, more land again became available for rice agriculture. Nevertheless, with the population continuing to grow, per capita consumption of rice fell. People compensated for this with lower-quality foodstuffs such as cassava, corn (maize) and sweet potatoes. Such hardship was also common in towns and cities among the vast majority of Indonesians who were poorly educated and worked as coolies, small-time traders and industrial labourers. The government’s response to hardship was to attempt to save money by cutting back such welfare services as existed. The government tried to create employment by expanding labour-intensive public works programmes, encouraging the use of what little uncultivated land remained, and supporting emigration (dubbed ‘transmigration’) from Java to the outer islands, but such measures only had a marginal impact on the hardship suffered by most of the Javanese population. I have pointed out elsewhere how futile the transmigration programme was: between its inception in 1905 and 1930, several thousand Javanese moved out of Java, the total population of such transmigrants being about 36,000 in 1930. At the same time, far larger numbers left Java to work as coolie labourers on plantations, mainly in Sumatra; these totaled over 306,000 in 1930. Meanwhile, between 1905 and 1930 the population of Java grew by some 11 million. As outer island plantations cut back production and employment in the Depression, Javanese plantation coolies indeed began to flow back to Java, where there was no work for them.

In many places in Java, the great employer had been the sugar industry. Java had exported some 3 million tonnes of sugar before the Depression but by 1936 was exporting a mere 1 million. East Java’s area planted to sugar was cut by 81 per cent over three years. Sugar had so dominated the economy of Surabaya that that city was particularly hard hit. Payments to Indonesians from the sugar industry for wages, rents and compensation fell from D.fl. 129.6 million in 1929 to a low of 10.9 million in 1936, a reduction of over 90 per cent. In Yogyakarta, in a normal pre-Depression year the sugar industry planted about 17,600 hectares. In 1931 that fell to 13,697, in 1932

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26 Ricklefs, *History of modern Indonesia*, p. 188.
27 Ingleson, ‘Urban Java during the Depression’, p. 305.
to 6,449 and in 1933 to only 1,110, by which time there were only two sugar plantations still operating in Yogyakarta. Before the Depression, people in the sugar areas of Yogyakarta normally earned a total of about D.fl. 8.3 million in wages, rent and compensation from the sugar industry. In 1933 the figure was barely 2.3 million. Of course there was more land available for rice cultivation as sugar cultivation was cut back, but this was of no assistance to the cash income of farmers because the prices of crops tumbled. The money supply contracted sharply, with serious consequences for trade and welfare across Javanese society.

It was not only agriculturalists who suffered in places like Yogyakarta. The silver artisans of Kota Gede survived and even expanded their trade in the later 1930s, but elsewhere the picture was gloomy. Batik production — a major form of local industry — was cut to a third of its former capacity by 1935. Some small cottage industries such as hand-rolling of cigars and cigarettes and local production of textiles and soaps did, however, find that opportunities were created by the cutting back of foreign imports and the fall in money incomes.

In Surakarta, the story in the batik industry was somewhat different. Among the most famous batik entrepreneurs of Java are those of Laweyan, Surakarta. Contrary to some interpretations of entrepreneurship in Java, these manufacturers (as opposed to many of the batik traders in the town) were mostly not from the pious santri community but were rather abangan nominal Muslims. Nor did they have much interest in local Javanese arts and traditions: they were interested in making money. They did, however, engage in various Javanese mystical and ascetic practices in the hope that they would bring good fortune. Women played a leading role as organisers of the Laweyan batik industry. Not surprisingly, there was therefore strong opposition in Laweyan to the polygyny commonly seen in Surakarta aristocratic circles. These abangan entrepreneurs modernised batik production from the early years of the 20th century and turned it into a mass-marketing industry by adopting print (cap) rather than hand-crafted techniques. Their markets were reduced during the Depression years but they survived reasonably well and by 1936 were as wealthy and technically proficient, and had marketing networks that were as good, as their Chinese

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29 O’Malley, ‘Indonesia in the Depression’, pp. 82, 98 n56, 188, 190, 216 n107.
30 Petrus Bakker, Eenige beschouwingen over het geldverkeer in de inheemsche samenleving van Nederlandsch-Indië (Groningen and Batavia: J.B. Wolters’ Uitgevers-Maatschappij, 1936), pp. 121, 133.
31 Ibid., pp. 191–2
and Arab (and very few European) competitors. In that year these Javanese entrepreneurs organised themselves into the Persatuan Perusahaan Batik Bumiputra Surakarta (Union of Indigenous Batik Enterprises of Surakarta), ‘strengthening their position as the Javanese middle class’ as Soedarmono puts it. But this organisation was opposed by the Chinese entrepreneurs and the Dutch regime would not give it sole authority to manage the batik industry, so it collapsed.

Most indigenous wage-earners in urban Java — people who, for example, worked as clerks and typists in public administration and private businesses — found their work opportunities shrinking or disappearing altogether. They sought various remedies, taking lower-standard employment or having their wives set up small trading warungs. For some, however, there were new opportunities. European, Eurasian and Chinese employees, who were paid higher salaries, were often the first to be fired. Sometimes this meant that lower-paid Indonesians were able to move into those positions. Urban labourers were hard hit. When the British American Tobacco Company shut its factory in Surabaya in 1932, for example, two thousand Indonesians were dismissed with a single week’s pay.

Newly qualified school teachers found few opportunities for employment. In Yogyakarta, however, there was actually an expansion of educational institutions during the 1930s. Both Taman Siswa and Muhammadiyah had their headquarters there and continued to be major providers of education. The government and Christian mission schools also continued. In 1929 a trade school taught in Dutch, the Princess Juliana School, opened there. It was followed by a new Dutch-medium high school in 1932, a normal school in 1934 and a Higher Middle-Class School (HBS: Hoogere Burgerschool) in 1937, all taught in Dutch. In this time of crisis, the foundations were thus laid for Yogyakarta’s prominence as a centre of education, which it retains today.

34 Ibid., p. 296.
35 Ibid., p. 300.
Since prices and hence the cost of living were rapidly falling, those urban Indonesians who managed to retain their jobs probably in fact gained in living standard simply because their salaries were falling less rapidly.\(^{37}\) That drop in the cost of living was dramatic, as set out in Table 2.

\textbf{Table 2} Cost of Living index, Netherlands Indies, 1929–39\(^{38}\) (1929 = 100)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>69.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>69.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>44.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>47.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, for most people of East and Central Java, the 1930s were a time of hardship from which certainly social and probably cultural consequences flowed. From the cities many had to return to rural areas to look for work, food and shelter. So the process of quite rapid urbanisation and proletarianisation that was suggested by the 1930 census data was slowed and for a time perhaps even reversed. For Surabaya, Howard Dick estimates that from 1930 to c. 1935 there was probably a net outflow of population from the city, a trend reversed again in the second half of the 1930s. By 1940 Surabaya had grown to an estimated 403,000 people from the figure of 342,000 a decade before, a much slower rate than for the decade 1920–30.\(^{39}\)

The Islamic reform movements and Islamically inspired political organisations associated with those movements were still largely urban-based. The malaise of the Great Depression was felt profoundly in those urban areas at the same time as the colonial government was cracking down on urban-based anti-colonial movements and political leaders in the wake of the failed PKI

\(^{38}\) Ibid., p. 307.
\(^{39}\) Dick, \textit{Surabaya}, p. 120.
uprising of 1926–7. So there was little prospect of new streams of political, cultural or religious ideas spreading widely in Java in the 1930s. Older ideas and styles still dominated much of Javanese life, whether of the aristocrats and elites in the Vorstenlanden court (kraton) precincts or of villagers in the countryside. While modern political elites contemplated how to liberate Indonesia from colonial rule — a contemplation not infrequently undertaken while in jail or exile on a remote island — and modern Islamic leaders considered how to make Javanese religious life conform more closely to their ideals, the vast majority of Javanese remained beyond their influence.

Javanese life and culture in kraton and countryside

In these hard times, Javanese villagers maintained a rich variety of popular performances, arts and entertainments. In most cases, these reflected a sense of supernatural powers that was only marginally influenced by Islamic orthodoxy. This richness and variety was captured in the monumental study of ‘Javanese popular performances’ by Th. G. Th. Pigeaud, published in 1938. Pigeaud emphasised that he was not intending to cover all such performances. His book of over 500 folio-sized pages described masked dances, masquerades, horse-dances (using model horses of woven bamboo), youth dance performances, male group dances and religious performances in their bewildering variety of styles and names from place to place across Java. He wrote that he would give little or no attention to

the performances of dancing women and female singers or of storytellers, to combat-play (fencing, etc., various kinds of combat sports and sparring matches), cock-fights and other animal fights, trance performances … and folk-theatre. Next to these we should mention all sorts of puppet theatre (wayang) and all sorts of music, as well as artistic dances by men and women, artistic expressions which are or have been the most influenced by courtly arts or which arose entirely from and developed at the courts. Completely beyond consideration remain the games and entertainments which cannot be regarded as performances or productions, such as children’s games (of boys and girls) and gambling.

40 A brief survey of the politics of the 1927–42 period may be found in Ricklefs, History of modern Indonesia, Chapter 16.
41 Th. Pigeaud, Javaanse volksvertoningen: Bijdrage tot de beschrijving van land en volk (Batavia: Volkslectuur, 1938).
42 Ibid., p. 5.
Illustration 3 Depiction of a Yogyakarta horse-dance (*jaranan*)
(from Pigeaud, *Javaanse volksvertoningen*, 1938, pl. 89)

Illustration 4 Horse-dance (*jaranan*) from Ponorogo (note the female dancer on the right) (from Pigeaud, *Javaanse volksvertoningen*, 1938, pl. 90)
Many of these entertainments not described in Pigeaud’s study were discussed in other major works of scholarship of that age, such as Kunst’s study of Javanese music, Kats’s of the wayang and van Lelyveld’s of Javanese dance. In these art forms, pre-Islamic inspirations, styles and librettos remained dominant.

Nevertheless, Pigeaud covered a very great deal. Some of these forms of performance we will encounter again in this book, such as the dances of Kediri (now commonly called jaranan) involving woven model horses and spirit possession, the female dancers and singers of the gandrung of Banyuwangi and the burlesque ladrak of Surabaya. Pigeaud was aware that he was recording a changing scene, for older supernatural understandings seemed to be fading. ‘The feeling for a (or several) religious significance(s) has not yet entirely disappeared from these performances’, he wrote.

Indeed, if one were to begin with Pigeaud and write a full history of popular Javanese folk arts down to the present, it would largely be a story of decline and loss of traditions, as will be suggested by the discussions in this book. This was partly to do with religious reform, but also with modernisation and globalisation: perhaps at least as much a product of education, electrification, televisionisation and Nintendoisation as of Islamisation.

Pigeaud noted performances which were associated with Islamic piety. Foremost among these was slawatan, known widely among ‘the old-fashioned Islamic religious community’, by which he meant the Traditionalist santri followers of NU. He commented that ‘In some districts more than others, however, [slawatan performances] seem also to be held in high regard by the common people [by which he meant the abangan majority] and by the priyayis.” In these performances, narratives of the life of the Prophet were sung by men either in Arabic or in Javanese to the sole accompaniment of terbangs (tambourines) but in Javanese musical style. Offerings (sajen) were prepared just as on other sacral occasions in Java and the performance usually went from around 9pm to about 3am, finishing in time for the pre-dawn prayer. Slawatan was performed particularly on the


46 Ibid., pp. 282–3.
 occasion of marriages, circumcisions, the seventh month of pregnancy, the falling off of the umbilical cord and redeeming of a promise. Remarkably it was sometimes also performed at the annual village cleansing (bersih desa) ceremony, which was more commonly the occasion for wayang performances and observations little associated with Islamic spirituality. Sometimes also slawatan was performed a few days after a performance of tayuban — dancing women who were also commonly prostitutes. It seems that on such occasions slawatan was a way to expiate the sins acquired at the preceding tayuban party.47

Most of the performances recorded by Pigeaud, however, were shaped more by concepts older than Islam in Java. Masked dance, like puppet (wayang) theatre more generally, performed stories that most commonly derived from the Hindu-Buddhist period classics Bratayuda and Rama or from the romantic adventures of the pre-Islamic hero Panji. The spiritual

forces at play in performances were mostly those that Islamic reformers regarded as anathema: the Goddess of the Southern Ocean (Ratu Kidul), the founder and protector spirits of villages, the spectral denizens of caves, forests and other haunted places. Transvestite performances and dancing women who also worked as prostitutes were hardly art forms thought proper by the devout. The popular folk dramas of *kethoprak* and *ludruk* often mocked the values of elites, including relatively prosperous middle-class *santri*.

Most Central Javanese villagers still seem to have accepted the *kraton* elite’s claims to cultural, religious and social leadership. This despite that elite’s obligatory — if often grudging — collaboration with the colonial authorities. In fact the Javanese aristocracy had only limited room for political manoeuvre in the colonial context, but some of them used that room as far as they could. For many others, however, a louche life of womanising and opium, or of pious retreat into mysticism, offered greater attraction. The values of the knightly aristocrat, the *satriya*, were more often reflected in poses than in day-to-day conduct.

In Yogyakarta, Pangeran (prince) Surjodiningrat was one of those who found room for manoeuvre. He established an organisation called Pakem-palan Kawula Ngajogjakarta (Association of the Subjects of Yogyakarta) in

*Illustration 6 Topeng* (masked dance) performance, 1929, depicting Prabu Klana from the Panji stories (from Pigeaud, *Javaanse volksvertoningen*, 1938, pl. 1)
This sought to represent the demands of ordinary Javanese villagers in the midst of the Depression. The Association became virtually a shadow administration in Yogyakarta’s countryside and Surjodiningrat himself was taken by many villagers to be the messianic Just King (*Ratu Adil*) promised by Javanese eschatologies. By 1931 Pakempanal Kawula Ngajogiakarta claimed over 100,000 members in Yogyakarta and by 1941 over 260,000. Such figures made it the largest political organisation in Indonesia (then, of course, still the Netherlands East Indies) in its day. The Pakempanal promoted cooperatives, attempted to spread literacy, supported peasant objections to taxation, and such like. It had been founded with the support of the Yogyakarta Sultan Hamengkubuwana VIII (r. 1921–39), who was the elder half-brother of Surjodiningrat, but as the Association’s influence spread in the countryside it aroused the concern of the Sultan and the colonial authorities. In 1933 one local leader of the organisation publicly announced that Surjodiningrat was the king (*ratu*) of all Muslims, thereby directly threatening the standing of the Sultan. Nor was the Association welcomed by the urban-based nationalist elite, for it bypassed and threatened to undermine nationalist figures like Sukarno who aspired to be the leaders of ordinary Indonesians but were unable to do that in conditions of colonial repression. The Sultan even contemplated asking the Dutch to exile Surjodiningrat. He escaped that fate, but from 1934 Surjodiningrat was pressured by the colonial and local authorities into limiting the Pakempanal’s activities to less disturbing social and economic initiatives, notably the promotion of cooperatives. The presence of such an organisation, which gave broader social relevance in hard times to princely leadership, may explain in part why in subsequent decades the Yogyakarta Sultanate survived — indeed prospered politically — in the tumult of war and revolution. Such was not to be the fate of the parallel *Vorstenlanden* in Surakarta.

Seemingly analogous organisations were founded in Surakarta, but they were less about building links between the *kraton* elite and ordinary villagers and more about internecine squabbles between the two royal houses there: those of Susuhunan Pakubuwana X (r. 1893–1939) and of the junior princely house of Mangkunagara VII (r. 1916–44). The Susuhunan’s *kraton* still felt

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aggrieved about the 1790s arrangements that had made the Mangkunagaran principality permanent. So the kraton elite now sought to reabsorb the Mangkunagaran. In 1932 the Surakarta politician Singgih, an activist for the Persatuan Bangsa Indonesia (Union of the Indonesian Race, PBI) headed by Dr Soetomo of Surabaya, led the establishment of a Pakemalan Kawula Surakarta (Association of the Subjects of Surakarta), ostensibly to build links with common villagers for the PBI. But it soon became evident that the main purpose of the organisation was to insinuate Surakarta kraton influence into Mangkunagaran domains. This organisation spread quite widely and Singgih — like Surjodiningrat in Yogyakarta — was regarded by some as the Ratu Adil. In 1933 Mangkunagara VII responded by establishing a Pakemalan Kawula Mangkunagaran (Association of the Subjects of the Mangkunagaran), but this failed to prosper. It seems that the popular prestige of the Mangkunagaran line was waning, while the Susuhunan still wielded considerable influence. But the main actor here was Singgih.

There were predictions that the Mangkunagaran would be reabsorbed under the Surakarta court and that Singgih would ascend the throne as Ratu Adil. He and other leading figures of his Pakemalan were known to be gathering spiritual powers through fasting and meditation. In 1935 they formed a group to engage in ilmu kebatinan (the inner mystical sciences). Office walls of the Association's administration had images depicting Singgih as the Hindu god Wisnu (Vishnu), who in Javanese tradition was regarded as the first ruler of Java and the saviour of the world in times of trouble and, in his avatar as Kresna (Krishna), was particularly associated with the warrior class. Pakemalan Kawula Surakarta obviously had the support of the Susuhunan and its propaganda became increasingly radical and sometimes even explicitly anti-colonial. In August 1934 the Dutch Resident of Surakarta warned Singgih to tone down his organisation's activities, which he did. Thereafter administrative problems and financial irregularities contributed to a falling-off of popular support. The organisation had probably never had a following of more than 20,000–50,000 at its peak and fell to 4,000–5,000 by the end of 1936.

In the later 1930s, the Pakemalan Kawula Surakarta revived somewhat but the dominant leitmotiv remained hostility between the Susuhunan's court and that of the Mangkunagaran. The organisation's membership may have climbed again to around 25,000, with its leadership very much in kraton hands. The more significant development, however, was a closer linking of the

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50 A brief overview of these events is in Ricklefs, History of modern Indonesia, Chapter 10.
anti-colonial leanings of the court elite with the more modern nationalism of Dr Soetomo and his Surabaya-based PBI. In 1935 at a congress held in Surakarta this party was fused with the older Budi Utomo — founded in 1908 by leaders among whom several regarded the Islamisation of the Javanese as having been a mistake\textsuperscript{51} — to form a new Partai Indonesia Raya (Greater Indonesia Party), led by Dr Soetomo until his death in 1938. This party rested on an alliance of Surakarta aristocratic politicians and the Surabaya activists. Partai Indonesia Raya — usually abbreviated Parindra — was impressed by the warrior culture of Japan, which had many resonances with the aristocratic warrior values of the Javanese elite, values that underpinned the social styles of that elite in just about everything except real battles, given the prevailing \textit{pax neerlandica}.

That the goings-on in Surakarta were more about intra-elite conflicts than about truly building links between the \textit{Vorstenlanden} aristocracy and ordinary villagers may go some way to explaining why — as will be seen later in this book — the princely rulers of Surakarta would become enemies of the Indonesian Revolution rather than forming part of its leadership, as occurred in Yogyakarta. In 1939 a crucial transition occurred in Surakarta that probably guaranteed this outcome. As Pakubuwana X neared the end of his days, there was discussion in Dutch colonial circles about who should be allowed to succeed him. One leading candidate was Pakubuwana X’s son Png. Kusumayuda. He had serious marks against him from the Dutch point of view, however, mainly that he was both genuinely able and a member of Parindra. So the choice fell instead upon another prince, Png. Hangabehi, whom the Dutch picked to succeed as Susuhunan Pakubuwana XI (r. 1939–44). He was assessed by the Dutch as a person who would be loyal, but ‘not excelling in firmness of purpose and from whom no great deeds may be expected’ — which was to say, a safe and malleable choice. A new contract was imposed on this new king which reduced the already circumscribed powers of the Susuhunan and cut his \textit{kraton} budget, changes which produced much critical comment from Indonesian observers. These developments further diminished the prospects of the Surakarta \textit{kraton} standing at the head of any sort of popular movement — prospects that were not great in 1939 in any case.

The Susuhunan’s \textit{kraton} elite continued to favour Parindra, with its sympathies for Japanese-style fascism. In late December 1941, as the Japanese advanced on Indonesia, some Parindra activists may even have plotted a

revolt against the Dutch, which was nipped in the bud. The Mangkunagaran, by contrast, began to lend its support to the leftist, anti-fascist Gerakan Rakyat Indonesia (Indonesian People’s Movement), founded in 1937. The Mangkunagaran Legion was the only serious military force raised in the Vorstenlanden. It had a military tradition going back to 1808 that rested on service to the colonial regime and this, too, inclined the Mangkunagaran side to an anti-Japanese, therefore pro-Dutch, position. Thus, developments in both the kraton and the Mangkunagaran positioned them poorly to be leaders of the mass mobilisation that was to follow.\footnote{Larson, \textit{Prelude to revolution}, pp. 181–5.}

The magico-mystical powers that commoners ascribed to Javanese royalty were still, however, widely believed in the 1930s. This was illustrated by the response to epidemic diseases that swept through the old town of Kota Gede, south of Yogyakarta. Here were the graves of the founders of the Mataram dynasty Senapati Ingalaga (d. c. 1601) and Seda ing Krpyak (d. 1613). It was a warren of houses and narrow streets where gold-, silver- and coppersmiths, leather workers, tortoise-shell artisans and diamond traders worked. In 1931 there was so much disease in this town that the more well-to-do abandoned their homes to live elsewhere, while the less favoured stayed awake at nights for fear of being overcome by death in their beds. Holy weapons regarded as supernaturally powerful heirlooms (\textit{pusaka}) were paraded in the streets to ward off illness. Eventually the Sultan of Yogyakarta Hamengkubuwana VIII was asked to allow one of the most holy of all the royal \textit{pusakas}, the banner Kangjeng Kyai Tunggul Wulung, to be paraded. This was said to be made from the cloth that hung around the grave of the Prophet himself. On its tip was a \textit{pusaka} spearhead called Kangjeng Kyai Slamet.

The Sultan agreed to the request, but in fact Ky. Tunggul Wulung and Ky. Slamet were paraded only around the city of Yogyakarta itself, not around Kota Gede. The last time this had been done was during the influenza epidemic of 1918 and the popular belief was that the epidemic had indeed ended as a consequence. Before that Ky. Tunggul Wulung had been paraded in 1892 and 1876, also at times of widespread illness.\footnote{On the 1876 episode, see Ricklefs, \textit{Polarising Javanese society}, p. 137.} It was decreed that this time the \textit{pusakas} would be paraded on the night of 21–22 January 1932, when the Javanese seven- and five-day week combination was Friday-Kliwon, the best combination from a supernatural point of view for Ky. Tunggul Wulung.

\footnote{Larson, \textit{Prelude to revolution}, pp. 181–5.}
After appropriate ritual preparations and offerings, a hundred religious officials (pamethakan) prepared to escort the pusakas out from the court. The call to prayer was jointly sung, followed by prayers. Then a large procession formed up and went out from the kraton bearing the holy banners, to be met by a throng of thousands of Javanese. Lest one think this procedure was in some way purely Islamic, however, it should be noted that the next step was to place offerings at the waringin kurung, the fenced banyan trees on the great square to the north of the Sultan’s kraton which were (indeed, often still are) believed to have supernatural powers. The offerings were a female albino water buffalo, tortoises with various kinds of shells, and so on. The entourage — court religious, soldiers, aristocrats, led by the pangulu (the head of the kraton religious hierarchy) on horseback — and thousands of local Javanese then made a circumambulation of the city of Yogyakarta, stopping at nine prescribed places to pray. At 5 AM the pusakas returned to the court, where the Sultan had remained awake throughout the night. The pangulu then oversaw the slaughtering of the animal sacrifices on the northern square.

But 1930s Yogyakarta was not 1830s Yogyakarta. Now this city hosted the headquarters of Muhammadiyah and such a parading of a holy pusaka provoked controversy. Soedjana Tirtakoesoema reported that ‘a group of orthodox [here meaning Modernist] religious types is of the opinion that one must break with this old practice and rely entirely upon medical science in combating illnesses, adhering to the Islamic faith’. Others objected that gathering thousands of people together in this way in fact enhanced the risk of infections spreading. ‘A liberal thinking man’, however, ‘belonging to the older religious [meaning the Traditionalists], was of the opinion that the parading nevertheless in some sense had a religious character. After all, a pious Sultan (he mentioned Sultan Agung) had got this banner from Mecca and at various places the call to prayer was sung and prayers were said.’54 In this contrast of opinions we may note the ongoing tensions between followers of Traditionalist Islam and the older Mystic Synthesis of Java on the one hand and those of the new Modernist Islam on the other.

However uncomfortable religious purists may have felt about some older Javanese traditions, courtly ritual life continued both to preserve traditions that conveyed the Javanese Mystic Synthesis and to inspire mass interest and awe. The courts still presented labuhan (offerings) to the spirits.

of Mount Merapi, Mount Lawu and the Southern Ocean, and still do. In Surakarta, offerings were — and still are — made to a site sacred to the pre-Islamic goddess Durga in the forest of Krendawahana north of Surakarta. In both Surakarta and Yogyakarta, the sacred *bedhaya* dance was performed (as it still is today), invoking the presence of the Goddess of the Southern Ocean.

Yet it is also true that in this overwhelmingly illiterate and poor society, at village level there were many Javanese who genuinely cared about adhering to what they understood the correct Islam to be. Even *abangan* villagers would turn to their more pious fellows for ritual leadership at major rites of passage. Ky. H. Saifuddin Zuhri, a leader of NU who was eventually to become Indonesian Minister of Religion (1962–7), later recalled his own youth in the period before the Second World War. He was sent to a small *pesantren* in Karangsari (Banyumas) run by one Ky. Dimiati, to whom he was related. There Saifuddin Zuhri observed the simple life of the local peasantry. They were poor in possessions, he recalled, but rich in character and morals. Although they were illiterate in the roman script, they could read and in some cases write in the Arabic script. They made time

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to read the Qur’an and were strict in observing what was allowed (halal) or forbidden (haram). At the Friday sermon and at Ky. Dimiati’s Qur’anic recitations (pengajian) they listened attentively, taking pride in the fact that there was a kyai living in their village to give them guidance. Such was the recollection of Saifuddin Zuhri.\textsuperscript{56}

Saifuddin Zuhri’s memoirs remind us that villagers in 1930s Java did sometimes have connections to more highly educated leaders. But these were rarely connections to nationalist political organisations. The Dutch regime and its repressive structures saw to that. There were links with kraton culture and sometimes with kraton elites, but this only applied in certain circumstances within the Vorstenlanden. More generally, it was the extensive informal networks and large organisations associated with Islam that built such bridges. It is therefore to such networks and organisations that we now turn.

\textbf{Islam in Java: Reform, local traditions and mysticism}

To a large extent, Muhammadiyah held the initiative in Islamic circles in 1930s Java. It was Muhammadiyah that looked at contemporary Javanese religious practice and judged much of it to be in need of reform. But we would be wrong to think of this as mainly a reformist assault on the religious practices and superstitions of the abangan. Muhammadiyah’s targets were more often the understandings of Islam to be found in the santri community of pious Muslims. Muhammadiyah was — to borrow a phrase used by Azyumardi Azra\textsuperscript{57} — ‘guarding the faith of the ummah’, and it was as if many abangan were so far beyond the pale that, by Muhammadiyah’s standards, they were hardly members of the ummah at all.

Muhammadiyah was regarded by G.F. Pijper (1893–1988), one of the leading Dutch experts on Islam who served as Advisor for Native Affairs to

\textsuperscript{56} Saifuddin Zuhri, \textit{Berangkat dari pesantren} (Jakarta: Gunung Agung, 1987), pp. 40, 42. For biographies of Saifuddin Zuhri and Indonesia’s other Ministers of Religion, see Azyumardi Azra and Saiful Umam (eds), \textit{Menteri-menteri Agama RI: Biografi sosial-politik} (Seri Khusus INIS Biografi Sosial-Politik 1. Jakarta: Indonesia-Netherlands Cooperation in Islamic Studies [INIS], Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat [PPIM], Badan Litbang Agama Departemen Agama RI, 1998); Saifuddin’s biography is to be found on pp. 201–41.

\textsuperscript{57} Azyumardi Azra, ‘Guarding the faith of the ummah: Religio-intellectual journey of Mohammad Rasjidi’, \textit{SI} vol. 1 (1994), no. 2, pp. 87–119. We will discuss Rasjidi shortly.
Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java

the colonial government, as a ‘backlash against the Christianisation efforts of the Protestant and Catholic missions’[^58]. That was certainly a major inspiration for the organisation, but its activities were also directed at local religious practices that it regarded as bid'a, unlawful innovations in Islam. By the 1930s the national leadership of Muhammadiyah was more in the hands of Minangkabau from Sumatra than Javanese leaders. These Minangkabau tended to be more intolerant of idiosyncratic practices that were regarded locally as being pious Islam.[^59] But there were also Javanese Muhammadiyah leaders who took a firm line against local practices not sanctioned by Islam. One of the foremost of these was Muhammad Rasjidi (1915–2001).

Rasjidi’s life story exemplifies the cultural and religious transitions experienced by many Javanese in the 20th century.[^60] He was born into an abangan family in Kota Gede but his father cared sufficiently about Islam to have his children taught to read the Qur’an. As Rasjidi’s father grew older, he became more pious and began to pray. Upon his death he left money for someone else to undertake the pilgrimage on his behalf. Rasjidi’s youthful cultural milieu remained in some ways more characteristic of Javanese traditions than of pious Islam. He could read Javanese script and sing Javanese poetry and was married in Javanese traditional attire. Yet his father sent him to a Muhammadiyah primary school and there Rasjidi’s transition to a leader of Modernist Islam began. He went on to a Muhammadiyah teacher-training school. When he learned that a new religious school had been founded in Lawang (East Java) by Ahmad Surkati (1872–1943), the Sudanese leader of the Arab Modernist organisation Al-Irsyad (est. 1915), Rasjidi applied and was accepted as a student there. In 1931 he set off to study in Cairo. Rather than studying at the great university of Al-Azhar, which he found too traditional, Rasjidi went to the University of Cairo. He also met and took private lessons from Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), who was to become one of the most prominent of radical Islamic thinkers and leader of the Muslim Brotherhood until his execution by the government of Gamal Abdel Nasser.[^61]

[^60]: The following account rests upon Azra, ‘Guarding the faith’, pp. 89–96.
Although Rasjidi may have displayed some degree of tolerance towards *abangan* — as also did some other Muhammadiyah leaders of Javanese background, notably the founder of Muhammadiyah himself, Ky. H. Ahmad Dahlan — he could be quite intolerant of what he regarded as backward and ignorant practices found among Javanese *santri*. In his 1956 doctoral thesis, defended at the Sorbonne, he held up for ridicule *fatwas* issue by Nahdlatul Ulama in the 1930s, such as the declaration that the production of photographs was *haram*. An NU *fatwa* also declared a purchase made while wearing spectacles invalid in Islamic law, on the grounds that spectacles distorted vision.62 For Rasjidi this was just backwardness.

Yet NU, too, was pressing for what we might think of as more modern ways in some respects. Like Muhammadiyah, NU approved giving the Friday sermon in the vernacular rather than in Arabic.63 NU was particularly concerned about the roles of government-appointed *pangulus*. These men were at the same time government bureaucrats and religious leaders, a difficult balancing act. It was certainly not the case that they were all highly regarded for their religious knowledge.64 In this respect, the *kyais* of NU were in competition with them for influence and leadership within Javanese society. NU pressed throughout the 1930s for a government-run system of examinations for *pangulus*, but without success.65 Similarly, in 1935 the NU Congress resolved that if the government did not create an institution to train Islamic judges adequately — a role exercised by *pangulus* — then NU would feel obliged to do so itself.66 This contest was not to be resolved until the Japanese occupation and the subsequent victory of the Indonesian Revolution cemented the *kyais*’ dominance of Traditionalist Islam and removed the *kafir* colonial government which supported, and thereby made illegitimate in the eyes of many, the authority of *pangulus*.

Just as the Modernists objected to the parading of royal *pusakas* to ward off epidemic disease, as noted above, they also attacked the widespread

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64 On the *pangulus* in general from the later nineteenth century to 1942, see ibid.
66 Rasjidi, *Documents*, p. 192. On the more general leadership competition between *pangulus* and *kyais* in the 1930s, see Hisyam, *Caught between three fires*, pp. 182–9.
observance of the middle of the month Saban (in Java often named Ruwah). There were a variety of beliefs which connected this time with fate, death and the dead. So it was a time to fear wandering spirits, to pray and to seek supernatural protection through communal observances. This night was (and is) observed widely in the Islamic world, including Mecca, by then under Wahhabi rule. Al-Irsyad’s leader Surkati declared, however, that all of the Prophetic traditions (Hadith) supporting the observance were weak. The Modernist, Muhammadiyah-led, Yogyakarta newspaper Bintang Islam (Star of Islam) also denounced these traditions thoroughly in 1930. What Pijper called ‘enlightened orthodox circles’, represented above all by Muhammadiyah, sought to stigmatise all the traditions about the middle of Saban as heterodoxy.

Yet these practices were deeply rooted. In Cirebon the pious would read the Qur’an in the middle of the night of 15 Saban. It was believed that then the dead were summoned from their graves so that from that night, through the fasting month that followed and until the first of the subsequent month of Sawal, there was no need to visit graves to talk to one’s ancestors, for they were empty. Rather, one took the occasion to clean the graves in preparation for the returning spirits. In south Banyumas ‘the religious and the irreligious’ (i.e., the santri and abangan) alike observed the occasion. While the santri gathered in mosques to pray for divine grace, forgiveness and protection from misfortunes, the abangan understood this as a time when God fulfills all of one’s wishes, so it was a time for jollity. There were various ideas about water connected with this, so public bathing at several (usually seven) specific places was often part of the celebrations. Warungs and pasars did a roaring trade from the passing observants.

In Kediri and Bojonegoro, by contrast, Pijper reported that the abangan cared nothing at all for this business. Only the ‘religiously developed’ honoured the night. Wherever abangan took part in the observances, not only did pre-Islamic ideas get mixed up in them, ‘but also here and there the celebration

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67 This account of the controversy rests upon Pijper, ‘Lailat’, pp. 405, 417–25.
68 See the article on Sha’ban by A.J. Wensinck in P. Bearman et al. (eds), Encyclopaedia of Islam (2nd ed.; 13 vols; Leiden: E.J. Brill; London: Luzac & Co., 1960–2008), vol. 9, p. 154. Wensinck writes, *inter alia*, that ‘according to popular belief, in the night preceding the 15th, the tree of life on whose leaves are written the names of the living is shaken. The names written on the leaves which fall down, indicate those who are to die in the coming year. … It is said that in this night God descends to the lowest heaven; from there he calls the mortals in order to grant them forgiveness of sins.’
attains a worldly character, indeed takes on the features of a popular festival.’ In Semarang, Kedu and the Vorstenlanden, the pious sometimes kept watch in the night and fasted. In Surakarta there was a strong commitment to what was there called separe (half, i.e., half-way through Saban) among ‘old-fashioned orthodox circles’, i.e., Traditionalist santri who followed NU-style devotions rather than Modernist Muhammadiyah versions. The Manba’ al-Ulum school in Surakarta, set up on the orders of Pakubuwana X in 1905 and the first modern Islamic school in Java,⁶⁹ was closed on 15 Saban. The Muhammadiyah schools, not surprisingly, remained open. In Yogyakarta, the aristocracy’s sense of decorum prevented them from joining in the celebrations at public bathing places so instead they sent servants to collect water from the seven wells traditionally identified for these observances. In the farthest Eastern Salient of Java, where was found ‘a simple, pious folk’, Pijper reported that ‘Islam in this district is not old and the knowledge of the faith is often still scanty’, but Javanese, Madurese and ‘Osingers’ (local indigenous Javanese) mostly regarded the night of 15 Saban as holy.

So the Modernist Islamic reformers faced formidable challenges in reforming Javanese society. Given low levels of literacy, widespread hardship, and the ongoing beliefs in all sorts of spiritual powers — usually connected with indigenous occult forces and agricultural cycles but sometimes of more clearly Islamic inspiration — it is hardly surprising that the influence of Muhammadiyah and like-minded groups remained almost exclusively limited to urban areas.

Nor did the Islamic reformers have a monopoly of influence in urban areas, for there they were challenged by other ideas and organisations, such as the Taman Siswa schools. These sought to produce a modern educational and intellectual style that was specifically rooted in Javanese culture, and particularly in ‘high’ Javanese culture: the world of wayang, gamelan and classical dance. In 1935, Taman Siswa’s founder, Ki Hadjar Dewantara (1889–1959), spoke about national education and the role of Taman Siswa. He made it clear that the central cultural or national question for him was about Javanese identity on the one hand and Dutch on the other. He ignored Islam and Islamic elites: they did not apparently offer a third alternative. Dewantara criticised those members of the aristocratic elite (priyayi) who were attracted to Dutch styles of doing things.

Dissatisfaction has … befallen us, and worse: slowly but surely we have become alienated from our own people and our own environment.

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⁶⁹ See Hisyam, Caught between three fires, pp. 141–6.
...Because of the great inferiority complex which we derived from our particular governmental experience, we were easily satisfied with anything that made us look a bit Dutch. ...70

In 1941 Dewantara gave another speech that was directed specifically towards Islam and, particularly given its venue, bluntly dismissive of narrow understandings of that faith. He was speaking to a gathering of the Lahore branch of the Ahmadiyya movement held in Yogyakarta. Ahmadiyya is an idiosyncratic development of Islam rather like Mormonism in Christianity since its founder, the Punjabi Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1839–1908), claimed to have experienced divine revelations.71 Half a century later, Ahmadiyya would be declared deviant by the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Indonesian Islamic Scholars’ Council), a government-appointed body of Islamic scholars. But in the 1930s, Ahmadiyya was still fairly new in Indonesia and was not yet the subject of such objections. In Java as elsewhere, Ahmadies were noted for their commitment to education and intellectualism.72

At the 1941 Ahmadi meeting in Yogyakarta, Ki Hadjar Dewantara spoke directly of ‘Islam and culture’. His comments would have been quite unwelcome to many of Islam’s leaders in Java at that time. Speaking Indonesian and tossing in Dutch words both to explain concepts and to confirm his intellectual standing, Dewantara observed,

Although in principle all religions are the same, because there is a stelsel [system] or specific forms, therefore over time inner faith (religi) becomes a regularised religion (godsdienst). And because of that, over time special regulations arise that differentiate religions one from another. ... Indeed, even within a single religion there are differences of understanding, so that sekten [sects] or variants arise. ... 


71 The Lahore branch regards Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as a renewer of Islam rather than a new prophet. Ahmadiyya’s other branch — the Qadian — sees him as a new prophet, an idea that is clearly heretical in conventional Islamic terms. See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, ‘Ahmadiyya’, in Encyclopaedia of Islam (2nd ed.), vol. 1, p. 301. The further story of Ahmadiyya in Java is considered below in this book (consult the index for relevant passages). The history of this movement in Indonesia is the subject of Iskandar Zulkarnain, Gerakan Ahmadiyah di Indonesia (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2005).

72 Ahmadiyya had only arrived in Java in the mid-1920s and did not establish its first mosque until the late 1930s. As a part of its intellectual activities, it produced translations of the Qur’an in both Dutch and Indonesian.
Thus it is that Islam is not pure, but is mixed with Arab, Indian, Persian, Sumatran, Javanese, and suchlike cultures. And don’t forget as well that the influence from society is very strong, as is also true of the circumstances of the time, so that the nature of Islam in a country in previous times is genuinely different from its nature nowadays. …

This means:

(a) That Islamic culture always had the character of ‘people’s culture’, not ‘kraton culture’ like Javanese culture down to the present, for example. In the present age, ‘kraton culture’ in Java is beginning to develop so as to become ‘people’s culture’.
(b) That Islamic culture in general is always about the religious life, social life and state life. Thus, art, for instance, is insufficiently or not at all considered.

Because Islam came to our country via Persia and India, therefore the nature of Islam in Java naturally is a mix of various religious and social influences from those places. …

Thus, here was a relativistic view that looked upon religion generally and Islam specifically as culturally and historically contingent. This was an idea that would have resonated in those circles still committed to the Javanese Mystic Synthesis and among those who were uncomfortable with fundamentalism in any faith. But to the more puritanical of Islamic reformers it would have been anathema. It is doubtful that Ahmad Surkati, many Muhammadiyah leaders or the activists of Persatuan Islam would have been at all happy with such views. The published version of this talk does not, however, give any indication of what the Ahmadis thought about it.

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74 Persatuan Islam (Islamic Union) was founded in Bandung in 1923 and was one of the most puritan of Modernist organisations. Its foremost leader in this period was A. Hassan (b. 1887), a Singapore-born Tamil with a Javanese mother. The organisation’s name was conventionally shortened to ‘Persis’, a pun on the Dutch word precies (precise, punctilious). Hassan established a pesantren in Bandung in 1936 but transferred it to Bangil in East Java when he moved there in 1940. See Howard M. Federspiel, Islam and ideology in the emerging Indonesian state: The Persatuan Islam (PERSIS), 1923 to 1957 (Leiden, etc.: Brill, 2001); Deliar Noer, The Modernist Muslim movement in Indonesia, 1900–1942 (Singapore, etc.: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 85–92.
Islam in Java was still much influenced by mysticism and in this realm, too, there were controversies in the 1930s. In Java, the Traditionalist kyais who were adherents of the Shafi’i school of law and were involved in NU were also supporters and leaders of Islamic mysticism. The various Sufi tarekats (orders; from Arabic tariqa, literally ‘way’ or ‘path’) were inherently in at least some degree of competition with one another for followers and to assert the superiority of their own understandings and devotional practices (wirid, Arabic wārid). The principal tarekats in Java in this period were still the Naqshabandiyya (of the Khalidiyya branch), the Qadiriyya, the composite Indonesian order Qadiriyya wa Naqshabandiyya, the Khalwatiyya, the Shadhiliyya and the Shattariyya. The main controversy in Java in the 1930s, however, concerned a newly arrived order, the Tijaniyya, which provoked conflict within NU circles.

Tijaniyya was controversial for several reasons. All Sufi tarekats should have a spiritual genealogy (salsilah; Arabic sīsilā, literally ‘chain’) which connects the current head of the order in a direct line back to the tarekat’s founder and thence to the Prophet, thereby confirming the authenticity of the teachings and devotions. Tijaniyya, however, lacked such a conventional genealogy. Its founder was the Algerian Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Tijani (1738–1815), who said that while in a fully awakened condition he met the Prophet Muhammad, first in 1782 and subsequently again, and received from him the teachings and practices of the order. Moreover, Tijaniyya practices were simpler than those of other orders — although the number of litanies to be repeated was too much for many — and promised sure entry to heaven for anyone who practiced its wirid until death, along with the devotee's parents, spouses and children. Tijaniyya declared itself superior to all other Sufi orders. With such ideas, Tijaniyya attracted large numbers of adherents.

In 1928 Tijaniyya began to spread in Java. A respected elderly kyai in Cirebon, Ky. Madrais (Muhammad Rais) began to teach it after having been initiated into its devotions by the Arab scholar ‘Ali bin ‘Abdallah al-Tayyib al-Azhari. At about the same time the young and influential Ky. Anas of the

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75 On these, see Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese society*, pp. 74–8.
pesantren Buntet in Cirebon also began to teach Tijaniyya after returning from Arabia. From this time on, the order spread rapidly in West Java and along the north coast, with Buntet as its main centre. Tijaniyya’s exclusivity was a major issue. Its devotees were forbidden to follow other tarekats, so its growth was at the expense of existing orders. Shaykhs of the other tarekats denounced Tijaniyya. They accused it of being the worst of all things to non-Modernist Islamic circles in Java in this time: they said it was Wahhabi. The opponents of Tijaniyya were not actually accusing it of introducing the austere practices of the Wahhabi leadership of Saudi Arabia. Rather, ‘Wahhabi’ had become a derogatory term for all reforming movements that denied the traditionally accepted authority of the Shafi’i school of law and the established Sufi orders. In this sense only was Tijaniyya a ‘Wahhabi’ innovation. The denunciations had an effect and stemmed Tijaniyya’s growth in some places. Tijaniyya’s defenders replied with assertions of the superiority and authenticity of its teachings.

In 1931, NU’s annual meeting took place in Cirebon and one of the major topics of discussion among these Traditionalist scholars was the orthodoxy or otherwise of Tijaniyya. In a classically equivocal, hair-splitting judgment, NU concluded that Tijaniyya was good with regard to its devotional practices and that those of its views that were consistent with the law (shari‘a) were good. But those that seemed to be in conflict with the shari‘a were to be left to the knowledgeable leaders of the tarekat insofar as they were susceptible to metaphorical explanations; if they were not susceptible to such explanations and were clearly in conflict with shari‘a, then they were declared to be in error. On the basis of this tangled decision, Tijaniyya devotees dared to claim that NU had pronounced their tarekat to be acceptable. Rather than dampening the controversy, the NU decision thus reignited it. Tijaniyya’s fiercest opponent was a respected figure from Kracak, Ky. Muhammad Ismail, who taught the Qadiriyya and Naqshabandiyya wirids. In 1932 he published a pamphlet that denounced Tijaniyya as heresy: ‘The tariqa of the Tijaniyya people is bid‘a [unlawful innovation], their shari‘a is unbelief and their Reality (baq‘iq) is Hell.’ A year later the kyai died. His opponents claimed that the body swelled up in an unnatural fashion as none other than al-Tijani himself took his revenge upon him.

Today Tijaniyya is found throughout Indonesia, but its main strengths remain in West, Central and East Java. In the 1980s it was accepted as a fully

77 In fact, the Saudis were opposed to all Sufi orders.
78 Cited in Pijper, Fragmenta, p. 119.
respectable, orthodox tarekat by NU. But even that did not prevent further polemics from breaking out.  

For many of the learned leaders of Modernist Islam, Traditionalists’ disputes about Tijaniyya — indeed the whole business of Sufism — must have been just further evidence of the backwardness of Indonesian Islam. Yet the more austere, legalistic, intellectualized version of Islam that seemed to represent the ideals of many Muhammadiyah leaders — and certainly those of Persis and Al-Irsyad — had little likelihood of winning mass support in Java. Even among Modernist intellectuals there seems to have been some awareness that Sufism and more indigenous forms of mysticism flourished in Java because they fulfilled the spiritual needs of many Javanese.

But what could Modernism offer to fulfill such spiritual needs? There were several barriers in the way of such an offering. Modernist reliance on the Qur’an and Hadith as the true foundations of faith — in preference to the vast library of interpretative literature by centuries of learned scholars — left little room for the mystics and their ideas. Moreover, the devotion and loyalty that Sufis accorded to their spiritual guides, their shaykhs, represented two profound faults from the Modernist point of view. Firstly, insofar as Sufi shaykhs — in Java called kyais — were regarded by their followers as unchallengeable authorities on belief and practice, then the deference thereby accorded to them plainly conflicted with the fundamental and unequalled guidance to be found only in the Qur’an and Hadith. Secondly, in competition for leadership of the Islamic community, Javanese kyais were the direct competitors of the more intellectually sophisticated leaders of Modernist Islam — and, worse still, had far greater influence than they among the masses of Javanese. So quite apart from questions of the doctrine, the standing of the shaykhs or kyais in Sufism was a fundamental problem for most Modernists.

In 1937–9 a possible solution to the dilemmatic relationship between Islamic Modernism and Sufism was provided, not by a Javanese Sufi, but (somewhat surprisingly) by a Modernist Minangkabau intellectual — a solution that continues to be powerful in Java and elsewhere in Indonesia seven decades after its initial publication. The writer in question was Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (1908–81), commonly called Hamka on the basis of his initials. Hamka's background is of interest, for he was the son of one of Minangkabau's early Modernist Islamic thinkers, Shaykh Dr Haji

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Abdul Karim Amrullah (1879–1945), better known as ‘Haji Rasul’. He studied for some years in Mecca and on his return to Sumatra in the early 20th century took a leading role in educational reform in Minangkabau, building a modern religious school called *Sumatra Thawalib* (1918). Haji Rasul was expelled from this, his own school in the early 1920s by proponents of Islamic Communism. In 1925 he introduced Muhammadiyah to West Sumatra and it soon came to be the biggest Islamic organisation in the region. Haji Rasul was a prolific writer. Among the targets of his polemics was the Naqshabandiyya Sufi order. As Taufik Abdullah puts it, ‘Although acknowledging the importance of *tasawwuf* [mysticism], [Haji Rasul] denied that the Naqshabandiyya order was doctrinally pure. He condemned the concept of *rabita*, mediation between creature and the Creator, as taught by the order’.80

Thus, Hamka came from a Sumatran background strong in Modernist Islamic intellectualism and socio-political engagement. Hamka himself became known as one of Indonesia’s leading writers as well as a major Modernist ulama. In 1937–8 he was editing the Islamic magazine *Pedoman Masyarakat* (the compass of the community) and, in response to requests from others, there wrote a series on *bahagia* (bliss, happiness, well-being).81 In 1939 these articles were republished as a book entitled *Tasauf moderen* (modern mysticism) which is still readily available in Indonesia.82

In *Tasauf moderen*, the still-young Hamka said that he was not presenting his own ideas, but rather views based on the writings of great ulamas of the past along with the *Qur’an* and *Hadith*. He cited not only medieval thinkers such as al-Mawardi (974–1058), Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (980–1037) and al-Ghazali (1058–1111) but also the Modernist pioneers Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905) and Jamal ad-din al-Afghani (1838–97), among others. He also referred to Western thinkers whose works he knew through Arabic translations: Aristotle and Tolstoy made appearances. There were, said

80 See the entry by Taufik Abdullah, ‘Abdul Karim Amrullah (Haji Rasul)’, in Gudrun Krämer et al. (eds), *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (3rd ed.; Leiden: E.J. Brill; available in print as fascicules appear).
82 From Arabic *tasawwuf* (mysticism).
83 The edition now commonly sold in Indonesia is Hamka, *Tasauf moderen* (Singapore: Pustaka Nasional Pte Ltd, 1997).
Hamka, many secrets of Islam that it was proper to discuss and to make accessible to people who could not read Arabic. 'I present an explanation that is modern, although its origins are found in books of mysticism. So this is Modern Mysticism, I mean an explanation of mystical sciences that is modernised', he said in the introduction to the first edition. 84

Hamka explained to his readers that the intentions of the early Sufis were good but later unacceptable things came to be added: ‘They wanted to resist carnal urges, the world and the devil, but sometimes they embarked upon ways that were not bounded by religion’. 85 His purpose, said Hamka, was to return to the original Sufism. In search of this baqia and the original Sufism, Hamka presented chapters on ‘opinions about baqia, ‘baqia and religion’, ‘baqia and spiritual accomplishment’, ‘spiritual and physical health’, ‘possessions and baqia’, ‘pious contentment with little’, 86 ‘deep trust (in God)’, 87 the baqia experienced by the Prophet’, the connection between contentment 88 and the beauty of the world’, ‘the ladder of baqia’, ‘misfortune’ and, finally, (supererogatory) prayers.

The important — indeed crucial — distinction between Hamka’s ‘Modern Sufism’ and the Sufism practised by Javanese mystics of his time was that ‘Modern Sufism’ was about personal spirituality and did not require a guru or shaykh. Nor did it require membership of a mystical order (tarekat).

With all of these explanations it is clear what my purpose is with this book. I call it tasauf, that is, to follow the intention of the original mysticism, as in the words of al-Junayd: 89 ‘To leave behind a shameful way of life and embrace a praiseworthy way of life’ — with a modern explanation.

I will reestablish the original intention of tasauf, that is, to purify the soul, to educate and to elevate the level of character; to suppress all greed

84 Ibid., pp. 2–3.
87 Tawakkal, Arabic tawakkul. On the uses of this crucial term in Islam, see L. Lewisohn, ‘Tawakkul (a.)’, in P. Bearman et al., Encyclopaedia of Islam (2nd ed.), vol. 10, p. 376.
88 Redha, from Arabic rida, a term found in Sufism; see Ed., ‘Rida’ in ibid., vol. 8, p. 509.
89 Abu ‘l-Qasim b. Muhammad b. al-Junayd (d. 910) a leading proponent of what is known as ‘sober Sufism’.
and voraciousness; to fight against lust that is beyond what is needed for personal tranquility.\textsuperscript{90}

None of Hamka’s purposes required formal adherence to an order or initiation by a \textit{shaykh}. It was the authority of those \textit{shaykhs}, the pledges of allegiance to them, and the ritualised practices associated with repetitive litanies (\textit{dhikr}) that much concerned Modernists. Hamka assured his readers that they could embrace the spirituality of mystical experience without the need to embrace any of those \textit{tarekat} practices, all of which smacked of pre-modernity in his eyes.

Hamka’s \textit{Tasauf moderen} of 1937–9 was thus emblematic of two important developments within Javanese Islam visible by the 1930s. Firstly, even something as fundamental to Javanese Islam as mysticism was open to new influences and ideas generated by the Modernist urge to return to the \textit{Qur’an} and \textit{Hadith} as a means of rediscovering the pristine truths of Islam. Secondly, profound new influences could come from other parts of what was soon to be the independent Republic of Indonesia. Javanese had never been isolated from the rest of the archipelago or the world. But the level of interconnectedness between Javanese and other societies was now increasing by virtue of modern communications, colonial unification of the islands, the consequent growth of archipelago-wide political and economic interactions and the national-level aspirations of religious and political organisations. The Javanese were well on their way to becoming a subset of the peoples who were soon to be known as Indonesians. It needs also to be borne in mind, however, that — as noted earlier in this chapter — the vast majority of Javanese were still illiterate in this period. So the impact of a publication such as Hamka’s book was necessarily still limited to the small literate elite. Within a few decades that, too, would change.

\textbf{Abangan and santri}

Regardless of how ‘Indonesian’ they were on their way to becoming, Javanese retained idiosyncratic cultural and social arrangements that are of central interest in this book. Notably, in the 1930s Javanese society was — so far as we can know on the basis of surviving evidence — structured along lines of religious identity as well as along the more usual lines of social class. On the one hand were the \textit{santri}, the pious, self-consciously practising Muslims. They were themselves divided by a primary distinction between Traditionalists

\textsuperscript{90} Hamka, \textit{Tasauf moderen}, p. 17.
(represented mainly by NU) and Modernists (represented by multiple groups, by far the largest being Muhammadiyah), but beyond this there were multiple other categories of santri: the contending Sufi orders including the much-contested Tijaniyya, the Ahmadiyya and various shades of Modernism. On the other hand were the abangan: nominal Muslims for whom Islam was largely a source of ritual practice at certain stages of life. An abangan rarely or never prayed, indeed normally did not know the ritual movements associated with prayer, could not recite the confession of faith or the Qur’an, rarely or never fasted in Ramadan and would almost certainly not contemplate the expenditure of resources necessary for the pilgrimage to Mecca. But at birth and burial, abangan would expect Islamic rituals to be carried out. And some version might be wanted at a circumcision or wedding.

Although we have no widespread social surveys from this period, a useful report from the area of Bagelen in western Central Java captures both the generality of the abangan-santri categorisation and the local idiosyncrasies found across Java. There the term for the aristocratic-bureaucratic elite was not the more general priyayi but rather kenthol. One such kenthol gave a ritual communal meal (slametan) in 1939 to which all were invited. But the seating was far from random. The pendhapa (open public hall) in which the occasion was celebrated was divided into three spaces. On the left sat commoners who were abangan. Away from them, on the right sat the santri — and it is interesting to note that Bagelen was one area where santri was indeed the local term at this time, rather than the more common putihan. In a middle section between them were seated the elite kenthols. This categorisation reflected the cross-cutting distinctions of social class and religious identity later to be made famous in the 1950s research of Clifford Geertz and his team in East Java: santri and abangan representing the two main categories of Islamic identity while, sitting between them, the upper-class priyayi represented the continuing salience of distinctions of social class.91

Polarised on the precipice

In 1930 the Javanese were predominantly rural dwellers, but there was also a growing urban proletariat as well as a tiny urban-based educated elite. Population growth already placed serious pressure on resources, which was

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heightened significantly with the onset of the Depression of 1930. That growing urban proletariat was particularly hard hit by the Depression. A process of Islamisation had been going on amongst the Javanese since the 14th century, but in the eyes of Islamic reformers there was still a long way to go. Indeed the process of Islamisation had been halted, in some ways perhaps even reversed, by developments since the middle years of the 19th century. Then there had emerged in Javanese society a group — in fact the majority of Javanese — known as the *abangan*, the nominal Muslims, in contrast to the pious *santri*. These social distinctions had been politicised and thereby made sharper by the growth in the early 20th century of political movements whose constituencies followed those social lines. But by 1930 this politicisation was being halted and probably reversed, as the Dutch crushed the main political movements responsible for the politicisation of social divisions.

Javanese society was, for the most part, not only impoverished but also ill-educated. Literacy rates were low and close to zero in the case of women. But Javanese were not culturally impoverished. A rich cultural life gave meaning to most Javanese, from hard-pressed peasants to kraton aristocrats and urban ‘moderns’. Little of this cultural life was yet influenced by reformist Islamic norms. Women were neither secluded in their houses nor did they wear all-enveloping clothes in public — rarely even headscarves, so far as we know. Islam was a presence in Javanese life, but it was only partly the Islam of urban-based Modernist intellectuals. To a much greater degree it remained the Islam of the rural *kyais*, of mystical *tarekats* and of a majority of Javanese who constituted the otherwise-uninterested *abangan* seeking Islamic ritual embellishment for a birth, circumcision, wedding or funeral. Even pious communities in the countryside clung to beliefs and rituals which the Modernist reformers regarded as ignorant superstition at best and heresy at worst. These Modernists were challenged not only by prevailing norms in the countryside but also by other urban moderns for whom purified Islam did not seem the appropriate key to the future. Such leaders were found in the Taman Siswa organization and in various ‘secular’ (i.e., not religiously Islamic) political parties.

Urban nationalist leaders wished to mobilise a mass following to overthrow Dutch colonial rule. Given the repressive nature of that regime in the 1930s, however, such dreams were frequently dreamt behind bars. Such nationalist movements as were able to survive under the conditions of the 1930s were split among themselves by ideological and personal differences.

Insofar as significant numbers of Javanese followed formal organizations in the 1930s, they were more likely to be led by the few Javanese *kraton*
nobles who were prepared to act on their sense of *noblesse oblige*, by the *kyais* of NU or by other religious organizations. The politically caged rulers of Central Java’s *Vorstenlanden* and their *kraton* aristocracies were mostly, however, more interested in preserving their social standing and the associated rituals that entailed supernatural powers and thereby attracted superstitious commoners to them. That aristocratic social standing and those rituals were also useful to the Dutch regime as a means of preserving as far as possible popular acquiescence with the status quo.

Thus stood Javanese society and its Islamic faith on the precipice of the cataclysmic years from 1942 through 1949. Impoverished, illiterate, socially polarised but depoliticised by colonial repression, Javanese society was about to become repoliticised by the devastating — but in the end politically liberating — experience of the Japanese occupation and the Indonesian Revolution. It would still be impoverished, illiterate and socially polarised, but repoliticised and freed of the colonial police-state which had prevented domestic Javanese conflicts from breaking out into violence. The result would be both the achievement of independence, with Java as a central part of the new Republic of Indonesia, and — tragically — the first significant bloodshed between Javanese *santri* and *abangan*. 