The first freedom experiment: 
*Aliran* politics and Communist opposition to Islamisation, 1950–66

The period of liberal democracy and the subsequent ‘Guided Democracy’ period (from the late 1950s to 1965) were characterised by what is known as *aliran* politics. The term *aliran* is found in both Javanese and Indonesian in closely related meanings. In Javanese it means a channel for diverting water, which also acts as a sort of boundary marker in a rice-field; in Indonesian, it means more generally a current or stream. Ruth McVey’s authoritative account of *aliran* is as follows:

a ‘current’ or ‘stream’ of ideological-cultural identification, [which] was an important concept in Indonesian politics from 1945 to 1965. The term refers to divisions in Javanese society, principally along the lines of observant Muslim *santri* and Javanist *abangan*, groups that were mobilised around political parties and their satellite mass organisations. These associations provided an environment for their adherents’ social activities and segregated them from competing communities. The distinctions on which the *aliran* rested were not those of formal religion, language, or territory but rather degrees of Islamic observance, and so their boundaries were fixed by custom and organisational affiliation rather than more permanent markers. …

The parliamentary period of 1950–9 saw the full flowering of communal identification as the basis of politics. The *abangan* position was represented primarily by the Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI), which reflected the aristocratic *priyayi* values of *abangan* high culture and its conservative following, and the Communist PKI, whose lower-class appeal ate away increasingly at the PNI’s peasant base. The *santri*
were shared between the Masyumi, which was Modernist ... and the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which represented the pious of rural Java. ... Among the abangan Javanese, political stalemate and economic privation led to a steady advance of the Communists.¹

These politicised aliran inflamed santri-abangan relationships and made PKI and (to a lesser extent) PNI into formidable opponents to the Islamisation projects of the santri side.

The santri-abangan balance

Before considering the history of aliran politics in the 1950s and early 1960s, however, we should try to assess the balance of numbers between the two sides of Javanese society. This is a difficult task, for even though Javanese villagers might have been confident about whether they or their neighbours should be classified as santri or abangan, for outside analysts there are many grey areas and absolutely no social surveys that tell us anything reliable on the matter. So we must make some educated guesses. We may note the data cited by B.J. Boland suggesting very low levels of santri observance in the 1960s: that in Central Javanese villages 0–15 per cent of the people prayed; in 1967 only 14 per cent of the people of Yogyakarta paid zakat and in Central Java only 2 per cent observed the fast.² But these are just snapshots and the actual basis of the statistics is not clear.

We may employ data from Central and East Java to support very rough estimates of what percentage of the population should be regarded as santris in the early 1950s. Of the five pillars of Islamic orthopraxy — reciting the confession of faith (Shahada), praying in the direction of Mecca five times a day, giving alms (zakat), fasting in the month of Ramadan and undertaking the pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj) for those who were able to do so — it is only zakat that is useful to us in assessing how many people were santris in the 1950s. We cannot know whether someone who recites the Shahada is truly devout, cannot know whether a person who claims to pray or to fast really does so, and know that going on the hajj is a function of financial resources as well as of piety. Since, however, most people can pay the modest amounts of rice expected of them as zakat, these payments are an indicator of how many observant santris there were. There is, however, a complication to be

noted in that evidently many abangan villagers also paid zakat — not out of piety, but from a sense of village solidarity and sympathy for the deserving poor, and often as a part of the whole village’s observation of the festivities at the end of the fasting month. So we must regard the number who paid zakat as a kind of maximum figure for the number of santris, recognising that abangan, too, were amongst zakat payers.

We have two sets of figures that are of some use. From the Ministry of Religion we have data on the number of people who paid zakat fitrah (the alms due at the end of the fasting month) in 1954 across Central and East Java and Yogyakarta (an administratively separate Special District). Zakat fitrah would have been paid by the head of a household, but a family’s fitrah obligation is based on the number of people in the entire household, including babies. It is evident that the figures for donors listed in the 1954 zakat fitrah payment figures reflect such a calculation and thus represent the total population of fitrah-paying households, rather than just the number of household heads who paid. We do not really know, however, how comprehensive the Ministry’s figures are. From a survey taken in Indonesia in 2004, we learn that at that time 45 per cent of Muslims claimed that they paid zakat fitrah directly to beneficiaries (which could include, for example, needy family members, neighbours or kyais) rather than through more formal organisations. So if we guess — and it can only be a guess — that a similar portion paid fitrah directly in 1954 and that such payments were not captured by the Ministry figures, then we should multiply the reported figures by 1.8 to get an estimate of the total fitrah-paying population. We must accept, as noted above, that many abangan Javanese also paid zakat fitrah; on the other hand, santris were probably more aware of correct Islamic practice and were thus more likely to pay their fitrah through mosques and prayer houses rather than giving it out individually — and because of this, their donations are more likely to appear in the Ministry figures. If that is so, then the fitrah-payers who were not captured in the Ministry of Religion figures used below are more likely to have been abangan than santri. Thus, we may proceed cautiously with this data.

3 Comparing the number of donors listed in the Daftar statistik Zakat Fitrah sources in n8 below with the amount of rice which was given shows that the rice donations were just over 2 kg per head, approximately the fitrah amount expected for each member of a family.


5 I am grateful to Dr Amelia Fauzia for her help in trying to unravel what this fitrah data may be able to tell us.
To understand this as a percentage of the population, we also need Java population data for the time, but there are none. There was no census in Indonesia between 1930 and 1961. If, however, we assume that population growth in Java between 1954 and 1961 returned to the level of the 1920s for all of Java and Madura (1.73 per cent per annum),6 then working backwards from the 1961 figure we can arrive at a population estimate for 1954 of 90 per cent of the 1961 figure.7 All of these assumptions and guesses yield the following calculations.

Table 3 Population, payment of zakat fitrah and estimate of santri percentage of the population, mid-1950s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Population (1961)</th>
<th>A x 0.9 (= estimated population 1954)</th>
<th>C/C/B (No. of zakat fitrah contributors) (1954)</th>
<th>D/C (maximum % of santris in population)</th>
<th>E/D x 1.8 (= estimated maximum % of santris in population)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Java</td>
<td>7,753,570</td>
<td>6,987,213</td>
<td>374,896</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yogyakarta</td>
<td>2,231,062</td>
<td>2,007,986</td>
<td>70,399</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Java</td>
<td>11,177,595</td>
<td>10,059,835</td>
<td>359,637</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>21,162,227</td>
<td>19,046,004</td>
<td>804,932</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For comparison, we can look ahead to the outcome of the 1955 elections in Central and East Java. By this time — as will be seen below — NU stood as a separate party, having split bitterly from Masyumi in 1952. The latter thus became a Modernist and largely urban-based party, with most of its strength in non-Javanese parts of Indonesia. The 1955 national elections were free and fair, the first such national elections in Indonesian history, and

7 This is consistent with — and probably rests on the same calculation as — the estimates reported in Widjojo Nitisastro, Population trends in Indonesia (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 126.
the last for 44 years. In assessing the results, we again must accept that some — perhaps, in fact, many — abangan Javanese still voted for NU in 1955, probably out of respect for the kyais who led it, even though they themselves were no santris. This is confirmed by the several hundred thousand voters, particularly in East Java, who — as will be seen below — switched support from santri parties to abangan parties (especially PKI) in the 1957 regional elections, as aliran boundaries were hardening. So again, seeing these 1955 election outcomes in terms of aliran can give us a rough estimate of a theoretical maximum percentage of Javanese who might have been santris.

Table 4 1955 national election outcomes for the ‘big four’ parties in Central and East Java

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Aliran identity</th>
<th>% of total vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NU</td>
<td>Santri</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masyumi</td>
<td>Santri</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santri party sub-total</td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PKI</td>
<td>Abangan</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNI</td>
<td>Abangan</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abangan party sub-total</td>
<td></td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Such data cannot give us very robust results, but it seems reasonable enough to conclude that santris were in a minority among Javanese in the 1950s. Tables 6 and 7 below include the breakdown of the 1955 voting patterns across Central and East Java. It will be seen there that the santri parties won only 33 per cent of the ‘big four’ vote in Central Java and Yogyakarta in 1955, and 49 per cent in East Java. If we were to guess that perhaps 10 per cent of NU’s 1955 vote came from people who were themselves abangan in their personal life, then NU’s vote across Central and East Java would drop to around 25 per cent and the santri voter total would be reduced to under 40 per cent. As we will see in the outcomes of the 1957 provincial elections below, these are not unreasonable guesses. Taking the zakat figures and assuming that a portion of NU’s vote in 1955 came from people who were in fact abangan, we might think that something between 10 and 40 per cent of Javanese were pious, observant santris in the mid-1950s.

9 See the sources in n55 below.
and about 60–90 per cent were abangans. By the time we get to the end of this book, we will still not have any really reliable social surveys, but we will see those percentages evidently reversed, and aliran itself largely dead and buried as a political phenomenon.

Given the minority status of santri Javanese, it is not surprising that when Clifford Geertz and his colleagues worked at Pare (near Kediri) in the early 1950s, it was possible for Geertz to make an extraordinary observation that, only a few decades later, would become inconceivably wrong-headed:

It is very hard, given his tradition and his social structure, for a Javanese to be a ‘real Moslem’. … The otherness, awfulness and majesty of God, the intense moralism, the rigorous concern with doctrine, and the intolerant exclusivism which are so much a part of Islam are very foreign to the traditional outlook of the Javanese.10

It is one of the aims of this book to assess why judgments such as that — which were consistent with observed social phenomena of the time — were so rapidly rendered untrue by social change. Politics is an important part of that story.

The pilgrimage to Mecca (the hajj) continued to be an important way of maintaining one’s sense of Islamic identity and was observed by Javanese santris and other Indonesian Muslims, but it is notable that the number of people going on the hajj in the 1950s from Javanese-speaking areas — as seen in Table 5 below — was significantly lower than before World War II. In 1914 there were 10,006 pilgrims departing from Javanese-speaking areas and Madura,11 and in 1921 there were 15,036, although those were atypically large numbers. More generally, in the years for which we have data over 1913–30, the number of pilgrims from Javanese-speaking areas and Madura averaged about 8,400 per year and never fell below about 5,000.12 Although the 1950s were times of little prosperity in Java, it is difficult to explain the post-war drop in hajj departures on the basis of declining prosperity among santris, for the 1920s and 1930s were probably even worse in this respect. We may therefore wonder whether these numbers reflect an actual diminution in the number of Javanese who were sufficiently devout to undertake the hajj,

11 Madura was included with Javanese-speaking areas in the colonial-era data, but was usually not included after independence. The data quoted here is thus not strictly comparable, but the general pattern remains significant.
that is, a sort of ‘abanganisation’ or even ‘de-Islamisation’, to use Wertheim’s term quoted below. It is, however, true that the all-Indonesia figures were also lower than before the war, which might support an explanation based on lower incomes across Indonesia.

Table 5 *Hajj* departures from Javanese-speaking areas, 1950–8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>C. Java</th>
<th>E. Java</th>
<th>Yogyakarta</th>
<th>Javanese TOTAL</th>
<th>(All-Indonesia total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>1148</td>
<td>1281</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2464</td>
<td>5132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1146</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2647</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>8706</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>2129</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>4131</td>
<td>11,803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>1606</td>
<td>1647</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3313</td>
<td>8993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>1573</td>
<td>1584</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>3211</td>
<td>8777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>1706</td>
<td>2133</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3889</td>
<td>9114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>1771</td>
<td>1655</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>11,507</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>786</td>
<td>1220</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2037</td>
<td>6874</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Aliran* in politics and culture and the elections of 1955–7

We have seen how NU’s *kyais* had become politically active during the Japanese occupation and Revolution and had thus finally and completely displaced the *pangulus* as the leaders of Traditionalist Islam. But NU in the early 1950s was not a strong organisation. At heart it was a network of *kyais* and their families, linked by experiences as each others’ students or teachers, connected through marriage, centred on a few famous *pesantrens*, particularly in East Java, and — at the top of this informal hierarchy — led by the families of NU’s founding fathers from Jombang, Ky. H. Hasyim

13 ‘Rekapitulatie statistik djemaah haji musim haji’ (typescript document in George McT. Kahin papers, Kahin Center, Cornell University), presumably compiled from Ministry of Religion data. Different figures for 1950 and 1951 are given in Vredenbregt’s analysis of the *hajj*, but it should be noted that those are (as Vredenbregt explains) merely the quotas approved by the Indonesian government, not the actual number of departures. See Jacob Vredenbregt, ‘The haddj: Some of its features and functions in Indonesia’, *BKI* vol. 118 (1964), no. 1, pp. 111, 145 n1.
Asy'ari and Ky. H. Wahab Chasbullah. These families represented the ‘blue bloods’ of NU — a term used in the network itself. NU held up the semi-legendary ‘nine saints’ (wali sanga), who are said to have brought Islam to Java, as model bridgers of cultural boundaries. They were thought to have operated in ways that accommodated pre-Islamic Javanese ideas, whereas the Modernists of the 20th century were regarded by NU as enemies of Javanese culture. Similarly, Sufism was accepted as an orthodox aspect of Islam in NU, whereas it faced many opponents on the Modernist side. But the Modernists had been much better organisers than the Traditionalists. Whereas Muhammadiyah was a massive nation-wide organisation with several hundred thousand followers, NU had only some 51,000 followers — it is inaccurate to speak of ‘members’ in such a loosely structured network — and 87 branches in 1952.

NU’s kyais were dissatisfied with the Modernist and urban political domination of Masyumi. Ky. H. Wachid Hasyim drew a distinction between the ‘clever’, Western-educated Modernists and the religious experts found amongst the kyais in 1951:

Within the Islamic community there are two kinds of leadership groups. There is the group of political leaders who use the brand or stamp of Islam: they usually consist of clever people with Western education. The second group consists of the religious experts who really master Islamic religious knowledge widely and are called ulama. These have great influence among the populace and occupy greatly honoured positions.

NU members had occupied the position of Minister of Religion almost from the beginning of the Revolution. As the ministry expanded in the early 1950s, NU followers were given most of the positions. When a new cabinet was formed in 1952, however, a Modernist was given the post of Minister of Religion. Traditionalists now saw even this treasured possession falling to their competitors for Islamic leadership, and decided that they had had

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Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java

enough. NU withdrew from Masyumi and formed itself into a separate political party, which Wachid Hasyim led until his death in an automobile accident in 1953, at the age of only 38. His loss was a major blow to NU. His impeccable ‘blue blood’ ancestry had given him unquestioned leadership, yet he was also more modern in lifestyle than many kyais and thus had been more able than many of them to deal with the better-educated Modernists. The Masyumi–NU split left an enduring legacy, a thick layer of political animosity added to the long-standing differences in religious understandings.

The Traditionalists of NU now set about more modern activities like setting up branches and creating subsidiary organisations. In 1952 NU had only its young men’s wing Ansor, the women’s branch Muslimat NU (including the young women’s organisation Fatayat), and the farmer’s organisation Pertanu (Pertanian Nahdatul Ulama, NU Farming). After splitting with Masyumi, NU added trade unions and organisations for veterans (both of which former Hizbullah and Sabilillah fighters joined), set up groups for male and female students and began producing its own publications, including the newspaper Duta Masyarakat (The People’s Messenger). By the time it held its congress in 1954, it had grown to 200 branches. By the 1950s, young women were becoming pesantren students in greater numbers. It was only in 1934 that NU had formally approved education for women, although in fact there had been some initiatives taken before then. Women were far from equals to men in NU, however, for as late as 1959 they had to sit behind curtains at meetings where both men and women were present. Muhammadiyah had abandoned such a policy in 1944.

This organisational activity was a significant step in strengthening NU as an actively Islamising organisation, supporting the communal identity

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17 Fealy, ‘Ulama and politics’, Chapter 3, covers NU’s secession from Masyumi in detail.
18 Ibid., p. 119.
19 Ibid., pp. 109, 114–5. There were some pre-war NU publications of a fairly amateur standard, but Duta Masyarakat was something new: a daily with significant political content. On the earlier ‘embryonic’ publications, see Andrée Feillard, ‘From handling water in a glass to coping with an ocean: Shifts in religious authority in Indonesia’, in Azyumardi Azra, Kees van Dijk and Nico J.G. Kaptein (eds). Varieties of religious authority: Changes and challenges in 20th century Indonesian Islam (Singapore: International Institute for Asian Studies and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010), pp. 159–60.
of the santris. This was not without contest from the Modernist side, of course. In Kudus, for example, the santri community split between Masyumi supporters and NU supporters. Modernist ideas continued to be spread there through Qur’anic study groups (pengajian) and were successful particularly among business people. The main entrepreneurial families of the town were mostly Modernists and Muhammadiyah supporters. The town also, of course, split on political aliran lines: West Kudus, where the grave of the local wali is found, was dominated by Masyumi whereas in East Kudus, PKI was strongest. Traditionalism was stronger among the peasantry and public servants.21

Islamisation of both the Modernist and Traditionalist style, however, encountered heightened opposition as aliran politics strengthened. Especially in Central and East Java, Feith observed,

party and party-related organisational activity ... spread from small towns to surrounding villages. ... Each major party was the centre of an interrelated set of voluntary organizations — women's, youth, veterans’, labor, peasant, religious, educational, cultural and sporting organizations — with the whole complex forming an aliran or political stream.22

A process of polarisation that can be traced from about the middle of the 19th century thus became sharper and potentially more violent. Writing in the mid-1950s, Wertheim commented,

If there is a process of de-Islamisation going on in the urban and rural society of Java there would on the other hand seem to be a deepening Islamic consciousness among those who take their religious duties to heart. Undoubtedly this polarization process, reinforced by the political party system, has been disruptive for the village community in large parts of Java.23

The most active and successful political party was PKI, which adopted practices that it dubbed ‘small but effective’ to win grass-roots support among the abangan. Farmers were supported through the distribution of agricultural implements, seeds and fertilisers; village festivities were assisted; irrigation works, wells, roads, bridges and other public facilities

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were improved; basic education and literacy were promoted; village sporting
teams were supported; those who had suffered from natural disasters were
helped and so on. As the election campaigning heated up from about 1953,
such actions and associated political mobilisation intensified.24 PKI worked
particularly hard to develop the Barisan Tani Indonesia (BTI, Indonesian
Peasants' Front) as a PKI organisation.25 By 1957 nearly 70 per cent of BTI's
membership was in Central and East Java, where it claimed 2.3 million
members.26 Hindley noted,

Because PNI has largely relied for winning popular support on the
elite of government officials, village officials, and schoolteachers, and,
despite much talk to the contrary, is clearly a party of 'haves', PKI
and its mass organizations have had a virtual monopoly in channeling
whatever social protest or aspirations there have been among the poorer
abangan population. PKI has gone further and, in many abangan areas,
deliberately exploited the abangan fear and dislike of the santris in order
to win support.27

This animosity was of course reciprocated, with some santris de-
nouncing their political opponents as kafirs and a group of religious teachers
in West Java even saying that PKI members should be denied burial as
Muslims.28

Campaigning for the elections of the mid-1950s was second only to
the Madiun incident of 1948 in deepening santri-abangan animosities. It
was just at this time that Clifford Geertz, Robert Jay and their colleagues did
their field work in 'Modjokuto', a pseudonym for Pare (near Kediri). Their
publications give us invaluable insights into this area of East Java in 1953–4,

24 See Feith, Decline of constitutional democracy, esp. pp. 353–4; Donald Hindley, The
Communist Party of Indonesia, 1951–1963 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of
25 In the early years of independence PNI also sought to control BTI at local level,
but lost out to the Communists; see Soegijanto Padmo’s introduction to Fadjar
Pratikno, Gerakan rakyat kelaparan: Gagalnya politik radikalisisasi petani (Yogyakarta:
Penerbit Media Pressindo, Yayasan Adikarya Ikapi and The Ford Foundation, 2000),
p. xix.
26 Hindley, Communist Party of Indonesia, p. 167.
27 Ibid., p. 12. It may be noted that Hindley’s research covered the period discussed
here and his fieldwork was done in 1959–60, i.e., before the chaos of Guided
Democracy, the subsequent Soeharto era and the latter’s attendant re–rememberings
of the past.
28 Feith, Decline of constitutional democracy, p. 357.
when they observed hardening santri-abangan identities and animosities. Jay noted ‘a religious schism that cuts straight through local society’ and the rapidly advancing nature of that schism over the months of his fieldwork. He saw how each side was progressively ridding itself of the styles and rituals of the other. Where santri women had usually but not always worn the headscarf (kerudung) and abangan women had sometimes but usually not worn it, progressively the kerudung was becoming an essential symbol of santri identity, always worn by santris and never by abangan women. Stories about the Madiun episode were part of the hardening boundaries, as santri communities saw the PKI reviving and feared that they would again become the targets of Communist violence. As the 1955 elections approached, the most important consideration in voters casting their ballot was whether a candidate was santri or abangan. The santris in Jay’s area opposed the veneration of village-founder and guardian spirits adhered to by the abangan side, and indeed these cults were reduced or suppressed in santri villages. The boundaries hardened so much that, by the end of their fieldwork, even Jay and his wife were finding it difficult to move between the two communities, being suspected by each side of sympathy towards the other.

Clifford Geertz also described Pare in the pre-election period. He noted inter alia the presence of Permai, a ‘vigorously anti-Moslem politico-religious cult, … a fusion of Marxist politics with abangan religious patterns’ in a village where the santris mostly supported Masyumi and the abangans followed Permai. The organisation’s name means beautiful or charming, and was an acronym derived from the full name Persatuan Rakyat Marhaen Indonesia (roughly, Indonesian Proletarian Union). Permai not only promoted leftist politics, but provided rituals for ordinary abangan villagers, divination, mystical doctrines, supernatural healing, and so on. ‘Charging that Islam is a foreign import, unsuited to the needs and values of the Javanese,

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the cult [urged] a return to “pure” and “original” Javanese beliefs’ — an echo of the anti-Islamic ideas mentioned in Chapter 1 above, which appeared from the 1870s particularly in the Kediri area, where Geertz was working. A crisis erupted in mid-1954, however, when a Permai leader’s nephew died and the religious leader (the modin) refused to officiate at the funeral on the grounds that a follower of Permai was not a Muslim. If, however, the Permai leader were to sign a statement saying that he was a believing Muslim and wanted the boy buried as a Muslim, the modin would then officiate — which produced rage on the part of the Permai leader. In the midst of this crisis, ‘an old, traditionalistic man of about eighty’ muttered to Geertz, ‘Everything these days is a political problem; you can’t even die any more but what it becomes a political problem’. Eventually the dead boy’s father asked for a Muslim burial and ‘the santris, somewhat gleefully, now chanted their prayers over the corpse’. By the time Geertz left his fieldwork site some four months later, ‘the tensions between the santris and abangans had increased, and everyone wondered what would happen the next time a death occurred in a Permai family’.

When a Permai leader was quoted in the press as having claimed that Muhammad was a false prophet, a Masyumi leader prophetically said to a meeting in Kediri,

> Muslims are patient, but they won’t be patient forever. You had better realise that they will take only so much and then they will fight. You must consider that your actions may bring about the flow of blood, that if you allow these insults to Islam to continue we may end up in civil war.\(^{34}\)

Permai was, however, an idiosyncratic local-level phenomenon; the more important representative of anti-santri politics was PKI.

We should remember that the bitter election campaigning of the mid-1950s took place in a society where most people were still illiterate. The government and non-government organisations were investing in education and achieving great advances over the lamentable record of the colonial period, but there was a long way to go. By the time of the 1961 census, 59.2 per cent of males over the age of 10 in Java were literate (in any character) but only 32.6 per cent of females, for an overall literacy figure of 45.5 per cent.\(^{35}\) In such an environment, newspapers and other publications had

\(^{34}\) Quoted in Geertz, *Religion of Java*, p. 364.

increasing influence, but many voters were more motivated by rumours, superstitions, slogans and demagoguery. There was plenty of the latter.

Brawls, threats, slander, kidnappings and some killings occurred during the campaigning. There were false rumours that food and wells had been poisoned. Santri-abangan fears were manipulated both in the countryside and in the towns: the abangan feared that a Masyumi victory — which many people expected — would lead to them being persecuted, while on the santri side it was rumoured that a PKI victory would bring with it the murder of kyais. There were predictions of supernatural events and there was good business in selling amulets and potions to provide invulnerability. Issues such as the acceptability of gambling or of various forms of popular theatre divided the santri and abangan sides of politics. NU persuaded young women students that the 1955 campaign was a life-or-death struggle. One was told, as she later recalled, ‘If you do not help NU win … the Communist Party will win, and you will end up being hacked to death’.

NU used Friday sermons for political propaganda, while PKI used popular theatre for this purpose. One of Bambang Pranowo’s informants from a village near Mount Merbabu recalled how PKI put on kethoprak performances in which kyais and hajis were insulted and equated with landlords. Similarly, Surabaya’s famous ludruk theatre attracted a basically pro-PKI proletarian audience, portraying the life of the poor and mocking the elite in a style that Peacock describes as ‘wildly comical and often gross’, featuring ‘aging transvestites and hare-lipped clowns’ before an audience including ‘whores, thieves and gamblers’. But ludruk was ‘no pure Marxist trumpet’ — it was too bawdy and ribald, too iconoclastic for that.

A valuable source on the campaign period is a 1956 book mainly by one Soekirno, then Acting Head of the Information Service of Semarang city, about whom we know nothing other than that he was evidently of a leftist political persuasion, perhaps PKI. He wrote that social conditions in Semarang — and, of course, more widely in Java — were poor, as an

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37 Quoted in van Doorn-Harder, Women shaping Islam, p. 219.
imperialist and capitalist bloc opposed Communism. He wrote of social conflicts, economic problems for the masses, corruption, unstable prices, falling currency values and shortages of housing. Soekirno went on,

A moral crisis raged everywhere. … At the level of the masses it was clear that they had lost hold of their spiritual compass (pegangan jiwa): Kebatinan [indigenous Javanese spiritual cults] and black magic teachings arose widely among the populace …. Evils such as banditry, robbery, deceit, gambling, prostitution and murder were difficult to combat. The same was true of armed gangs that caused great losses to the people and the nation. Banditry, killings and burning people’s houses still just carried on in the villages. Fanaticism — especially regarding Islam — increased dreadfully.40

Parties were identified by their symbols on posters, billboards and banners: PKI’s hammer and sickle, PNI’s buffalo in a triangle, Masyumi’s crescent moon and star, and NU’s globe surrounded by a looped cord and stars. These were frequently defaced by opponents. They also inspired claims, counter-claims and political jokes that were easy for illiterates to grasp. In voting, party symbols on the ballot paper were to be punctured. Masyumi urged voters to puncture its crescent moon and star, for that was what illuminated all of the ummah (the Islamic community); opponents countered with the accusation that punching the crescent moon and star would plunge the world into darkness. NU supporters said to voters that they lived in the world and the world was round, and thus if not tied it could wobble, so they should choose the picture of the globe secured with the cord around it. Or that NU’s symbol was not a human creation, but was received in the form of a divine inspiration. In the case of PKI, poor voters were urged to pierce the hammer-and-sickle because they needed or hoped to pierce (i.e., plow) a piece of land.41 Soekirno’s account of the campaigning in Semarang no doubt reflected developments more widely in Java in 1954–5. Parties created slogans and songs to remind supporters how to vote.42 A simple question-and-response PNI song in Javanese went as follows:

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42 The following songs are from Soekirno, ‘Semarang’, pp. 176–80.
1. Pilihanmu apa
   Aku kandhana
   Pilihanku siji
   Ora liya mung PNI
   ‘What is your vote?
   Do tell me.’
   ‘My choice is just one,
   None other than PNI.’

2. Aku apa kena
   Melu milih kuwi
   Ya luwih utama
   Yen kok pilih siji iki
   ‘Can I
   Follow in that vote?’
   ‘Yes, that would be the very best,
   If you vote for that one.’

3. Tengerane apa
   Aku durung ngerti
   Banteng segi tiga
   Ngunjung drajad bangsa
   Partai kang sejati
   Pembela Ibu Pertiewi
   ‘What is its symbol?
   I do not yet know.’
   ‘It is the buffalo in the triangle
   That builds up the standing of the people.
   The party that truly
   Defends the Motherland.’

Masyumi of course emphasised its Islamic character in its campaign
ditties, the following one being in Indonesian (reflecting Masyumi’s Modern-
ism, its urban base and its appeal to non-Javanese voters):

Bismillah sudah mari memilih
Gambar bulan bintang putih
Atas dasar bitam nan bersih
Tanda gambar Masyumi
Partai berjasa nusa dan bangsa
Demi setia agama
In the name of God we are about to vote
For the crescent moon and star of white
On a base that is black and clean:
The symbol of Masyumi,
The party that serves nation and people
In the name of religious faithfulness.

NU repeated stock Islamic phrases in their Javanese version and
employed the Javanese calendrical system in appealing to its Traditionalist
flock:

Allah huma sali salim alla
Sayidina ǝwa maaulana
Muhammadin
Tanggal 13 Sapar tabun ngajeng
Kemis Legi aja lali nyoblos
jagad-gad
O God, give blessings and salvation to
Our Lord and Master Muhammad.
On the 13th of Sapar next year,
On the day Kemis-Legi,44 don’t forget to
pierce the globe.

Platforms were clear enough, but it is doubtful whether they actually
had much resonance among voters whose choices in many cases were based
on whether a candidate was santri or abangan. NU presented itself as the

43 A slightly Javanised spelling of the Arabic Allahuumma Salli ǝwa Sallam ǝla Sayyidina
wǝ Maωalana Muḥammadin.
44 The days of the Javanese seven- and five-day weeks respectively.
party of Sunni Muslims — the ahlu sunnah wal-jamaah. Its platform as recorded in Semarang was Islamist: ‘to implement shari’a law with reference to one of the four Sunni Schools of Law …; to implement Islamic law among the people’. Masyumi was just as blunt: it wanted to ‘carry out the teachings and laws of Islam in life for the blessings of God, based upon the Islamic nature of an Islamic state’. PKI’s platform was predictable: ‘to go in the direction of a Communist society, on the theories of Marx, Lenin and Mao Zedong; to unite the working class, peasants, lower bourgeoisie and democratic elements to oppose imperialism and capitalism’. PNI, less flamboyantly, sought ‘to perfect the sovereignty of Indonesia, bring about social justice, and suchlike.

More important than official platforms amongst less sophisticated voters were claims such as NU’s that a vote for it meant a path to heaven, that it was like going on Holy War. At the Friday sermon, some kyais told their audiences that it was compulsory for Muslims to vote for NU. Public meetings were held to which sympathisers were trucked in large numbers. There opposing parties were denounced and followers were promised prosperity, portions of land for farmers, a better life for workers, lower prices for necessities, and so on. Village headmen pressured people to vote for PNI while PKI village guards urged support for the Communist Party. At village level, PKI and its peasant front BTI emphasised that the Communists would distribute land to the landless and even sometimes promised land to everyone who voted for PKI. Such ‘sweeping general promises’ led to ‘acute

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45 Arabic abl al-sunna wa’l jama’a: the followers of the Prophetic Tradition and the Community, i.e., the Sunnis.
46 NU’s national-level ‘Struggle program’ (Program perdjuangan), developed c. 1954–5, was a bit more ambiguous. It said that the party ‘upholds (menegakkan) Islamic shari’a in a principled and consistent fashion following one of the four Schools of Law … and struggles for its implementation as the living law (Hukum-Hidup) that develops within society. … The Nahdlatul Ulama party endeavours to bring into being a national state based on Islam that guarantees and protects basic human rights in the freedom to embrace a religion.’ See Aboebakar Atjeh (ed.), Sedjarab hidup K.H.A. Wahid Hasjim dan karangan tersiar (Djakarta: Panitya Buku Peringatan Alm. KHA Wahid Hasjim, 1957), pp. 494–5. I am grateful to Dr Greg Fealy for locating this document and advising me about its date.
50 Feith, Decline of Constitutional democracy, pp. 432–3.
social tensions, … particularly in Java as election day approached’. According to PKI propaganda, PNI was the party of the elite priyayi, Masyumi and NU were parties of the santri but PKI was the party of the people.\textsuperscript{51} The Party tried to avoid seeming completely anti-religious while positioning itself as the party of the abangan, but the santri side emphasised the atheistic nature of Communism.\textsuperscript{52}

PKI was also denounced by PNI and NU as Partai Kriminal Indonesia: the Criminal Party of Indonesia, which would steal your land. NU supporters called PKI followers kafirs. Communists denounced NU people as wong Nadhah Udan: people standing with their hands held palms upward to catch the rain, both an accusation of passivity and a mocking of one of the prayer positions. Masyumi said that it faced two enemies, both called PKI: the Partai Komunis Indonesia (i.e., the real PKI) and the Partai Kyai Indonesia (i.e., NU).\textsuperscript{53} Villages split. As in the Kediri area studied by Jay, Geertz and their colleagues, so also in the pasisir area of Pemalang, for example, relatively well-off santri farmers and traders in one hamlet supported NU, relatively poor abangan villagers in the adjacent hamlet supported PKI and in a third, mixed, hamlet PNI was dominant.\textsuperscript{54}

Despite this social, religious, cultural and political polarisation, however, when polling finally took place in September 1955, it was peaceful. There were no significant episodes of conflict; nor did the sky darken or black magic prevail. To this surprise were added other and more significant ones. We have already noted above in Table 4 that in the Javanese heartland of Central and East Java, and looking only at the ‘big four’ party outcomes,

\textsuperscript{52} Feith, \textit{Decline of Constitutional democracy}, pp. 359–60. In a Yogyakarta village, Kim was later told that PKI had said that it, too, was religious, but that it supported what it called ‘Javanese religion’ (agama Jawa), while Masyumi ‘equated affiliation to the PKI with a straight path to Hell’; this agama Jawa, however, appeared not to differ much from Traditionalist practices; Hyung-Jun Kim, \textit{Reformist Muslims in a Yogyakarta village: The Islamic transformation of contemporary socio-religious life} (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2007), pp. 60–1.
\textsuperscript{53} Bambang Pranowo, \textit{Islam factual}, pp. 28, 33, 35; this material is based on interviews from 1987 onwards.
PNI was the strongest with 32 per cent of the vote.\textsuperscript{55} Given its Sukarnoist and priyayi character, PNI had been expected to do well. The major surprises from this election for Javanese were three. The first was that Masyumi did so poorly in these provinces — only 12 per cent of the vote in contrast to its national share of 21 per cent and its predominance in most non-Javanese parts of Indonesia. The second was that PNI was so closely trailed by NU with 30 per cent in Central and East Java — and 18 per cent nation-wide. This dramatically increased NU’s national parliamentary representation from only 8 seats to 45 and confirmed that NU was a major political player. The third surprise was that PKI did so very well, with 27 per cent of the votes in Central and East Java, giving it 39 parliamentary seats. PNI and PKI together, with their combined 59 per cent of the votes in Central and East Java, appeared to have created a serious political barrier to santri aspirations for further Islamisation of Javanese society through the ballot box.

Below national and provincial levels, there were many local areas in Java, particularly in East Java, where either PKI or NU was the largest party. Overall, in Central Java PNI was the largest (with 33.5 per cent of the vote) and in East Java NU was the largest (with 34.1 per cent). In both provinces, PKI was the second-largest party, with 25.8 per cent of the vote in Central Java and 23.3 per cent in East Java, but lower-level aliran realities were more complex. Among the 37 Kabupaten (regencies) and cities in Central Java, PNI gained the largest vote in 21, NU in 4 and PKI in 12, in the last case including the largest cities of Surakarta, Yogyakarta and Semarang. Among East Java’s 29 Kabupaten and cities, PNI was the largest vote-winner in only four. NU took 11 and PKI 14, including all of the major cities: Surabaya, Madiun, Malang and Kediri. The discrepancies in votes were sometimes large. In Kabupaten Madiun, for example, the centre of the PKI rebellion of 1948, PNI gained 57,632 votes, Masyumi 16,518, NU 44,114, but PKI swept into the lead with 101,477. In the city of Madiun itself, PNI got 8,713 votes, Masyumi 1849, NU only 1261, and PKI the most at 18,133. In Kediri city — half a century later regarded as a great NU stronghold — the 1955 vote outcome was PNI 14,998, Masyumi 4521, NU 11,803 and another PKI victory with 23,252. In Surakarta, PNI was supported by

32,870 voters, Masyumi by 15,364, NU by a mere 1462, but PKI by 76,283, half again as much as the other three combined. In Yogyakarta — a major centre of Modernist Islam, where the headquarters of Muhammadiyah were found — the vote for PNI was 21,839, for Masyumi 18,027, for NU a paltry 2387, and for PKI 43,842. NU’s domination was as great as PKI’s in other places. It took a third of all the votes in Magelang and 39 per cent of the total in Kabupaten (not the city) of Surabaya. Madurese in East Java were solid supporters of NU. Thus, NU took 48 per cent of the total vote in heavily Madurese Probolinggo and 45 per cent of the total vote in Situbondo. In the former, PKI won only 23,583 votes against NU’s 183,084 and in the latter only 8157 against NU’s 109,751. In Probolinggo, NU’s vote was half again as much as the other ‘big four’ votes combined and in Situbondo it was nearly 30 per cent more. The party completely swept the Kabupatens of Madura itself. Since Christianity will become a major issue later in this book, it is worth noting that in 1955 it was of next-to-no political significance. Christian-based parties won only one parliamentary seat from each of Central and East Java.56

In the Javanese countryside, the stage was set for a period of increasing polarisation and conflict, with PKI and NU as the main political contenders. In the highly politicised aliran environment of the day, winners of elections can hardly be expected to have been modest in victory. And success bred more success. In some places politicians switched to parties that had done better in the polls, especially in the case of Masyumi people who crossed over to NU. This was not, however, true of PKI, whose activists were loyal and confident of ever-increasing influence. PKI was particularly successful in attracting PNI supporters and continued to build its influence among the rural poor and urban labourers.57 The Constituent Assembly elections in December 1955 were an anticlimax but the same was not true of the subsequent regional elections.

By the time the regional elections were held in 1957–8, the national political context was in flux. Sukarno was expressing — and thus further promoting — widespread dissatisfaction with the corruption and broken promises of the parliamentary system. Regionally based rebellions were challenging the authority of the central government and the army was increasing its role in national life. The parties themselves were, in some

56 Alfian, Hasil Hasil pemilihan umum 1955, pp. 12, 21–2, 80–1, 90–1.
57 Soetomo, Biografi Mangunnegoro, pp. 53–4, refers to such events in the context of Pekalongan.
cases, uncertain to what extent they should defend the party system, seek to reform it or side with Sukarno in some new political structure. Nor were they certain how they should deal with the army, which no party dominated. PKI’s strength in the 1955 elections was an important element in this flux, for it was now reasonable to suspect that a continuation of parliamentary democracy could end in a Communist-dominated government. At village level in Java, aliran-defined political, religious and social conflicts continued. In this delicate, indeed potentially explosive, environment, elections were held in nine provinces across the country in 1957–8.

In the July 1957 Central Java and Yogyakarta elections, PKI registered major gains. The results were as follows.

Table 6 1957 provincial election outcome for the ‘big four’ parties in Central Java and Yogyakarta compared with 1955 outcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Aliran identity</th>
<th>% of total vote, 1957</th>
<th>(% of total vote, 1955)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NU</td>
<td>Santri</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>(22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masyumi</td>
<td>Santri</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Santri party sub-total</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>(33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PKI</td>
<td>Abangan</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>(29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNI</td>
<td>Abangan</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>(38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abangan party sub-total</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>(67)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, PKI was the great winner here, for it increased its vote by nearly 30 per cent over its 1955 figure (from 1,772,306 to 1,865,568, in a period when the number of voters increased by only 1.1 per cent) and gained a larger percentage of the overall vote, evidently entirely at PNI’s cost. The latter shed over 20 per cent of the number of votes it had won in 1955. For its part, NU increased its vote roughly in line with the increase in voter numbers. Like PNI, Masyumi fell, with nearly 8 per cent fewer votes than in 1955. The percentage which we can regard as santri or abangan in aliran orientation remained stable overall.

The provincial elections in East Java also showed that PKI was increasing in strength, as can be seen in the following table.

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58 Based on Lev, *Transition to guided democracy*, pp. 92–3.
Table 7 1957 provincial election outcome for the ‘big four’ parties in East Java compared with 1955 outcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Aliran identity</th>
<th>% of total vote, 1957</th>
<th>(% of total vote, 1955)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NU</td>
<td>Santri</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>(37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masyumi</td>
<td>Santri</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santri party sub-total</td>
<td></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>(49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PKI</td>
<td>Abangan</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>(25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNI</td>
<td>Abangan</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>(25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abangan party sub-total</td>
<td></td>
<td>54</td>
<td>(50)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here PKI increased its vote by nearly 18 per cent over its 1955 figure: from 2,299,602 to 2,704,523, a gain of over 400,000 voters, whereas the total number who turned out to vote actually declined by nearly 5 per cent. This growth was at all other parties’ cost, for the total number of votes and the percentage share of the votes of all the other ‘big four’ parties declined, but it was mainly a case of voters shifting allegiance from NU to PKI. The percentage which we might think to have been santri or abangan in aliran orientation thus shifted in the abangan direction, with half a million more voters choosing abangan parties — that is to say, voting mainly for PKI — than two years before. This shift also shows us that NU’s vote in 1955 did not rest upon a solid santri constituency, for votes were flowing from it to PKI — 3,370,554 having voted for NU in 1955 but only 2,999,785 in 1957, a loss of over 370,000 voters. The fears of a PKI march to power were further exacerbated by the August 1957 election in mainly Sundanese West Java, where PKI rose to 24 per cent of the vote from 16 per cent in 1955.

Both in the national-level squabbles between political parties and in the social realities at grass-roots level, those who hoped for deeper Islamisation of Javanese society now faced a formidable opponent in the Communist Party. PKI support was increasing, PNI was losing ground to it and even NU was challenged by it — and that even in the NU heartland of East Java. In 1960 Masyumi was banned for involvement in regional rebellions, further weakening the political structures supporting the santri side of politics.

59 Based on ibid., pp. 94–5.
60 Ibid., p. 95.
PKI’s leader D.N. Aidit (a Sumatran Malay by ethnic origin) reiterated the historical revisionism that had been part of the challenge by some Javanese to Islam for nearly a century: the idea that the last and greatest pre-Islamic kingdom of Java, Majapahit — depicted as the standard of what was truly Javanese — was destroyed in the early 16th century by the unscrupulous perfidy of the first Muslims. Of course he now gave this idea a veneer of Communist jargon, injecting feudalism, capitalism and contradiction. ‘Moslem traders from Persia and India’, he wrote, converted local Hindu lords to Islam and encouraged them to abandon their loyalty to Majapahit. The *wali sanga* then overthrew Majapahit. ‘This was the result of the contradiction which had arisen between the Moslem feudal kingdoms who had become at one with commercial capital (the merchants) and the Hindu feudal kingdoms that were still completely agrarian.’ We may be confident that this same theme — that the best of what was truly Javanese was destroyed by Islam, of Islamisation as a civilisational mistake — was reiterated in multiple propaganda sessions at grass-roots level.

NU sought to meet the PKI presence in all fields. To challenge PKI’s women’s movement Gerwani, NU sought to build up Muslimat NU and Fatayat. PKI’s youth activists in Pemuda Rakyat were balanced by NU’s Ansor and its uniformed militia wing Banser (from Barisan Ansor Serba Guna: Ansor All-purpose Forces) which was established in 1962. Banser combined spiritual disciplines with martial arts and a dose of beliefs in supernatural powers. NU already had its farmer’s union Pertanu to counter the Communist BTI and (from 1954) Sarbumusi (Sarekat Buruh Muslimin Indonesia, Indonesian Muslim Labour Union) to counter PKI’s union SOBSI. For higher education students, NU set up PMII (Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia, Indonesian Islamic Students’ Movement), for fishermen Sernemi (Serikat Nelayan Muslimin Indonesia, Indonesian Muslim Fishermen’s Union) and for businessmen HPMI (Himpunan Pengusaha Muslimin Indonesia, Indonesian Muslim Entrepreneurs’ Association). A missionary organisation was set up, borrowing the Christian (originally Dutch) terminology for proselytism: Missi Islam.

Others also opposed PKI initiatives. The Party established a People’s University (UNRA: Universitas Rakyat) in 1958 in Jakarta and Yogyakarta, where Party cadres, public servants and others were taught. UNRA soon

had branches in other cities, including Surakarta, Semarang and Surabaya in Javanese-speaking areas. In response, Islamic activists established Pendidikan Tinggi Da'wah Islam (PTDI: Islamic Proselytism Higher Education) in Surakarta, which was moved to Jakarta in 1965. Military officers played a role in its leadership.

The arts became politicised as well. PKI’s Lekra (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, People’s Cultural Institute, established 1950) was becoming an effective tool for intellectual repression, spearheaded by Indonesia’s greatest writer, Pramoedya Ananta Toer. To compete with this, in 1962 NU established Lesbumi (Lembaga Seniman Budayawan Muslimin Indonesia, Indonesian Muslim Culture-Bearers’ and Artists’ Institute), which, however, struggled somewhat in the absence of any figure of the stature of Pramoedya. This artistic world was, in any case, a more modern one in which many kyais felt uncomfortable; indeed, some evidently felt that Lesbumi was not really consistent with NU values.

A political war was fought around popular theater across Java. In Banyuwangi for example, PKI, BTI and other Communist-affiliated organisations set up groups to perform angklung while NU supported Islamic-style arts such as rebana and hadrah. The iconic reyog dance of

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63 Hindley, Communist Party of Indonesia, p. 94.
65 On these various NU organizational initiatives, see Saifuddin Zuhri, Berangkat dari pesantren, p. 186; Fealy, ‘Ulama and politics’, pp. 228, 237–8; Ihsan Ali–Fauzi, ‘Religion, politics and violence’. See also Choiratun Chisaan, Lesbumi. According to Saifuddin, Banser’s name was chosen also because if its two syllables are read in reverse order, they say serban (turban). Lesbumi was founded by Djamaludin Malik, Usman Ismail and Asrul Sani. On the abangan side, Lekra was often supported by the PNI intellectuals’ front LKN (Lembaga Kebudayaan Nasional, National Cultural Institute), which was led by the writer Sitor Situmorang.
67 Chintya Novi Anoegrajekti, ‘Kesenian Using: Resisten budaya komunitas pinggir’ in Kebijakan kebudayaan di masa orde baru: Laporan penelitian (Jakarta: Pusat Penelitian dan Pengembangan Kemasyarakatan LIPI and The Ford Foundation, 2001), pp. 813–4. Angklung is an indigenous instrument using bamboo tubes held in a frame, which are shaken to produce musical tones. Rebana is a tambourine and hadrah a chant in praise of God done to rebana accompaniment.
Ponorogo was used as a political propaganda vehicle by PKI and PNI and, to a lesser extent, by NU, for the santri side of politics was often uncomfortable with performances that involved trance (feared as a form of spirit-possession and black magic). Transvestite performers were sometimes employed in these performances, although both PKI and PNI evidently felt some discomfort with that, since transvestitism seemed inconsistent with the modernisation these parties sought to convey. In 1965, more than 300 villages around Ponorogo had their own reyog groups, but in the conflagration of that year — discussed below — many PKI-linked performers were arrested or disappeared.68 This happened in many other places as well, such as among tayuban performers in Kediri.69 In Surabaya, ludruk continued to burlesque the ills of a socially divided society to an audience of the poor. But by the time that Peacock did his fieldwork there in 1962–3, ludruk’s leftist, iconoclastic message was diluted, for the army had banned explicitly ideological messages other than Sukarno’s idiosyncratic doctrine of Nasakom.70 Elsewhere in East Java, too, ludruk and other cultural performances were highly politicised.71 In 1961 Lekra claimed that large numbers of kethoprak groups in Central Java and ludruk companies in East Java were affiliated with it.72

NU and PKI both knew that religion was the key issue between them, that whatever class issues there might be as well, it was faith and aliran that mattered most. PKI went through various public ideological contortions to avoid seeming anti-religious, to no avail.73 At local levels, the conflict was

70 Peacock, Rites of modernization, p. 31. NASAKOM stood for nasionalisme, agama, Komunisme, i.e., the unity of nationalism, religion and Communism — something conceivable only in Sukarno’s revolutionary humbug and unattainable in the realities of early 1960s Indonesia.
quite clear. One kyai recalled later that in the area of Klaten, in the 1960s the Party put on performances of Kethoprak PKI with a script entitled Patine Gusti Allah (The death of God). As the parliamentary system staggered to its end, to be replaced by Sukarno's so-called Guided Democracy, PKI adjusted its ideological positions to support Sukarno's successive ideological pronouncements. The Party was seeking protection from the hostile forces that faced it and believed that Sukarno represented its best hope of gaining power. By the early 1960s there was hardly any difference to be seen between Communist ideology and Sukarnoism. NU meanwhile made its own accommodation with the chaotic political realities of Indonesia, based on the ideas of accepting the existing political authority and of seeking benefit and avoiding harm.

A new leadership style was, however, emerging within NU. Kyais still dominated the organisation, but now there were younger leaders who had gone through Indonesia's expanding public education system and more modern kinds of Islamic education as well as Traditionalist pesantrens. Some of these younger figures had professional qualifications and had even been in Western countries for higher education. As Fealy puts it, now there were NU cadres who were 'just as likely to speak English as Arabic'. Among the new figures was M. Subchan Z.E., a 'flamboyant and charismatic figure' who would wield significant influence until his early death in 1973. He was from a Yogyakarta Muhammadiyah family and went to a Muhammadiyah primary school but spent his youth with a wealthy merchant uncle in Kudus who was active in NU circles, and had then gone on himself to become a successful entrepreneur. He was adept at managing the politics of Jakarta: 'A debonair and popular figure among Jakarta's social set, he often spent his evenings dancing with glamorous women at the city's elite nightspots.'

NU was thus developing a politically active wing which was often far from the lifestyle and values of the kyais, but which nevertheless gave it new opportunities. This produced tensions within NU, of course, but also gave Traditionalist Islam influence in modern political life to go along with

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75 An overview of the Guided Democracy period, with references to the main secondary sources, is to be found in Ricklefs, *History of modern Indonesia*, Chapter 20.
Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java

its influence at grass-roots level. This combination of influences could be found in only two organisations in Indonesia in the early 1960s: NU and PKI. Less well-supported among the populace, but also powerful, was the army. All turned to Sukarno for legitimacy as they prepared for a contest for power among themselves. Given that PKI was evidently the rising power, it is not surprising that an anti-PKI coalition of interests grew between NU and the military. A group of ‘hard-line’ anti-PKI militants was strengthening among younger NU followers in Ansor and other NU groups at this time. Their leaders included Ky. H. Bisri Syansuri (a respected elder figure, by then in his late 70s), Subchan and two former army officers M. Munasir and Jusuf Hasjim. It should be noted, however, that in Central and East Java, Communist infiltration of the military was also advanced, so that the upper echelons of the military could not be confident of the loyalty of their own forces.

The violent conflicts of 1963–6

In 1963 and 1964 the wobbly radicalism of Guided Democracy began to tip into social violence in the countryside of Central and East Java. PKI seems to have become confident that, while its enemies were strengthening, the massive following that it claimed gave it capacity for independent action. It is also possible that Aidit was urged during a visit to Beijing in September 1963 to begin direct revolutionary action in the countryside. Whatever the case, the events suggest, as Mortimer put it, that the Communists felt ‘that the time was approaching when their political fate would be decided one way or the other’. In a speech that Aidit gave in Beijing, published the following year in Indonesian, he made the following observation, capturing the central social, religious and political dichotomy (he of course called it a ‘contradiction’) faced by PKI.

The Indonesian situation is indeed complex and filled with many contradictions. On the one hand, according to the statistics, over 90 per

77 Involvement in politics also brought an increasing number of accusations of corruption and mismanagement against NU leaders, and the feeling that the social standing of kyais was declining because of involvement in politics. See Fealy, ‘Ulama and politics’, pp. 192 et seqq., 232.
78 For a brief biography, see Feillard, Islam et armée, pp. 326–9.
80 Mortimer, Indonesian Communism under Sukarno, p. 278.
cent of Indonesia’s populace is Muslim. On the other hand, the influence of Communism is constantly expanding.81

While the precise motivation of the PKI leadership is not entirely clear, early in 1964 the Communists launched a ‘unilateral action’ (aksi sepihak) campaign to carry out land reform laws that had been passed in 1959–60 but had hardly begun to be implemented. The membership numbers being quoted by PKI in the mid-1960s — claiming a total of perhaps 20 million in the Party and its affiliated organisations, the large majority being in Java82 — were certainly grossly exaggerated. Whether the Party leadership knew this and was engaged in massive bluff and brinkmanship, or actually believed the figures themselves, is not knowable. Whatever the case, PKI activists — especially BTI and Pemuda Rakyat — and their landless or land-poor followers began taking over ‘excess’ lands in Central and East Java. This pitted the Communist side against many wealthy hajis and kyais, the landholdings of pesantrens, other santri landowners and military officers.

Ironically, PKI’s ‘unilateral actions’ worked to the benefit of some Islamic institutions, for there were santri landowners who preferred to give their land to pesantrens, mosques, prayer-houses (langgar) or other institutions as pious endowments (wakaf) rather than to see it fall into the hands of Communists. The most famous of all the modernised pesantrens of Java, Pondok Modern at Gontor, saw its landholdings rise from a mere 25 ha of rice land to over 260 in this way. BTI tried but failed to prevent the school getting these lands.83

Santri activists — especially NU’s Ansor and Banser — fought back.84 Brawls, kidnappings, beatings, arson attacks on houses, destruction of cane-fields and other crops and the killing of opponents spread. PKI declared that ‘true revolutionaries’ must place themselves on the side of the peasants

82 Mortimer, Indonesian Communism under Sukarno, pp. 366–7.
84 There is considerable literature on this violence. For the account here, I have relied upon Mortimer, Indonesian Communism under Sukarno, pp. 309–27; Fealy, ‘Ulama and politics’, pp. 239–44; Soegijanto Padmo, Landreform dan gerakan protes petani Klaten, 1959–1965 (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Media Pressindo and Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria, 2000), pp. 109–55; Sulistyo, Palu arit di lading tebu, pp. 91–156; and Aminuddin Kasdi, Kaum merah menjarah: Asksi sepihak PKI/BTI di Jawa Timur 1960–1965 (Yogyakarta: Jendela, 2001). See also Arbi Sanit, Badai revolusi: Sketsa...
and presented the cause as if it were class-based, but of course these actions were not supported by all peasants. Rather, it was the *abangan* peasant followers of PKI and BTI who were claiming land, not the *santri* peasantry. The latter — led mainly by NU’s Ansor youth militia — saw it as a religious act to resist the ‘atheistic’ Communists. The police often became involved, BTI cadres were arrested, and before long serious losses of life were being reported. Chinese — often assumed by the *santri* side to be both atheists and Communists by definition — were also attacked in some places, and defended by PKI. Some *santri* activists believed that the Communists were using black magic to curse their opponents, while *kyais* gave supernatural protection, powerful prayers and amulets to NU activists. *Kyais* declared that anyone killed in action against the Communists would go directly to heaven, as was true of martyrs who fell in Holy War.

In this spreading violence, PKI soon found itself on the defensive, particularly in NU’s heartland of East Java. When the Party was put to the test, the millions of militants it claimed were not to be seen and aliran had clearly trumped class as a format for political mobilisation. By November 1964, BTI admitted that a ‘counter-revolution’ was gaining ascendancy in East Java. NU and other anti-PKI forces were winning. PKI tried to back off from the *aksi sepihak* campaign but this could not be ordered immediately, for fear of demoralising Party cadres and losing altogether whatever peasant base it really had. Thousands of BTI members were already abandoning the organisation — for membership was a passport to trouble — and declaring themselves members of PNI instead, thereby maintaining their *abangan* political identity but getting out of the firing-line of *santri* violence. While the Communist side tried to restrain its activists, the *santri* side could smell victory. Mortimer observes, ‘All anti-Communists who became aware of what was happening were greatly encouraged. That PKI strength was preponderant in the villages of East and Central Java was no longer accepted as an axiom.

*Kekuatan politik PKI di Jawa Tengah dan Jawa Timur* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2000). Van Doorn-Harder, *Women shaping Islam*, p. 220, writes of Muslimat NU participating in ‘the military preparation’ and having ‘joined the fight’, but this seems an exaggeration; there is no evidence of women being involved in the killings (my thanks to Prof. Robert Cribb for confirming my impressions in this regard).

There were some variations to the pattern of *abangan* followers of PKI clashing with *santri* followers of NU. In Gunung Kidul, most ‘excess’ land was held not by *kyais* but rather by the local *priyayi* who were supporters of PNI; Fadjar Pratikno, *Gerakan rakyat kelaparan*, pp. 87, 112–4, 138–44. Although this book does not cover Bali, it should be noted that serious violence also occurred there, where of course Islam was not a factor.
of Jakarta politics.\(^8^5\) Conflict was not confined to rural villages. In Surabaya, for example, Chinese-owned land was taken over and was quickly covered with hundreds of houses. BTI demanded that the mayor — himself a PKI member — give land titles to these squatters, but in fact the city government failed to do so. Pemuda Rakyat and Ansor confronted each other violently in several neighbourhoods of Surabaya, and in other towns and cities.

The air of radicalism at both national and local levels continued as the months of 1965 passed. The creation — over Indonesian objections — of Malaysia in September 1963, the consequent declaration of the Indonesian-Malaysian conflict known as ‘Confrontation’ and the escalation of the American war in Vietnam during 1964 and 1965 also provided international fodder for Indonesia’s increasing domestic radicalism. In August 1965, Sukarno suddenly vomited and collapsed in public. Although he soon recovered, both national-level political actors and people in towns and villages across the country began to consider the possibility of an Indonesia without Sukarno. Many domestic observers as well as foreigners thought that PKI was poised to gain power. Now that Masyumi was banned, NU remained as the only significant santri political party. Its leaders and activists, along with other santris and leading military figures, were determined to prevent a PKI takeover. In towns and villages across Java, people believed that violence loomed and that the other side had lists of those to be killed when it erupted.\(^8^6\)

At the end of September 1965, the chaotic, radical, corrupt and violent Guided Democracy period came to an end in Jakarta. The events in the capital may be briefly told here, even if many details are obscure and, we may suppose, will always remain so.\(^8^7\) A poorly organised military coup group removed the top leadership of the army by kidnapping and murdering six senior generals and an aide, in the name of forestalling what was claimed to be an American-sponsored coup by a secret council of generals. PKI’s women’s organisation Gerwani and its youth wing Pemuda Rakyat were also involved. It is not clear how much of this adventure was really attributable to PKI plotting, how much arose from intra-military issues, and how clear the distinction between PKI and the coup’s military activists was anyway, given

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\(^8^5\) Mortimer, Indonesian Communism under Sukarno, p. 327.

\(^8^6\) For example, see the account of rising social conflict in 1965 and the emerging alliance between the military and the kyais of the Jombang-Kediri area in Sulistyo, Palu arit di lading tebu, pp. 129–31.

\(^8^7\) A brief overview of the 1965 coup attempt is available in Ricklefs, History of modern Indonesia, pp. 318–21, with references to relevant literature listed under the readings for Chapter 20.
the mutual infiltration, influence and clandestine contacts that had been developing for years. Whatever the case, the coup attempt quickly collapsed, Major-General (soon-to-be-President) Soeharto, then commander of the Army Strategic Reserve Command (Kostrad), took charge of the military and commenced — cautiously and methodically — to lay the foundations for the removal of Sukarno as President and the implementation of his own ‘New Order’ regime.

The crucial consequence of the 1965 coup attempt for the history of Islamisation in Java was that it allowed santri-abangan differences over degrees of commitment to Islam now to lurch into widespread, still almost-inconceivable, slaughter. Mutual suspicions and stereotyping across hardening aliran boundaries, bitter political party animosities with aliran roots, politicised tensions over folk rituals and arts, the part-class and part-aliran conflict in the countryside of Java that had already turned violent — all of this now gave birth to the worst domestic bloodletting in the history of Indonesia. PKI was blamed for the events in Jakarta by the military and by its many enemies on the santri side of politics. In Jakarta and other cities, young activists of various backgrounds (including Christians) with military support formed action groups to attack PKI people and property. Chinese were also targeted.

In the Javanese-speaking heartland, social violence on an unprecedented scale broke out. The role of the military in Central and East Java varied from place to place. There was a major complication there, for the army’s Central Java Diponegoro Division and East Java Brawijaya Division were among those most successfully infiltrated and influenced by PKI; some elements were clearly on the side of the military coup leaders in Jakarta. The loyalty of precisely these two crucial divisions was therefore doubtful. It was some time before Soeharto and his colleagues could be confident that an order

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88 The killings of 1965–6 continue to attract serious research and to produce valuable studies. Most of this research is handicapped by its heavy reliance on later memories and, of course, the almost total absence of sources from the PKI side. The most important study so far published is Sulistyo, _Palu arit di lading tebu_, covering the area of Jombang and Kediri. In the account of the killings here, important items of information will be footnoted. Otherwise, the general narrative relies upon Sulistyo, _Palu arit di lading tebu_; Fealy, ‘Ulama and politics’, pp. 248–56; Robert Cribb (ed.), *The Indonesian killings of 1965–1966: Studies from Java and Bali* (Monash Papers on Southeast Asia no. 21. Clayton, Vic: Monash University Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, 1990); and Imam Tholkhah, _Anatomi konflik politik di Indonesia_, pp. 134–41. See also the November 1965 Indonesian intelligence report translated in ‘Report from East Java’, *Indonesia* no. 41 (Apr. 1986), pp. 135–49.
given to either Diponegoro or Brawijaya forces would be followed. So the main mobilisers of the killing squads in most rural areas were not military men. Nor were they university students, for the number of higher-education institutions with networks into the countryside was still small. Rather, and not surprisingly, it was Ansor and the kyais of the countryside, who mobilised their pesantren students in ways seen previously in the Revolution and at the time of the 1948 Madiun incident.

Across Central and East Java, as well as elsewhere in Indonesia, there flowed together a potent conjunction of piety, profound faith, mystical doctrines, superstition, hatred, ignorance, magical mumbo-jumbo, villainy and primitive bloodlust. Pamphlets, rumours and stereotyped accusations abounded. It was widely believed that the Communists had prepared instruments to gouge out the eyes of their enemies and wells into which they would throw the bodies of murdered kyais. It was thought that the houses of NU and PNI people in Yogyakarta (and no doubt elsewhere) would be identified by secret marks for attack by Communists, so families inspected the perimeter of their houses each morning for the tell-tale signs of impending assault. For the santri side, it appeared to be a matter of kill or be killed.

An NU Banser activist in the Salatiga area later recalled,

At that time ‘in-group feeling’ was very strong. So the issue of santri vs. abangan, or NU and Masyumi against the Communists, was very strong. This feeling was accompanied by very strong inter-group conflicts at local level. At that time, conflict at the national level encountered sentiments flowing at the local level. In fact, even more than that, two choices appeared: to kill or be killed.

NU’s Ansor and its militia wing Banser took leading roles in the killings, although other Islamic organisations, notably Muhammadiyah, also proclaimed the extermination of the PKI a religious duty tantamount to Holy War. Kyais were not unanimous in their own fatwas about the fate that awaited the Communists, but most judged that killing them was

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89 Sulistyo, *Palu arit di lading tebu*, p. 175.
92 See Boland, *Struggle of Islam*, p. 146, for a Muhammadiyah declaration of November 1965.
allowed, even a religious duty. The Communist enemies were seen as rebels against a legitimate government and atheistic kafirs. This had the consequence that some escaped being murdered by pronouncing the Shahada, thereby ‘converting’ to Islam from their previously abangan nominal Muslim status and making it more difficult for santris to proceed with murdering them, confirming that this was essentially a religious conflict in the eyes of the santri activists. But this did not always work. Some abangan were in fact able to recite the Shahada, just as nominal adherents of other religious systems can often mumble the basic ritual phrases of their cultural community, so people accused of association with PKI who pronounced the Shahada were often killed anyway. At least one kyai said that faith was a private matter between the believer and God: Communists who were rebels against the legitimate Indonesian government could be killed whether or not they were Muslims, but anyone who had not rebelled, whether or not a kafir, should be left alone:93 we should not imagine that many lives were saved through this subtle distinction. There were, however, some kyais who tried to stop the killing or offered protection to Communists, but they were few and they had little overall impact.94 There were even a few cases of Ansor leaders trying to protect people associated with PKI,95 but this was far from the norm. Abangan areas in Gunung Kidul came under much suspicion at this stage. In the village of Kajar, studied by Ann Dunham, the headman later recalled how an army sergeant and Ansor activists repeatedly visited and demanded the names of Communists to be taken away for killing, but they were assured that there were no PKI villagers there and ‘there was relatively little loss of life’.96 Near Pemalang on the north coast, the bloody santri-abangan violence of 1965–6 gave the people of one village an opportunity to carry out an unrelated act of revenge, killing a hated headman in a manner reminiscent of the ‘people’s sovereignty’ actions of the Revolution. But PKI was of course the main target of an alliance there between the local military and two pesantrens, with the killing again spearheaded by Ansor. Before this

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time, PNI and PKI had been the prominent political forces in the area, but by the time the killings subsided in 1966 NU was — and would long remain — the dominant political force. 97

In their pesantrens, kyais had long taught a combination of martial arts and spiritual disciplines — including progressively deeper initiation into the mysteries of the Sufi tarekats — two aspects that came together in ilmu kanuragan, the science of invulnerability. This ilmu was — and still is — widely believed. Amulets (jimat) and magically powerful formulae were given out by spiritually advanced kyais to their followers. Again, some declared that anyone who died in killing Communists would go straight to heaven, as happens with a martyr who falls in Holy War.

The killing in most cases was an easy affair. In a way that we may find incredible, PKI activists rarely resisted their fate. A side of politics that had taken the offensive in the aksi sepihak campaign now seemed to accept that it was defeated and that death awaited its followers. Only a few PKI figures or followers were able to escape, for in village Java it was (and is) almost impossible to move into a new area without being known. The killers had little need for firearms. They preferred their own weapons: krisses, swords, sickles and other farming implements. And, of course, their supernaturally confirmed invulnerability. In one of the few cases of PKI resistance, the Communists sought to defend themselves with bows and arrows. 98 PKI activists and followers — and undoubtedly many people who just found themselves in the wrong group at the wrong time — were hacked, stabbed and beaten to death. Beheading became a common practice. In Kediri, many victims were beheaded on the banks of the Brantas River and their bodies then thrown into the water. Banser members were also injured and killed in some clashes, 99 but there is no doubt that the deaths were overwhelmingly on the abangan PKI-affiliated side.

General Soemitro later reflected on what he saw when he arrived in Surabaya to take command of the Brawijaya Division in mid-1966 with orders, inter alia, to see to the destruction of PKI but to stop the insane mass slaughter. As the Brantas flowed through the city towards its mouth, Soemitro saw it ‘so full of bodies floating along, with others caught in the water."

97 Frans Hüsken, ‘Continuity and change in local politics: The village administration and control of land and labor’, in Hiroyoshi Kani, Frans Hüsken and Djoko Suryo (eds), Beneath the smoke of the sugar-mill: Javanese coastal communities during the twentieth century (Yogyakarta: AKATIGA and Gadjah Mada University Press, 2001), pp. 240–1, 250.
99 Ihsan Ali-Fauzi, ‘Religion, politics and violence’; see also ‘Report from East Java’. 
branches of trees that had fallen in at the river’s edge’. A November 1965 Indonesian intelligence report also tells of ‘many headless corpses … sprawling in the rivers and along the river banks’ in Mojokerto. ‘The Indonesian Red Cross took them away. On Sunday there were approximately 162 corpses, and on Monday, 102.’

Soemitro, like everyone else so far as we can know, saw supernatural powers involved in these dreadful events. But his supernatural reference-points were not those of the santris. Instead he thought in terms of indigenous Javanese ideas centring on the figure after whom the Brawijaya Division was named — the last pre-Islamic king of Java, Brawijaya of Majapahit, who was overthrown by Muslim conquerors but then reappeared (according to many Javanese) as the powerful and anti-Islamic spirit Sunan Lawu. Although he was at that time ‘not deeply knowledgeable of the Javanese kebatinan (mystical faith)’ and ‘was still raw’, Soemitro went to the ‘Brawijaya ruins’ to meditate ‘and to seek protection and direction from Almighty God. … [and] permission from Brawijaya to serve him.’ Such kebatinan ideas were widely spread among Javanese military men, portending differences with santris that would only become manifest after 1966. Soemitro wanted to serve God and Brawijaya and the santris wanted to serve God and their kyais but, for the time being, both were mainly interested in slaughtering Communists.

Young santri killers perceived supernatural forces at work in the bloodletting and some evidently regarded these murders as a rite de passage to manhood. They sometimes dismembered bodies and carried off fingers, ears, or genitals as tokens of their manly courage, or engaged in other ritual practices including tasting the blood of the dead as a means of ensuring that they would not be pursued by their victims’ ghosts. Kyais condemned such practices, for they were all contrary to Islamic teachings. Ky. H. Mahrus Aly, the senior kyai of pesantren Lirboyo in Kediri, reportedly ruled that respect should be shown to Communists who were being killed. Thus, their

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100 Ramadhan K.H., Soemitro, former commander of Indonesian security apparatus: Best selling memoirs (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1996), p. 114. See also ibid., p. 101: ‘Every day large numbers of bodies were spotted floating in the local waterways.’
101 ‘Report from East Java’, p. 141
102 Ramadhan, Soemitro, pp. 102–3. The term ‘Brawijaya ruins’ evidently refers to the old Majapahit site at Trawulan. For further discussion of the Brawijaya legends, see Ricklefs, Mystic Synthesis in Java, p. 134; and idem, Polarising Javanese society (see the indexed references to Brawijaya).
103 Sulistyo, Palu arit di lading tebu, p. 205, citing later interviews.
deaths should be delivered with a sharp knife or sword, his reasoning resting on analogy with Islamic rules for the slaughtering of animals.104

No one knows how many people were slaughtered in this orgy of murder, which continued to August 1966, for no one counted. Only as the killings began to subside in mid-1966 was it more likely that bodies would even be buried. Some scholars have tried to come up with a total number for the dead, but they lack the information on which a reliable calculation must rest. There is a general consensus that the dead across Indonesia — and that means mostly in Central Java, East Java and Bali — amounted to somewhere between half a million and two million. Most analysts probably regard the half-million figure as more likely simply because it is lower, but there is in fact no data to give this consensus any real substance. While such a number is below the scale of the murderous Pol Pot regime in Cambodia and far below that of the Holocaust of Nazi Germany, Indonesia’s killings still rank as one of the worst cases of mass slaughter of the 20th century. This bloodletting took a toll across Javanese society — the dead themselves; the distress, poverty, disempowerment and discrimination suffered by survivors and victims’ descendants; the tens of thousands who were imprisoned without trial for many years; the burden of guilt on the part of many killers — and the sanguinary pride on the part of many others. The legacies of this killing still resonate amongst Javanese.105

Among many santris at the time, there was a belief that the utter physical annihilation of the Communists was a decisive watershed. Santris found themselves cooperating and sharing interests with the military and the emerging New Order regime led by Soeharto. PKI’s destruction, they imagined, meant the removal of the main barrier to ongoing Islamisation. At last Islam would take its proper place among Javanese and in Indonesian society more broadly. At last its beliefs and practices could dominate society, Indonesia could become a society shaped by God’s book and his Messenger, and nothing would now stand in the way of progress towards an Islamic state and society. They were wrong.

105 In 2000, the leadership of Ansor and Banser in Yogyakarta apologised to the families of victims of the killings, saying that ‘at that time, the people of NU, in particular Banser, were just used by and made instruments of the military’. Banser than assisted in the reopening of a mass grave of victims in Boyolali. Hairus Salim, Kelompok paramiliter NU (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2004), pp. 62–3.