Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java

M.C. Ricklefs

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Defending abangan, kebatinan and related ideas and practices

Javanese society has a long history of people believing in a vast array of spirits, both benign and malign, who demand respect, awe and propitiation. One of the works of older Javanese literature is the Kidung rumeksa ing wengi (the song keeping guard at night), a mantra sometimes ascribed — pretty improbably — to the wali Sunan Kalijaga, the possession or reciting of which will guard one from evil spirits. We noted in Chapter 6 that jaranan performances may end with a version of this text because of its potency as an amulet against evil forces. A related text is the Kidung lalembut (the song of the spirits), which includes what is in effect a spiritual geography, listing the spirits that occupy various places across Java. One early 19th-century version of that work ends with the chilling admonition, ‘Honour, all (of you), the history of the spirits, at night be it remembered; it will become a defence for the ill. Be feared the spirits, all, none dare oppose. And when travelling, the spirits and the devils, none shall dare to oppose: in the forests savage beasts do run.’¹ The long history of Islamisation among the Javanese is in some measure a history of the confrontation between such indigenous ideas of the spirit world and the different concepts about unseen beings that originate in Islam. The Javanese Mystic Synthesis, which had been a way to reconcile these different Weltanschauungen, had been under

challenge for 150 years by the time we are discussing here, and was by now a minority phenomenon.

In Central (but not most of East) Java, older spiritual ideas were associated particularly with the kratons. Their influence was a barrier to deeper Islamisation, said the senior nyai of Krapyak pesantren in Yogyakarta, for kraton influence supported ideas about black magic which made it difficult to lead people to God. Java’s rulers were widely believed to have intimate connections with the Goddess of the Southern Ocean (Ratu Kidul) and the spirits of Mount Merapi and Mount Lawu, to be the only persons whose supernatural capacities were such that they dared keep the royal pusakas without harm to themselves or to the balance of the universe, and so on. These ideas remained strong after independence in Yogyakarta, where Sultan Hamengkubuwana IX had supported the Revolution and remained in office thereafter as the head of the Special District of Yogyakarta (unlike Surakarta, where the Revolution ended the Susuhunan’s administrative authority outside the court). Hamengkubuwana IX was believed to commune with the Goddess and to command other spiritual powers like his ancestors, and was widely respected both for such occult capacities and for his role as a temporal leader. After his death in 1988, his son succeeded him as Sultan Hamengkubuwana X. We noted in Chapter 5 above that he went on the hajj to Mecca shortly after his accession and that Embah Wali, the leader of the dancing cult of Tugurejo, announced to his followers that the Ratu Adil was no more. For believers in older forms of Javanese occultism, this was indeed a momentous event. Never before in the entire history of Javanese monarchy had a king undertaken the pilgrimage to Mecca. Embah Wali was not the only one to think that Hamengkubuwana X’s more Islamic persona ended a spiritual tradition in Java and created a cultural issue of significance.

It is my impression that the present Sultan of Yogyakarta identifies strongly as a Muslim, carries out Islam’s ritual obligations but also accepts local spiritual phenomena, that is, that his ideas are consistent with the

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3 For example, Nur Choliq Ridwan’s interviews in Yogyakarta with Listya Thohari (inter-religious activist and daughter of a prominent Indonesian writer, Ky. H. Ahmad Tohari, 27 Nov. 2007), Prapto Darmo (follower of kejawen rituals, 6 Dec. 2007), Ari Budi (kebatinan activist, 8 Dec. 2007), M. Jadul Maula (LKiS leader, 9 Dec. 2007). A dissenting view is mentioned in the following note.
Older Cultural Styles on the Defensive

three pillars of the old Mystic Synthesis. The Yogyakarta kraton continued to carry out traditional rituals under Hamengkubuwana X’s authority. The royal pusakas were ritually ‘bathed’ at the start of each year in the Javanese calendar. Those that were washed in public — such as the royal carriages — attracted crowds who collected the used water in the belief that it contained supernatural powers to heal illness. Similarly, at the royal graves at Imogiri, south of Yogyakarta, there are four pusaka water-containers, each with a male or female name as nyai or kyai, which are believed to have specific powers to get a husband, bring commercial success, cure chronic illnesses, and so on. These are drained and cleaned at fixed times in the Javanese calendar in the nguras enceh (draining the water-pots) ritual, which begins with tahlilan and a slametan and is carried out by officials of the royal kratons. Hundreds attend to gather the water and thus share in the beneficent spiritual powers released on the occasion. The annual labuhan ritual, when offerings are thrown into the water at Parangkusumo on the south coast, the domain of Ratu Kidul, is carried out by the kratons of both Yogyakarta and Surakarta. This is also done at the summits of Mounts Lawu and Merapi and other sacred locations.

In 2000 the Sultan and his wife joined President Abdurrahman Wahid and his wife Sinta Nuriyah, the national police chief, various other ministers and dignitaries in overseeing a national exorcism (ruwatan nasional) with a wayang performance at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, to invoke supernatural assistance in facing the nation’s challenges. ‘Our people are sick, or motherland is full of sorrow, her tears trickling down,’ said the Sultan, explaining the need for ‘spiritual measures’.

It remained the case, however, that there were doubts as to whether a Sultan who was more Islamic in style really commanded Java’s indigenous spiritual powers. In February 2005, not long after the horrific December

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4 The view that the Sultan adhered to Islam as taught by the walis and respected both Islam and Javanese royal traditions was put by one interviewee: Andi Suryowitono (locally born, unaffiliated Muslim, interviewed by Nur Choliq Ridwan, 5 Dec. 2007).

5 For example, KR, 3 Jan. 2009.


Illustration 31 Yogyakarta kraton celebration of the end of the fasting month, Garebeg Puasa, 1992
2004 earthquake and tsunami that devastated Aceh, there was a rumour that a major tsunami was about to hit the south coast areas of Yogyakarta. Fisherman would not put to sea and people in general were fearful. To ward off this danger, the Sultan ordered people to prepare soup (sayur lodeh) with particular vegetables and to make an offering of a 100 Rupiah coin (equivalent to about 1 US cent) with a depiction of a mountain on it, to be buried in their front garden. Mosques also held group dhikr and recitation of the Qur’an seven times; water used on these occasions was then taken by the populace as amulets against misfortune. There was, in fact, no tsunami.9 If the Sultan’s powers seemed to work on this occasion, however, they were seriously called into question by a devastating earthquake that hit Yogyakarta and surrounding areas in May 2006, killing over 6,000 people, destroying large amounts of property and rendering some 1.5 million people homeless. Meanwhile, to the north of Yogyakarta, Mount Merapi threatened to erupt. Various tales were told to explain these natural events, among them that the Goddess of the Southern Ocean was angry because Hamengkubuwana X refused to marry her, as all previous Sultans of Yogyakarta had done, and/or that she was angry about the proposed anti-pornography legislation (which we discussed above).10

Mount Merapi, at just under 3,000 metres, looms over Yogyakarta, steadily produces emissions and erupts with sufficiently regularity and force that it is easy to understand why local people regard it with respect and awe, even believing it to have supernatural power. During Soeharto’s last days before his death in January 2008, the shape of Merapi’s clouds was interpreted by local spiritual experts as prophesying his death.11 When an eruption threatened in 2006, Merapi’s spiritual keeper (juru kunci), Mbah Marijan, led various rituals to placate the mountain, which he said was angry because of sand-mining that was destroying its surroundings.12 He refused to evacuate despite being told by the Sultan to do so, and survived the eruption that followed shortly thereafter. The 80-year-old subsequently

9 A useful analysis of this episode by Imam Subkhan was published in Kmps (edisi Jogja), 10 March 2005.
10 This is a brief summary of tales told me by various friends and colleagues during a visit to Yogyakarta in August 2006.
11 Tempo, 13 Jan. 2008. The cover story of Tempo vol. 8, no. 20 (15–21 Jan. 2008) was about Soeharto’s final illness and Javanese spiritualists’ explanations of what needed to be done so that he could depart peacefully.
became something of a celebrity and was used in the advertising campaign of an energy drink. In 2010 his spiritual powers were, however, inadequate to control the massive eruption of that year and Mbah Marijan died in his house on the mountainside. His body was found kneeling with his forehead on the floor, in the position for prayer.\textsuperscript{13}

Kediri lacks a kraton, Sultan or tradition of large-scale offerings to spirits, but the city and regency fathers decided that they should have something of the sort in order to encourage tourism. From at least 2003, efforts were made by the Kediri city Tourism Service to revive local traditions that were ‘Kediri specialities’, although in fact most have analogues elsewhere in Javanese society.\textsuperscript{14} Among folk performances, jaranan remains the most popular and widespread, with a large number of performing troupes and the continuing support of the police force, which itself has several performing

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{13}] Jkt\textit{P} online, 28 Oct. 2010.
\item[\textsuperscript{14}] Mm\textit{K}, 9 Sept. 2003.
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\end{footnotesize}
Older Cultural Styles on the Defensive

Since *jaranan* usually involves trance and spirit possession, some reject it as *shirk*, but even those who were concerned about this sometimes accept *jaranan* if it was regarded as ‘just culture’. A student in a state Islamic senior high school (Madrasah Aliyah Negeri) wrote a paper on *jaranan* that included photos of performers in trance. His teachers thought this contrary to Islam and forbade him to enter his essay in an Islamic student competition. But then the head of the school thought this might embarrass the school, so the paper was submitted, whereupon it won the local competition and went on to a national-level competition. *Jaranan* has the advantage of being cheap to perform, whereas *wayang* is expensive and thus difficult to put on. Consequently, there are few *wayang* performers remaining in Kediri regency. One of the tasks of the Kediri city secretary, Drs H.M. Zaini, was to offer guidance and encouragement to local *jaranan* troupes and to clean up the art’s less salubrious aspects such as gang fights and drunkenness. A curious local performance in Kediri that still attracts audiences is *tiban*, which requires both physical and spiritual preparations, such as no sexual relations for three days before a performance, fasting and recitations of mantras. Performers whack each other up to five times with fearsome whips made of palm leaf ribs, with serrations from middle to tip. *Tiban* is usually performed during the dry season and the consequent drawing of blood is said to bring rain. (This is not, perhaps, the most sophisticated of folk performances to be found in Java.)

Kediri already had local holy sites and sacred graves that attracted pilgrims, as are found across Java, but they were not on a sufficient scale for local government’s needs, it seems. Kediri did, however, have the great

16 Suhadi Cholil and Imam Subawi asked several female interviewees in Kediri about this matter in June 2008, with mixed outcomes. Their main informants were the President of the Kediri STAIN student body Ratna M. (18 June 2008), the head of a village NU branch Inisiyah (2 July 2008), and a teacher at an Islamic school Wahyu Eka Nugraha (18 June 2008).
18 Discussion with Suradi, the head of the Arts and Culture section of Kabupaten Kediri, 16 March 2005.
19 Discussion with Drs H.M. Zaini, Kediri, 26 Nov. 2007. Zaini later sought to mobilise *jaranan* groups to win support for his 2008 bid to be elected mayor, which failed.
Brantas River and Mount Kelud, just over 3,200 metres high and with a destructive history, so these became the focus for newly invented ‘sacred’ traditions. From 2002 the popular mayor of Kediri, H.A. Maschut, led an annual ‘throwing of offerings’ (larung sesaji) into the Brantas River — prominent among them the head of a water buffalo — in a rather pale imitation of the kratons’ labuhan ceremonies.\textsuperscript{21} Mount Kelud had its own spiritual guardian — Mbah Ronggo — but there were no particular rituals associated with the mountain. Indeed there were spirits there, he said, along with certain prohibitions from the ancestors (e.g., one should not applaud), as well as a source of sacred water at some distance from the crater, but there were no sacred sites near the crater itself.\textsuperscript{22} So from 2005 a new larung sesaji tradition had to be invented at the mountain, led by Bupati Sutrisno of Kediri regency (whom we have met before as a promoter of grass-roots Islamisation) and other regency-level luminaries. Sutrisno was himself a successful entrepreneur and even suggested that Kediri’s local attractions could be marketed overseas for the purposes of tourism; this is how Bali started, he observed.\textsuperscript{23} This new larung sesaji at Kelud attracted crowds of several thousand and was thus thought to be a success from the tourism point of view. To invent this new — and obviously not Islamic — ritual for propitiating local spirits, the Hindus of Kediri were asked to officiate, and Mbah Ronggo was also involved.\textsuperscript{24} The Gudang Garam tobacco company in Kediri also had its own larung sesaji ritual, going to the south coast and taking offerings out to sea in a boat — a risky enterprise on that coast. In 2004, the boat was rolled by a 5-metre wave, but all were saved. This was proof, said the oversight committee, of the power of the company’s team of meditators. Memo Kediri reported the incident with a headline (perhaps not entirely tongue-in-cheek) proclaiming, ‘Gudang Garam subdues the Southern Ocean’.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{21} RK, 23 July 2004; this ceremony at the Brantas is reported annually thereafter in Kediri newspapers. Kediri also invented a manusuk sima (stabbing the free domain) ritual; on at least one occasion this involved a procession with Mayor Maschut playing the role of the ancient king Rakai Kayuwangi; MmK, 28 July 2005.
\textsuperscript{22} Discussion with Mbah Ronggo, Sugihwaras, 3 March 2006.
\textsuperscript{23} MmK, 21 Nov. 2005.
\textsuperscript{25} MmK, 26 June 2004; see also RK, 25 June 2004. A similar ‘mystical incident’ surrounding a labuhan on the coast south of Yogyakarta is reported in Bernas, 30 Oct. 2007.
The small HTI and PKS groups in Kediri objected to these new ceremonies that smacked of polytheism (shirk), but the need for symbols of local identity and tourism were evidently overriding considerations for the local governments promoting them. So far as I am aware, the kyais of Kediri did not comment on these new ‘traditions’, at least in public. Mount Kelud itself, however, seem dissatisfied, for the deep lake previously found in the crater disappeared as a new lava cone arose in its place and the mountain seemed close to eruption. A local kebatinan figure explained that this was all because the ritual was wrongly done there, so she was taking propitiatory ritual steps herself. Kebatinan believers may conclude that those measures worked, for there has been no eruption to the time of this writing.

26 Suhadi Cholil and Imam Subawi interviews with Sulisty Budi (chairman of PKS for Kabupaten Kediri), Kediri, 19 Oct. 2006; and with Khutub Amrullah (chair of HTI Kediri), Kediri, 1 Nov. 2006. PKS was, however, prepared to accept that these ceremonies were ‘folk culture’ — even though they had in fact been newly invented.

27 Discussion with Ibu Sudarmi, Kediri, 27 Nov. 2007.
In Karanganyar regency, just southeast of Surakarta, another tradition was invented in 2005 and also attracted objections from Islamic purists. This was called Garebeg Lawu (Lawu festival), a programme of activities over several weeks on Mount Lawu — a site long associated with indigenous spiritual forces and where Hindu communities still exist. The activities attracted those with an interest in both the natural world and the realm of unseen spirits. Sufi dancing and *dhikr* were performed, but also people from kebatinan and Hindu backgrounds undertook rituals at the 15th-century Hindu temple Candhi Sukuh and did ascetic exercises at the top of the mountain. There was ritualised planting of trees in celebration of links with nature, a *pusaka kris* from the Mangkunagara palace in Surakarta was ritually ‘bathed’, a ceremony was carried out at Parangkusumo (Parangtritis) on the south coast, and so on. A leading figure was Suprapto Suryadarmo, who believed that Javanese should rediscover ‘the way of Majapahit’ and the ‘mystical sciences’ (*ngelmu*) of that way — the sort of idea that infuriates Revivalists. Muhammadiyah and PKS were reportedly unhappy about this. The Bupati of Karanganyar — Hj. Rina Iriani, one of Java’s female Bupatis — had to deflect stronger objections from LDII, MMI, Mohammed Kalono and the frequently violent FPIS (discussed in Chapter 12). Nevertheless, she continued to support the festival in the interest of tourism.

Large-scale public exorcisms (*ruwatan*) were performed quite often, reflecting a widespread sense that Indonesia was plagued by an unusually high level of natural disasters in the early 21st century. These were often funded by local governments and involved local dignitaries. Unlike the new ‘traditions’ of Kediri and Karanganyar, we may accept that these exorcisms were done less for any tourism considerations than as response to genuine beliefs that some malign supernatural powers were behind the deadly earthquakes, floods, volcanic eruptions and land-slips that seemed so common, and which devastated so many lives. Puppeteers who performed such *ruwatans* still had to meet stringent personal requirements.

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28 *Solopos*, 10 Oct. 2000, contains a discussion of Lawu as the centre of Javanese supernatural forces.


30 For example, *Tempo*, 19 Aug. 2000 (on the *ruwatan nasional* in Yogyakarta, described above); *Kmps*, 23 March 2005 (Blora); *Kmps* (*Jawa Timur*), 7 March 2005 (Surabaya).
and undertake spiritual preparations for their task. At village level, too, exorcisms might still be performed for genuine purposes of spiritual healing, as in a village near Yogyakarta where a *ruwat* and mass spiritual exercises were undertaken after a series of suicides.

Among the many spirits of Java, the foremost remains Ratu Kidul, the Goddess of the Southern Ocean. She has already appeared several times in this book. Islamic reformers are likely to regard her as the Javanese superstition that most stands in the way of a truly Islamic society, but many people believe her really to exist. It is quite common to encounter people who say that, according to the *Qur’an*, God created both humans and spiritual creatures, and Ratu Kidul is among the latter. That view was, for example, accepted by the head of the Surakarta branch of the Department of Religious Affairs, who also said that there are people who can communicate with spirits. One writer who publishes particularly on mystical matters produced an entire book on ‘Her Highness Ratu Kidul in the perspective of Javanese Islam’. He argues that belief in the Goddess represents ‘awareness that there is another life behind the life of the physical realm …. Therefore, belief in her existence and position as one of the creatures “chosen” by God (because she takes on a special task) is not among the kinds of beliefs that are forbidden.’

Ki Supriyoko, criticised in some circles for increasing the influence of Islam within Taman Siswa schools and who established his own *pesantren*, also assured me of the reality of Java’s spirits. In his *pesantren*, the *gamelan* instruments play by themselves on some evenings, which he has heard himself. And spirits have been seen at the school, he said.

Below the level of *kraton*- or local government-supported rituals, village observances carry on, in many cases with little influence from any reformed version of Islam. The annual village cleansing (*bersih desa*) ceremonies are still observed in many places, although they have also died out in others. Such observances are now sometimes a more Islamised mix of Traditionalist Islamic with *abangan* practices: beginning with *tablilan*, *slawatan* and/or *dhikr*, proceeding to *tayuban* dancers and all-night *wayang kulit* if it can be

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31 *KR*, 15 June 2008, discusses these requirements on the basis of information from the 82-year-old *dhalang* Ki Cipto Subali.

32 This was at Kelurahan Gading, Kecamatan Playen; *KR*, 20 Dec. 2008.


Illustration 34 Hindu statue (Durga Mahiṣasuramardini) discovered in Kediri, with offerings, 2007 (photo by Suhadi Cholil and Imam Subawi)
afforded. In some cases, people may think this to be ‘just culture’, but no
doubt many villagers still believe — or at least dare not disbelieve — in the
spiritual forces associated with such practices. It is not surprising in this
case that when some very beautiful Hindu statues were unearthed in
Kediri, locals at first thought them to be ‘empty’. But Hindu Balinese visitors
disclosed the spirits of these statues to be ‘alive’, whereupon local people
began placing offerings for them. In another case, when an ancient temple
was discovered in a rice field, people came to lay offerings in the hope of
getting winning lottery numbers in return.

In Sleman, Ky. H. Masrur Ahmad is an NU leader who has con-
siderable influence, even though his own pesantren is relatively small. He
does supernatural healing, mass circumcisions and pengajian from village
to village. Like the Ihsaniyyat leader Ky. H. Abdul Latif in Kediri, he has
supported abangan-style arts, including jaranan (jathilan), to attract abangan
to his teaching. He interprets the jaranan performers’ trance as a kind of
dhikr, which in Sufi thought can lead to fana’ (mystic loss of self). In his
view, one must care for all creatures, including spirits such as Sunan Lawu
and Ratu Kidul. Such ideas of course attract criticism from others, above all
from Modernists.

The fate of kebatinan movements since the fall of Soeharto has been
mixed. One can find as many people who think that they are reviving as
think that they are declining, and the evidence gathered for this book is

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36 Reports on such observances are found regularly, especially around the beginning
of the year in the Javanese calendar. For example, Kmps, 1 Apr. 2009; Bernas, 12 July
description of village rituals in the month of Sapar in Central Java and Yogyakarta.
37 Email from Suhadi Cholil, 11 Feb. 2007.
39 Information from Muhammad Hanif, Yogyakarta, 20 Oct. 2005, who had
completed a postgraduate thesis on Ky. Masrur. On fana’, see F. Rahman, ‘Bak’a’wa-
Fanā’ in P. Bearman et al. (eds), Encyclopaedia of Islam (2nd ed.), vol. 1, p. 951, which
defines this as ‘(1) the passing-away from the consciousness of the mystic of all
things, including himself, and even the absence of the consciousness of this passing-
away and its replacement by a pure consciousness of God, and (2) the annihilation
of the imperfect attributes (as distinguished from the substance) of the creature and
their replacement by the perfect attributes bestowed by God.’
40 Kebatinan groups now prefer to call themselves kejawen (Javanese — implying
that they are authentically Javanese) or penghayat (instillers — i.e., instillers of their
beliefs), but we will retain the older term here to avoid confusion.
inconclusive. Whether they are growing or not, their numbers seem small in comparison with pre-Soeharto days. Surakarta is an interesting case in this regard. It is part of the social polarisation there that both reforming religious movements such as MTA, the Assalaam school and the Revivalism of Abu Bakar Ba’asyir should co-exist in uncomfortable tension (and sometimes conflict) with *abangan*, *kebatinan* and Christian Javanese. In the early post-Soeharto years, the PDIP leadership in Surakarta was inclined to the view that there were more *abangan* than devout Muslims in the city, with the former stronger in north Surakarta and the latter in the south, and that *abangan* represented PDIP’s core political constituency. There was some evidence to support this, but by the time of the 2004 election such *aliran*-type voting patterns were hardly visible any longer and, as we have seen above, PDIP was taking steps to accommodate devout Muslims. Certainly *kebatinan* groups — the largest among them being Sumarah and Pangestu — exist in Surakarta, but it is doubtful that their following is anywhere near the scale known before 1965. In the more radical and polarised environment of Surakarta, the ‘paranormal’ Soetiyono Tjokroharsoyo is a one-man anti-Islamic protest movement. He has a strong line in anti-Islamic jokes and proudly wears a shirt that proclaims, ‘My ancestry is Majapahit and my guardian is Sabda Palon’, thus invoking the anti-Islamic figure of *Babad Kedhiri* and the other works originally written in the 1870s, described above.

In Surabaya, too, people speak of *kebatinan* being strong, but its strength is limited and leading *kebatinan* exponents are concerned about the tendency for the government and police to shut down groups described as deviant. In Kediri, Ki Bagus Ponari, a Sapta Darma figure and head of an organisation of *kebatinan* groups, said that there were about 120 *kebatinan* followers in the town and about 6,000 in the regency. Another leader

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42 Discussion with Surakarta Electoral Commission members, 12 March 2005.
43 Discussion with Soetiyono Tjokroharsoyo, Surakarta and Klaten, 2 Nov. 2006.
44 Discussion with the Protestant (Gereja Kristen Indonesia) pastor Simon Philanthrope, Surabaya, 24 Nov. 2007.
45 Discussion with Drs KRAT Basuki Prawirodipuro and KRT Giarto Nagoro, Surabaya, 25 Nov. 2007. Similar comments were made by another *kebatinan* figure, Drs Sulistyo Tirtookusumo, at a seminar in Yogyakarta; KR, 27 March 2008.
46 Comments by Ki Bagus Ponari, at seminar at Institute Agama Islam Tribakti (IAIT), Kediri, 29 Nov. 2007. IAIT was founded in 1966 by Ky. H. Mahrus Aly. It now has some 2,500 students and is, in effect, pesantren Lirboyo’s tertiary-level
said that Sapta Darma has been growing again since 1998 in Kediri and by 2004 claimed 25 places of worship (sanggar) and perhaps 2,000 followers in the area.47 Across the whole of Indonesia, Sapta Darma claimed to have about four million followers in 2008. In the Special District of Yogyakarta there were then 15 sanggars and about 3,000 followers.48 Such numbers are of significance, but they are not particularly impressive when set against the scale of Java’s population. The appeal of kebatinan seems to be limited not just by the process of Islamisation. Another kebatinan practitioner in

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{anti_islam_protest}
\caption{Illustration 35 Soetiyono Tjokroharsoyo’s one-man anti-Islamic shirt protest: ‘My ancestry is Majapahit and my guardian is Sabda Palon’, Surakarta, 2006}
\end{figure}

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\footnotesize
Ki Bagus Ponari is not to be confused with a faith-healer named Ponari; see KR, 23 Feb. 2009, 3 March 2009. A list of kebatinan organisations in the city and Kabupaten of Kediri names Sapta Darma and 20 other such groups, but without any indication of the size of their followings; Dewan Pengurus Daerah, Badan Kerjasama Organisasi Kepercayaan terhadap Tuhan Yang Maha Esa (B.K.O.K.), Kota/Kabupaten Kediri, 15 Jan. 2008.

47 Suhadi Cholil’s interview with Pak Sarjan, Papar, 4 May 2004.
\end{flushright}
Kediri, Ibu Sudarmi — who is said to be an avatar of a female spirit called Ratu Diah Pithaloka — lamented that the young were distracted from the beliefs of the ancestors by foreign culture, television soap operas and their mobile phones.49

Local-level kebatinan movements exist without the larger-scale organisation or identity of movements such as Pangestu, Sumarah, Sapta Darma or Subud. One such group near Klaten call themselves wong kere (the beggars), having been founded by a man they revere as Ki Kere — reminiscent of Chapter 5’s Embah Wali of Tugurejo, who was regarded by his followers as kerene ratu, the ‘king’s beggar’. Symbolising their rejection of normal conventions, the wong kere do things in reverse. They shake hands with the left hand and their leader, who is an ordinary peasant farmer, has a wall clock whose hands rotate counter-clockwise. They recognise and honour God and deny that there are any other spiritual creatures, but reject Islam’s practices. Each day they pay obeisance to God, then to the earth (for ‘it is the earth that brings existence to life’) and then pay honour to the four cardinal directions. They regard Pancasila as their spiritual guide and reject all forms of organisation. This includes supporting no political party.50 Although they have no written work of scripture, they did keep a typescript copy of Dermagandhul dating from 2001, taken from the Tan Khoen Swie publication of 1921.

In the very village where Abu Bakar Ba’asyir’s school is found there is also a kebatinan group. They have neither gurus nor disciples, but merely gather together to discuss the visions they receive in meditation. These visions have, they claim, predicted major national events such as the tsunami of December 2004 and the outcome of elections. Their aim is direct contact with God and, although they say that their doctrines are secret, they accept a description of their ideas as ilmu kasampurnan (the mystical sciences of perfection) — a venerable term in Javanese mysticism. ‘Javanese culture is more pure than religion’, they say. Their prayer is a nine-line recitation that reflects the diverse religious upbringings of the group, invoking God, then Jesus, then the secret of God: ya Allah (x3), ya Yesus (x3), sir Allah (x3).51 A similar group meets in Kedungtungkul (north Surakarta), some of them of Christian background and some Muslim. They fast according to the Javanese

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49 Discussion with Ibu Sudarmi, Kediri, 27 Nov. 2007.
50 Discussion with Warno Sawito, Jonggrangan, Klaten, 2 Nov. 2006.
51 Discussion with Bu Amin, Pak Pardi and others of this group, Cemani, Ngruki, 11 March 2005.
35-day cycle and regard that as superior to Islamic fasting; they take their mystical knowledge (ngelmu) from Islam or any other source. The head of their local mosque (the modin) is, they say, a kejawen paranormal who knows the local spirits and has never been known to pray in the orthodox Muslim fashion. ‘Do not seek pleasure, rather seek tranquility’, they say, and ‘do not seek wealth, rather seek to have enough’. On the slopes of Mount Lawu is a group calling themselves Parabu, from Pangudi Rahayuning Budi (Striving for Virtue). They engage in ascetic practices such as pilgrimages to mountain sites and meditating while submerged in rivers up to their necks (kungkum). They have had encounters with Sunan Lawu and are able to meet Ratu Kidul, we are told. In Gunung Kidul, many people reportedly engage in kungkum at night during the first month of the Javanese year and visit holy graves in the hope of receiving supernatural inspiration.

Near Tegal is a group with Buddhist-like teachings that they say are handed down from the time of Majapahit. Despite the New Order’s bloody suppression of what seems to have been a version of the older Saminist movement in Blora and Ngawi in 1966 (discussed in Chapter 5 above), Saminist communities survive, with their rejection of outside authority and emphasis upon sexuality, agricultural labour and passive resistance. In the Magelang area, near the Borobudur temple, is found a kebatinan group calling themselves Kawruh Urip Sejati (True Knowledge of Life) with some 3,000 followers. Similar movements can be found in other places, but so far as I am aware none are of any great size.

The limited influence and prospects of kebatinan movements is a function of their nature as much as their size. The organisations of Islamic activists and zealots of the kind that we will discuss below and characterise as the protagonists in our drama, in many cases would be no larger than some of these kebatinan movements. But kebatinan has been on the defensive for over 40 years and has got used to keeping a low profile in a game in which the recognised world religions seem to be the only legitimate players.

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52 Discussion with a group of the villagers of Kedungtungkul, Jebres, Surakarta, 31 March 2004.
55 This group is called Maneges; email from Suhadi Cholil, 27 Apr. 2008.
56 There is lengthy reporting about Saminists in Bojonegoro in Kmps, 4 March 2005.
Moreover, as we have just noted, it is common for such movements to reject outside authority, to seek to live within a limited village community insulated as far as possible from outside interference, and to seek both the social and personal harmony that such insulation can bring. Unlike in the days of *aliran* politics, no political party can be called the party for *kebatinan* adherents. It is rare for such movements to proclaim any political allegiance (although two ‘paranormals’ did claim to have mobilised their powers to give strength to Amien Rais as a presidential candidate in 2004). It is precisely this antipathy to organisation, this rejection of institutionalisation that makes such movements vulnerable to influence (indeed, to threats) from better-organised religious organisations. Add to that the impact of religious education in schools, the widespread *dakwah* activities we have frequently noted, Ibu Sudarmi’s lament (quoted above) about the young being distracted by foreign culture, television soap operas and their mobile phones, and the wish of many movements principally to be left alone to seek harmony — and it is hard to imagine that *kebatinan*’s prospects can be very rosy in Java.

Among *kebatinan* people, some claim to be at the same time practicing Muslims who carry out the five pillars of orthopraxy but others have been attacked by religious zealots on a charge of deviancy. One movement that has suffered in this way is called Tri Tunggal (Three-in-One); this is a term also used in Indonesian Christian circles for the concept of the Trinity, and no doubt makes Tri Tunggal a particular target for angry Islamic zealots. In this case, however, the trinity that is meant is the three-in-one in the human being of body, ‘thinking-spirit’ (*jiwa pikiran*) and soul. While it is rooted in Javanese *kebatinan*-style rituals, which it has performed publicly on a large scale, it also seeks to act as a bridge across religious traditions in the interest of promoting harmony. The founder was one Sapto Rahardjo (later called Sat Guru Sabdo Langit IV, the ‘heaven-speaking guru’), who — like some other leaders of the movement — is a Catholic, but one steeped in indigenous Javanese traditions. He was born in 1974 in Yogyakarta to *priyayi* parents, his father a military officer. With parental encouragement, the young man undertook various ascetic exercises, which

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58 Paguyuban Sukmo Suminar, *Amien Rais: Satriya linuwih; Kajian supranatural tokoh-tokoh nasional* [Surakarta: c. 2003–4]. This pamphlet described Amien’s descent from the last king of Majapahit Brawijaya V and his receipt of a princely (Pangeran) rank from the Surakarta *kraton*.

59 For example, Ki Bagus Ponari, Kediri, 29 Nov. 2007 (Sapta Darma); *TempoI*, 2 Sept. 2008 (on Aboge or Islam Aboge, in Malang and Banyumas Regencies).
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included encounters with a number of spirits, until, in 1995, in the midst of meditation he received a spiritual command: ‘Fear not! Carry on! Your place is just as far as your belief.’ On the basis of this (not-entirely-transparent, it must be said) inspiration, he founded the Tri Tunggal Association (Paguyuban Tri Tunggal). This Association was active in spiritual healing and teaching meditation and mystical doctrines. It became well known for its conduct of exorcisms (*ruwatan*) and other such spiritualist rituals. For followers of Tri Tunggal, *kungkum* (meditating while submerged in water up to the neck) is an almost daily practice and *ruwatan* exorcisms are done weekly and on important dates. The ultimate aim of these practices is the unity of self with God, of servant with master (*manunggaling kawula-gusti*) — a long-established aim of Javanese mysticism but one that easily gives rise to accusations of polytheism (*shirk*). There is also a Tri Tunggal music group called Adiluhung Tak that is rather like Emha Ainun Najib’s Kiai Kanjeng group in combining Javanese *gamelan* and other folk instruments with modern sounds. But instead of pious Islamic music, Adiluhung Tak presents Javanese religious songs composed by Sapto Rahardjo and inspired by pre-Islamic Old Javanese literature or works such as Mangkunagara IV’s *Wulangreh*. Tri Tunggal can be followed by people of any religion, but Sapto Rahardjo is of the view that all the world religions have ‘colonised’ Java and acted to destroy its indigenous faith and culture.60

Given such ideas and the Catholic background of its leadership, it is hardly surprising that Tri Tunggal (and other such movements) attracted criticism and threats from some Islamic circles. Tri Tunggal had a branch at Cemani, Ngruki, where Abu Bakar Ba’asyir’s Al-Mukmin school is located. In 2006, a group of zealots there denounced Tri Tunggal as a deviant sect promoting Christianisation and forced the branch to close.61

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61 Ibid., p. 57, identifies the attacking group as ‘Front Pembela Islam (FPI) Surakarta’, almost surely meaning the FPIS (Surakarta Islamic Youth Front). Laskar Umat Islam Surakarta (LUIS, Surakarta Islamic *Ummah* Militia, est. December 2000, which included FPIS) was named as the attackers by Eko Sriyanto Saptaji of the rather idiosyncratic Gerakan Moral Rekonsiliasi Indonesia (Moral Movement for Indonesian Reconciliation, founded in Surakarta by Abdurrahman Wahid, Pakubuwana XII and others, according to the founding notarial document of 18 March 2003); discussion, Surakarta, 26 March 2007.
and elsewhere, Tri Tunggal carried on with its activities, although its leaders expressed concern about Muslim groups who were prepared to denounce such movements as unbelievers (kafirs) or polytheists (musyrik). Sapta Darma came under attack in a small village near Yogyakarta, where there had been a Sapta Darma centre (sanggar) since 1984. In 2008, some 50 FPI thugs attacked the sanggar late at night, smashed the place up, punched one of the adherents and seized publications which proved, they said, that this was a ‘deviant sect’ because its followers prayed facing east rather than towards Mecca, and demanded that it be disbanded. The Sapta Darma people said they did face east, but this was just one of the Javanese ways of paying obeisance to God. The FPI mob intended to carry on to attack a Tri Tunggal branch nearby, but were dissuaded by the police. The latter brought the two sides together to ‘straighten out perceptions on each side’. The Sapta Darma group ceased their activities for a time until the atmosphere cooled, they said. Evidently no one was arrested. Shortly thereafter, in Brebes, near the north coast, thousands of local people forcibly closed a Sapta Darma building where a small number of adherents met, denouncing the movement as ‘deviant’ because its followers pray facing east and there was a picture of the clown-god Semar on the wall. The police prevented them from burning the building. Other Sapta Darma sites in the region were also threatened. The police again arrested no one but sought to mediate,


63 Zayyin Alfiijah interview with Mas Jeje (one of the top Tri Tunggal leaders), Yogyakarta, 3 Dec. 2007. A report on Tri Tunggal’s rituals at the south coast and Candhi Cetha is in Bernas, 27 Oct. 2007.

64 KR, 12 Oct. 2008; Kmps, 13 Oct. 2008. There is also a report in [Zainal Abidin Bagir, Suhadi Cholil, Budi Ashari and Musaghiroh Rahayu,] Laporan tahunan: Kehidupan beragama di Indonesia tahun 2008 (Yogyakarta: Program Studi Agama dan Lintas Budaya, Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies, Sekolah Pascasarjana, Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2008), pp. 23–4. The head of FPI was reported to the police for beating up a person in the same village, but this seems to be a separate case; KR, 16 Oct. 2008. FPI was sometimes on the receiving end, e.g., NU activists attacked the FPI headquarters in Yogyakarta in June 2008, following the violence at the national monument in Jakarta on 1 June; email from Noorhaidi Hasan, 9 June 2008.
achieving an agreement whereby the Sapta Darma adherents should either cease to call themselves Muslims or repent and recite the *Shahada*, thereby returning to Islam.\(^{65}\)

Such conflicts led some Javanese to feel that certain elements of Islam had become a disruptive force, a threat to that tranquility which older forms of Javanese mysticism and *abangan* villagers generally sought. A Yogyakarta *kraton* servant and guardian of the grave of the Mataram dynasty’s founder, Panembahan Senapati, commented (romanticising Javanese history as he did so),

> Make no mistake: since early times, Javanese people have sought to live in peaceful tranquility, with good order and good fortune, and that was not because of religion but because of the roots of Javanese tradition which always emphasised empathy for others and polite conduct. It was not at all because of religion! [But nowadays] Islam in fact seems to bring misfortune; I see on television people who often shout *Allahu akbar* and wear Muslim-style clothes (*baju koko*), even cudgeling and punching people — it’s unheard-of!\(^{66}\)

While some who were committed to *abangan*, *kebatinan* and related ideas and practices thus lamented the presence of violence in the name of Islam (as did many devout Muslims), there was also a positive response to the prevailing atmosphere of deepening religiosity — a response consistent with the general process of Islamisation seen in this book. In the Kediri area the annual *bersih desa* (village cleansing) rituals still include older Javanese performances such as *wayang* or *tayuban*, but it is now common for them also to have religious teachings (*pengajian*) led by the local *kyai*.\(^{67}\) A village in the Kulonprogo area revived its *bersih desa* ceremony after having abandoned the tradition for 20 years. The day before there was Sufi spiritual ‘striving’ (*mujahadah*). On the day itself, the ritual consisted of the recitation of several passages of the *Qur’an*, followed by the Traditionalist devotional practices of *slawatan* and *tahlilan*, and prayers for well-being. Then it culminated in a *wayang* performance.\(^{68}\) In the Sleman area, another village instituted the *bersih desa* ritual where there had been none before in the hope of attracting

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\(^{65}\) Email from Suhadi Cholil, 6 Jan. 2009. The Brebes incident is also reported in [Zainal Abidin Bagir *et al.*], *Laporan tabunan*, p. 24.

\(^{66}\) Mas Bekel Hastono Wiyono, 4 Dec. 2007 (interviewed in Kota Gede by Zayyin Alfijihad).

\(^{67}\) Email from Imam Subawi, 2 Feb. 2009.

tourists. Prominent among the reinvented ‘tradition’ were ‘songs of an Islamic flavour’ sung to various forms of instrumentation.\(^{69}\)

As we have seen throughout this book, abangan, kebatinan and related ideas and practices were intimately involved in many of the art forms found in Javanese society, for those arts often invoked supernatural powers. For that reason, they, too, have been affected by efforts to make Javanese society more perfectly Islamic. It is to those arts that we now turn.

**Older arts and performance styles in a more Islamic society**

In this age of deeper Islamisation of Javanese society, the fate of older art forms has been rather like that of abangan, kebatinan and related practices in general. While there are occasionally optimistic reports about the survival or revival of such arts and while there can be no reasonable doubt that there are still Javanese who believe in the spiritual forces associated with them, it does seem that they have declined in frequency and popularity, have been in large measure denatured culturally by a decline in the number who believe in their older spiritual aspects, have sometimes become more Islamised like the rest of local culture, and have survived best where local authorities support them for the purposes of tourism or reinforcing senses of local identity. The last is of particular significance in the post-2001 age of regional autonomy. In the early 21st century we can see a pattern that is over a century old, as Islamic reformers seek to rid Javanese society of older superstitions, which frequently means a wish to abolish the associated art forms altogether. The only major religious actor that takes a different position is the Catholic Church, with its policy of ‘inculturation’ (a matter to which we will return below). But we must remember that, even if there were no religious reformers, modernisation and globalisation of entertainment would kill off many older art forms anyway.

The head of the Yogyakarta Special District, Sultan Hamengkubuwana X, and his government put special effort into supporting older art forms. From 2005, villages were selected for support and guidance from the Tourism, Art and Culture Service to maintain and develop ‘traditional culture’ such as jaranan (called jathilan there) and ande-ande lumut of the more abangan style, courtly gamelan (karawitan), plus Traditionalist performances including slawatan and kasidah (religious chanting to percussion instruments, but also done in the modern form called kasidah

\(^{69}\) KmpsO, 28 Sept. 2009.
pop or kasidah modern), along with music of colonial-era vintage such as kroncong (ballads sung to accompaniment of the guitar and other modern instruments). Performance festivals and competitions were to encourage these arts.\textsuperscript{70} The Yogyakarta Tourism Service had a task to develop these arts, said its head, because tourism represented ‘the locomotive of the economy’.\textsuperscript{71} Nevertheless Yogyakarta observers continued to report that some types of performance seemed to survive while others languished. Spiritual aspects continued to be reported in some circumstances. To mark 1,000 days since the Yogyakarta earthquake of May 2006, a village in Bantul put on a gamelan performance in the dark of the night with no lights, ‘but the players experienced no difficulties in playing the gamelan because, so they say, they received guidance from spirits’.\textsuperscript{72} Even long-established religious practices could become little more than tourist attractions. To observe the ‘Night of Power’ (Arabic laylat al-qadr) during the month of Ramadan, when God is believed to have sent down the Qur’an, about a thousand tourism promoters, agents, workers and people running ‘tourism villages’ gathered to do a ‘cultural performance of Islamic religious arts’, such as slawatan, which are ‘rarely performed nowadays, under pressure from modern entertainment’.\textsuperscript{73} Similarly, a celebration of the Prophet’s birthday on the slopes of Mount Wilis, near Kediri, was described as a way to promote tourism, although the local people thought it could fend off calamities.\textsuperscript{74} Such dual understandings and purposes are probably widespread, with local people (perhaps just the older generation) taking part in rituals because they believe in the power of spirits, and local governments supporting them because they believe in the power of tourism. Over time, asserted the leader of an annual ritual at a holy grave in Gunung Kidul, the people would become more aware that such rituals are only symbolic.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{70} Tempo\textit{i}, 23 Feb. 2005, reports 35 villages were picked; Kmps (Gunung Kidul), 11 June 2009, reports 32 being selected in Gunung Kidul. Other reports on such activities are in \textit{KR}, 30 Oct. 2007; Kmps, 8 Oct. 2008.
\textsuperscript{71} \textit{KR}, 2 March 2008.
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{KR}, 23 Feb. 2009.
\textsuperscript{73} Kmps, 11 Sept. 2009. Other reports on older art forms being sustained for the purposes of tourism may be found in Bernas, 21 July 2008; \textit{KR}, 28 July 2008.
\textsuperscript{74} RK online, 27 Apr. 2005.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{KR}, 4 May 2008. This was Sumarwanto, a local leader at Sodo, the site of the reputed grave of Ki Ageng Giring III, a founding figure from the obscure 16th-century history of the Mataram dynasty.
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*Kraton*-style performances tend to be expensive and, on the whole, the spiritual ideas associated with them do not seem to have fared well in recent years. Sultan Hamengkubuwana X himself choreographed a new *bedhaya* dance, but the newspaper report of its performance, at least, did not mention a connection with the Goddess of the Southern Ocean, but rather said that this ‘sacral dance … symbolised the spirit of patriotism and the philosophy of leadership’.76 A local aficionado regretted that the *bedhaya* was increasingly seen as an ‘ordinary dance’ rather than one that is ‘sacral’.77 The main royal-sponsored Habirandha school for *wayang* puppeteers in Yogyakarta, founded in 1925, has a diminishing number of students who begin their studies and even fewer who finish.78 The burlesque *kethoprak* also experienced varying fortunes. The leading performer Bondan Nusantara bemoaned its decline in popularity in Yogyakarta to Barbara Hatley,79 a view shared by others.80 Evidently *kethoprak* in Yogyakarta was, however, at least surviving better than *wayang kulit* (shadow play with parchment puppets) and *wayang wong* (dance drama).81 Nevertheless, in 2007 there were just 32 *kethoprak* troupes in the whole Yogyakarta Special District, whereas there had been 95 in Gunung Kidul alone seven years before.82

In Surakarta, too, there was little in the way of folk performances in the city. *Wayang wong* was still performed at its famous Sriwedari theatre, but to tiny audiences.83 There still seemed to be popular interest in *kethoprak* in the countryside. A leading exponent, Hanindyawan, performed simplified *kethoprak* in villages with a small troupe. On one occasion, however, plans for a performance had to be cancelled because the local people thought it to be irreconcilable with Islam.84 *Kethoprak* was nearly dead in Kediri; only one troupe remained there, performing some nights to no audience, under

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76 Bernas, 2 Apr. 2008.
78 JktP online, 6 Apr. 2010.
79 The comment was made c. 2003–4; Hatley, *Javanese performances*, p. 197. He repeated these concerns in Kmps, 18 Oct. 2008.
80 For example, Kmps, 1 Aug. 2009.
83 KR, 14 Nov. 2007, citing the well-known *wayang wong* dancer Darsi Pudyorini (then 74 years old).
84 Discussion with Hanindyawan, Surakarta, 18 Oct. 2005. The failed performance was to be at Tegalsari. According to Hanindyawan, *kethoprak* continued to be popular in Pati.
a roof that leaked if it rained.\textsuperscript{85} In that region, \textit{kethoprak} performers earned hardly enough to live, while their poverty and constant travel from place to place to perform meant that their children were unable to attend schools, according to one report.\textsuperscript{86}

The village of Tutup Ngisor, on the slopes of Mount Merapi, continued its tradition of artistic performances by villagers without government support.

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\textbf{Illustration 36} Wayang wong performance in the Yogyakarta \textit{kraton}, 1969
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\textsuperscript{86} \textit{RK}, 26 July 2009.
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Wayang wong, jaranan, gamelan and much else remained part of the daily life of this small village, with its population of about 200. In 2005, the leading figure there, Sitras Anjilin, along with others announced an ‘Academy of Mountain Culture’ (Akademi Budaya Gunung) which put on a ‘Five Mountain Festival’ (Festival Lima Gunung). This presented performances from the five mountains Merapi, Merbabu, Sumbing, Menoreh and Andung, but also invited performers from Surakarta, Yogyakarta, Bali and elsewhere. The performances preserved older supernatural ideas, with mantras being recited and other spiritual preparations, although Sitras Anjilin’s brother commented that some of these spiritual traditions had died and only the performance remained. Traditionalist Islamic observances and performances were also included, such as Maulid Nabi to commemorate the birth of the Prophet, observance of the end of the fasting month (Idul fitri) and wayang Menak (with stories about the Prophet’s uncle Amir Hamza).

Such traditional arts were subject to the influences of modernisation, with unclear effects on their popularity. A group near Yogyakarta began teaching jaranan to youngsters without trance, emphasising this as an art form of music and dance alone. Indeed, said the LKiS leader Jadul Maula, jaranan was now just entertainment. At the Yogyakarta Gamelan Festival in 2008, the Women’s Studies Centre at Universitas Gadjah Mada was the moving force for wayang performed by three female dalangs (one of them a Japanese visitor), with scripts about female heroes. Gam Rock has even been born, with gamelan instrumentation augmented by electric guitars, bass guitar, drum and organ, as have forms sometimes called gamelan gaul (mixed gamelan) which add saxophone, flute, guitar, bass and/or keyboard to the orchestra and are reportedly popular among school pupils in Yogyakarta.

Sometimes NU has endorsed Javanese artistic forms that Modernists and Revivalists regard as legacies of the pre-Islamic age of ignorance, above all the kris, but this is done in a way consistent with NU’s ultimate aim of purifying local culture. Ansor in Kediri promoted ‘kris folk culture’, but in a

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despiritualised form, as a part of ‘dakwah and struggle in a cultural way’. Said the Ansor leader Abu Muslich,

With the ever more intense internalisation of religion, for the past several decades the fate of the kris has gone through a gloomy period. It has been accused of being a source of polytheism (shirk) and the bearer of deviance and superstition. The kris is regarded as a thing of black magic, which has its own evil spirit … So now it’s time to place the kris in its proper place, as an ancient object and cultural object left to us by history, which bears high esthetic and artistic standards.93

Kediri’s kyais were unhappy with the promotion of jaranan as a characteristically Kediri art form. They had successfully blocked an earlier idea that tayuban — with all its lascivious associations — should be picked as the special art form reflecting Kediri’s identity.94 But it was harder to resist jaranan, evidently. The city secretary Zaini said that a PKB member of the local parliament came to him to say that kyais had contacted him to express their concern that their students were enjoying jaranan. Zaini felt that he must proceed slowly in this matter but believed that more moderate kyais were coming around to his view and, indeed, many pesantren students were watching jaranan. The kyais of course did not approve of trance — seeing it as possession by evil spirits — but in Zaini’s view trance was just being faked anyway. To encourage a change of opinions about jaranan, Zaini — himself the son of a kyai from Nganjuk — began a dakwah section within the local jaranan association that he had formed, with the aim of having pengajian by a local kyai once every three months.95

Surabaya, like Kediri, lacked the kraton culture that was so important in Central Java, and thus struggled to find what it was that, in a cultural sense, made Surabaya special. The answer might have been the burlesque ludruk theatre — bawdy, raunchy, vulgar and iconoclastic that it was. But as well as being in bad taste it had been anti-elite, anti-santri, and particularly

93 Quoted in RK, 29 Apr. 2007. Similar views were put by the promoter of a display of krisses at a Toyota showroom in Kediri; RK, 27 Dec. 2007. The artistic and esthetic standards of krisses, as well as the technical processes involved in making them, are set out with wonderful illustrations in Isaäc Groneman, The Javanese kris (preface and intro. David van Duuren [transl. Peter Richardus and Timothy D. Rogers]; Leiden: C. Zwartenkot Art Books and KITLV Press, 2009).

94 Discussion with Suradi, head of the Arts and Culture section of Kabupaten Kediri, Kediri, 16 March 2005.

95 Discussion with Drs H.M. Zaini, Kediri, 26 Nov. 2007; MmK, 5 Nov. 2007.
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associated with PKI in Sukarno’s days — none of which recommended it for government support. In 2005 the Surabaya government proposed a one-year attempt to modernise the management of *ludruk* and clean it up, making it more ‘artistic’ and satirical rather than simply vulgar.96 But two years later the four theatres that had existed in Surabaya around the year 2000 had dwindled to just one survivor, operating in a slum with poor attendance. A problem for *ludruk* has been that its performers are predominantly impoverished gays, transsexuals and transvestites, living on the margins of society and respected by only a few human rights activists. Their art was not a target of Islamic activists’ hostility — it was just dying from neglect and lack of public interest. *Ludruk* performers were obliged to search for other sources of income on the legal and moral margins of society to survive.97

NU continued to promote its own Traditionalist art forms which are at the same time spiritual practices, but of a kind seen as bearing acceptably Muslim spirituality. The performances that we have often encountered above — *slawatan*, *tablilan*, *rebana*, *nasyid* and all the rest — carried on in the post-Soeharto years. Traditionalists’ belief in supernatural forces continued also in the semi-performance and semi-spiritual world of martial arts, where belief in invulnerability (*ilmu kanuragan*) was publicly advertised as a skill that could be taught by a ‘Maestro of Banser in Central Java’.98 Another form of martial arts, reputedly handed down from the *wali* Sunan Bonang and consisting of bodily positions based on Arabic letters, was said to convey both invulnerability and healing.99 Yet another form attributed to Sunan Kalijaga called *Ilmu Banyu Mataram* (the mystical science of Mataram water) rested on orthodox Sufi roots, said its leader, although it had recently suffered from deviations.100

NU was prepared to embrace some innovation in its arts. At a *Festival Bedug dan Selawatan Rebana* (mosque-drum and *slawatan* with tambourine

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96 *Kmps* (edisi Jawa Timur), 7 March 2005.
97 Discussion with Pak Sapari at the *ludruk* theatre Irama Budaya, Pulo, Wonokromo, Surabaya, 26 Nov. 2007. See also *Tempo*, 25 Dec. 2005, reporting on the dying of *ludruk*, when in the whole of East Java there were only about 30 groups surviving.
99 *KR*, 9 Sept. 2008. In Javanese historical legends, Sunan Kalijaga had a special connection with the Mataram dynasty (Mataram being today’s Yogyakarta region); see Ricklefs, *Jogjakarta under Sultan Mangkubumi*, p. 75.
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festival) in Pare, audiences were attracted by the religious pop star Opick, along with others performing devotional songs (nasyid and kasidah), the whole occasion being sponsored by Yamaha.\(^\text{101}\) Kyais were, however, mostly unenthusiastic about television and often hostile to the Internet, which was seen as a source of pornography and other forms of immorality.\(^\text{102}\) In Yogyakarta in 2008–9, Jadul Maula and others revived Lesbumi as a modern sort of organisation to promote the artistic side of Traditionalism and defend it from globalisation’s challenges. Festivals were to promote slawatan and other performances of a Traditionalist kind.\(^\text{103}\) At a festival in Yogyakarta in 2008, Lesbumi introduce a new sort of wayang, with puppets made of translucent mica and accompanied by modern stringed instruments and drum, called wayang Mika-EL, the name taken from the angel Michael (Mikael). The story, however, was based on that of Dewa Ruci, telling of the spiritual searching of Bima (a figure from the Bratayuda epic).\(^\text{104}\)

Traditionalist artistic-cum-spiritual practices represent a barrier to the reforming aspirations of Revivalists, and came under formidable attack from that quarter. From its inception, Islamic Modernism has been at least unenthusiastic about such practices and at times downright hostile, but in Indonesia’s post-2001 atmosphere of ‘moderates’ collaborating, Muhammadiyah’s objections were moderated. So it was left to Revivalist quarters to denounce Traditionalist observances as heresy. Ky. H. Mahrus Ali (not to be confused with Ky. H. Mahrus Aly of pesantren Lirboyo) was born in a village near Gresik in 1957, studied and taught in pesantrens, eventually becoming a teacher at the YAPI\(^\text{105}\) pesantren in Bangil, one of Java’s very few Shi’ite institutions, then led by its founder Ust. Husein al-Habsyi. Under the latter’s influence, Mahrus Ali began to see the error of some Traditionalist ways, he said. He then lived and studied in Saudi Arabia for seven years, returning to Indonesia in 1987. In 2007 he published two books in which he identified himself as a ‘former kyai of NU’. These works denounced NU practices such as tabilatan, slawatan, dhikr, pilgrimages to the

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\(^{101}\) RK, 5 May 2007.

\(^{102}\) There was no Internet allowed at Lirboyo in 2007 and pupils were not allowed to watch television, but an exception was made for the World Cup soccer competition; discussion with Ky. H.A. Idri Marzuqi, Lirboyo, Kediri, 29 Nov. 2007. Getting the Internet into pesantrens has been a considerable challenge for modernisers.


graves of walis, seeking blessings from the dead, prophesying, accepting the religious authority of kyais and invulnerability — all on the narrowly textual grounds that any practice not specifically approved in the Qur’an and Hadith represents illegal innovation in Islam (bid’at). We have noted earlier in this book that Modernists generally take such a view, rejecting as bid’at what is not specifically allowed by those basic scriptures, while Traditionalists generally take the inverse position that anything can be accepted that is not specifically forbidden by the Qur’an and Hadith and which is good in itself. But Mahrus Ali’s position was an extreme form of Modernism and, resting solely on the Qur’an and Hadith, it is Revivalist in the analytical terminology we use in this book. Page after page cites those scriptures (and sometimes Saudi fatwas or other judgments based on them) to reject Traditionalist practices in uncompromising terms. Mahrus Ali also rejects democracy, which both Muhammadiyah and NU support. ‘Remember,’ he says, ‘that Islamic shari’a is already perfect and the Messenger of God has passed to us all of God’s commands …. If we add to or take away from Islamic shari’a, it means that we regard Islamic shari’a as imperfect and God’s Messenger as a deceiver.’

NU kyais were angry at this challenge. They rejected the label ‘former kyai of NU’, saying that a kyai could not stop being a kyai and that Mahrus Ali had never been active in NU. Some published a book rejecting his arguments and wished to report him to the police for lying to the public. Others chose to ignore his claims and to explain carefully to their pesantren students the scriptural foundations of Traditionalist practices — for kyais are at least as adept as Mahrus Ali at citing scripture. Imam Ghazali Said was of the view that Mahrus Ali had been persuaded of Wahhabi theology while in Saudi Arabia and that his writing was funded by the Saudis. He

106 Mahrus Ali, Mantan kiai NU menggugat sholawat & dzikir syirik (Nariyah, al-Fatih, Mujiyat, Thibbul Qulub) (intro. KH. Mu’ammal Hamidy; rev. ed.; Surabaya: Laa Tasyuk! Press, 2007); idem, Mantan kiai NU menggugat tabililan, istigosahan dan ziarah para wali (intro. H. Abdul Rahman; rev. ed.; Surabaya: Laa Tasyuk! Press, 2007). Biographical information from the biographical sections of these books and from the first of these works, pp. ix–x. Mahrus Ali advertised a series of further books to prove Traditionalist practices to be heretical, but I do not have copies of those.

107 Mahrus Ali, Mantan kiai NU menggugat tabililan, istigosahan dan ziarah para wali, pp. 229–32.

108 Mahrus Ali, Mantan kiai NU menggugat sholawat & dzikir syirik, p. 305.


viewed this as part of a general trend of increasing Wahhabi influence among NU kyais.111

Others who were inclined to an uncompromising puritanism also had objections to arts. One typical example was the leader of a small Salafi pesantren in Kediri which was supported with Saudi Arabian-based funding and had links to other Revivalist pesantrens including the Yogyakarta school of Ja’far Umar Thalib, the founder of Laskar Jihad. His view was that ‘All local arts are human creations and … are bid’aa and forbidden in Islam. … [They] regard Islam as not sufficient and not complete, whereas Islamic teachings are already complete and final.’112 The HTI leader Ismail Yusanto said that it was acceptable to enjoy an art so long as the spiritual ideas associated with it were got rid of. If it is not possible to ‘straighten out’ such arts, then they will disappear. Beliefs about krisses are unacceptable, he said, as is the making of offerings to spirits.113 PKS has been readier to embrace local arts, but with appropriate amendments. It has put on wayang at its meetings, but with the singers wearing head-scarves (kerudung). On the other hand, the bedhaya dance, with its female dancers and links to the Goddess of the Southern Ocean, needed ‘cultural dialogue’ so as to be ‘straightened out’ in the view of the Yogyakarta PKS leader Kholil Mahmud.114

More extreme attacks on older arts are rare, but not unknown. In Sukoharjo regency south of Surakarta — an area with a reputation for Islamic hard-liners, where Abu Bakar Ba’asyir’s Ngruki school is found — Islamic extremists attacked several wayang performances in late 2010, the first time this is known to have happened. Waving swords, throwing rocks and shouting Allahu akbar, people who reportedly described themselves as Laskar Jihad (Holy war militia) injured several persons and forced the performances to stop.115 I do not know whether this group had any connection with the

112 Husnul Qodim interview of Ust. Sapto Atmo Wardoyo, pesantren Ath-Thoifah Al-Manshuroh, Jl. Papar-Pare, Kab. Kediri, 27 Feb. 2006. Almost all of the 150 pupils received funding from the International Islamic Relief Organisation, which is a Saudi Arabia-based charity whose office in Jakarta has been put on a United Nations list (last updated 30 Dec. 2011) of organisations associated with al-Qaeda; see http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/pdf/AQlist.pdf.
113 Discussion with Muhammad Ismail Yusanto, Jakarta, 8 June 2007.
former Laskar Jihad organisation set up by Ja'far Umar Thalib, which was disbanded in 2002 (see the following chapter).

Older art forms were sometimes subjected to conscious Islamisation, that being the best way to survive in more Islamised Java. We have already noted the likelihood nowadays that bersih desa ceremonies will include pengajian and/or Traditionalist devotional practices. An interesting case of Islamising an art form concerns the gandrung dance and singing performance of Banyuwangi, associated particularly with the Osing (or Using) people. In the 19th century, gandrung performers were boys, but in the 20th century women took over gandrung, attired in alluring form-fitting outfits, with bare arms and shoulders. They danced sensuously with male watchers in turn, and the performance was often associated with drinking and immoral conduct, as in the case of tayuban. The performance had supernatural aspects, too, and was thought to bring protection particularly to fishermen. In the late 1980s local bureaucrats sought to make gandrung the artistic symbol of the Osing, but pious Muslims objected. In 2000–5 the elected Bupati of Banyuwangi was Osing and wished to promote gandrung as a tourist attraction, including opening a school to train performers. Again there were objections from devout Muslims, although some kyais were willing to accept gandrung as ‘just culture’. Meanwhile the dance has become slowly but progressively more Islamised to deal with these objections and songs have been introduced that promote Islamic piety. The local government runs month-long gandrung training sessions which include pengajian. So this characteristically abangan Osing performance is growing more Islamic, along with the rest of Javanese society.

Similarly, in 2009 Gadjah Mada University put on an Islamised wayang version of the Bratayuda to celebrate the revelation of the Qur'an (Arabic nuzu 'l-Qur'an). This was dubbed wayang sambung (connection wayang) and was said to be about the connection between God and humankind. In this version there were no female singers as is customary but rather men. The puppets were of parchment as usual but the Pandawa puppets (in effect, the ‘good guys’ of the drama) appeared in Islamic dress while their opponents the Kurawa side were traditionally depicted. The characters all had Islamised

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names, such as Muhammad Gathutkaca and Abdullah Gareng and the story was about Bima spreading Islam and creating a pesantren.117

Modernists — represented above all by Muhammadiyah — have mixed and contradictory views about all art, and about old-fashioned Javanese arts with their spiritual associations in particular. This reflects the potentially divergent aspirations of Modernism that we have noted above. Muhammadiyah’s aim to return to the Qur’an and Hadith on the one hand and its wish for Islamic renewal or modernisation on the other can give birth to a contradiction between wooden literalism and puritanism driven by the first aspiration and openness to innovation and modernity driven by the second. In Muhammadiyah’s home in Yogyakarta, this distinction is sometimes depicted as geographical. With the River Code as the dividing line, people speak of Muhammadiyah ‘west of the river’ (kulon kali), which means the Kauman area (seen as the base of the conservative and puritan side of Muhammadiyah) versus Muhammadiyah ‘east of the river’ (wetan kali) (which means Kota Gede, regarded as the base of the liberals and modernisers). The former is generally hostile to older forms of local culture and, in the more modern realm, regards the guitar as haram.118 The wetan kali people, by contrast, are reputedly more open to local and modern arts.119

Muhammadiyah’s uncertainty about local arts, even on the part of the supposedly more open people ‘east of the river’ in Kota Gede, was exemplified in 1999–2000. Kota Gede is commonly thought of as a town dominated by Muhammadiyah and Modernist Islam. It had put on a festival of folk arts and performances in the 1960s, but that came to a halt after 1965–6, when many kethoprak (and probably other) performers were arrested. Like elsewhere, thereafter abangan-style arts were thought insufficiently Islamic and carried a whiff of Communism. In 1999 this festival was revived with some World Bank funding and the organising committee set a top-down artistic agenda. When the festival was repeated in 2000, however,

118 The scriptural authority for this view is probably the 14th-century Shafi’i work Umdat al-salik, in which the Prophet is reported to have said that God sent him ‘to do away with all musical instruments, flutes, strings’ and ‘It is unlawful to use musical instruments … like mandolin, lute, cymbals and flute’; see r40.1 and r40.2 in Ibn al-Naqib al-Miṣri, Reliance of the traveller: The classic manual of Islamic sacred law Umdat al-salik (ed. and transl. N.H.M. Keller; rev. ed.; Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 1994). I am grateful to Amelia Fauzia for locating this source.
119 Discussion with Dr Sidik Jatmika (Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta academic staff), Yogyakarta, 8 March 2005.
local people rather usurped control and programmed performances such as jaranan (jabilan) with their local non-Islamic spiritual aspects. This challenged the image of Kota Gede as a Muhammadiyah fortress and senior Muhammadiyah leaders were upset. One gave a Friday sermon objecting to a particular performance and saying that the ummah must be saved from such things. Muhammadiyah wrote a formal letter of objection to the festival organising committee, but no resolution of the disagreement was possible; both sides stood firm. Younger Muhammadiyah figures were, however, inclined to be more tolerant of these local arts. In the wake of this episode, there was surprise in some quarters on discovering that that Kota Gede was not yet as purified of older superstitions as Modernists had thought.120

The prominent Muhammadiyah-affiliated artist Prof. Tulus Warsito, who is also Dean of the Faculty of Social and Political Studies at Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, expressed the view that Muhammadiyah was not as smart as NU in its use of local culture. The Islamic Studies Centre at his university, he said, opposed all modern sculptures even if they were not statues of living beings, and regarded the guitar as the sound of Satan. And even though Muhammadiyah in 2005, with its talk of ‘cultural dakwah’, seemed more open to local culture, in fact most Muhammadiyah people held dissenting views121 (as we saw above also with regard to the 2005 triumph of anti-Liberal figures in the Muhammadiyah leadership).

Muhammadiyah opinions range from qualified openness to local culture (with provisos, such as men and women being kept separate, prayer times not being disrupted and women dressing modestly) to simple opposition by people whom their opponents describe as ‘puritans’ and ‘confrontative’.122

120 M. Jadul Maula, ‘The moving equilibrium: Kultur Jawa, Muhammadiyah, buruh gugat, dalam Festival Kotagede 2000’, in M. Jadul Maula et al. (eds), Ngesuhi desa sak kukuban: Lokalitas, pluralisme, modal sosial demokrasi (intro. Robert W. Hefner; Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2002), pp. 5–20. The particular performance that was objected to was jailangkung, which involves the summoning of a spirit.

121 Discussion with Prof. Tulus Warsito, Yogyakarta, 8 March 2005.

The organisation remains split on this issue. Some Muhammadiyah schools introduce their pupils to wayang or traditional Javanese dress, and Muhammadiyah meetings sometimes open with local cultural performances, as did the national meeting of 2005 which *inter alia* put on a Ponorogo reyog performance at the opening (but — we may assume — without trance).

As noted earlier in this chapter, the religious group that is most supportive of older forms of indigenous Javanese arts is the Catholic Church, which pursues its policy of ‘inculturation’, the current term for an approach that goes back over a century. It has its roots in the views of the Jesuit father Franciscus van Lith (1863–1926), who arrived in Batavia in 1896 and promoted Catholic accommodation of Javanese culture. This process is facilitated by the fact that the hierarchy and almost all the priests are ethnically Javanese. There are Catholic versions of wayang, slawatan and even ruwatan. Gamelan is used in some churches and services are sometimes in Javanese rather than Indonesian. The spiritual content of these performances is of course Catholicised, and these arts, too, face challenges from the forces of modernisation and globalisation, including young people’s declining facility in Javanese (which we will return to below). This pattern of the Catholic Church seeking to be ‘Javanised’ while some Islamic activists seek cultural ‘dejavanisation’ is about a century old. Another echo of the past is the emergence of some puritans within Javanese Protestantism who are also hostile to local culture. Despite the latter, the generally more culturally receptive approach of Christianity among Javanese is a cause of worry to some Muslim activists, who feel that this gives Christianity an advantage in inter-religious competition for adherents.

126 Discussion with the Catholic Father Haryanto, Surabaya, 24 Nov. 2007. *Ruwatan* has been performed particularly by the Jesuit scholar of Old Javanese Dr Ignatius Kuntara Wirayamartana SJ. On *slawatan*, see Latifah, ‘Seni slawatan Katolik di paroki Ganjuran: Sebuah kajian inkulturasi dari perspektif religi dan budaya’ (MA thesis, Program Studi Ilmu Perbandingan Agama, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, 2007).
127 Discussion with Pastor Simon Philantropha, Surabaya, 24 Nov. 2007.
128 Discussion with Imam Subkhan, an inter-religious activist of Muhammadiyah background, Yogyakarta, 13 Sept. 2008.
Generally speaking, recent decades have not been good for older Javanese art forms, and along with their observed decline has gone increasing concern about loss of Javanese language skills. Command of more elevated forms of that hierarchical language (such as krama and krama inggil) and of Javanese script are both declining, continuing a process already noted in previous years. School students are reported to avoid studying Javanese if they can. It would be a very rare high school graduate today who could read Javanese script, for publications are in roman script. Javanese script is used for public signs in Yogyakarta and in 2007 the mayor of Surakarta, Joko Widodo (known popularly as Jokowi), ordered a similar policy in Surakarta, but the signs are also written in the roman alphabet and, since it is not necessary to read the Javanese-script version, few people do or can. The Yogyakarta government ordered its civil servants to communicate with one another in Javanese at certain times (which, given bureaucratic conventions, should require command of the language’s hierarchical levels), but I do not know whether this experiment has produced significant benefits for the language. Newspapers appear in the Indonesian language but some have columns in Javanese, and there are magazines using Javanese, but these are invariably in the roman alphabet and normally employ ‘low Javanese’ (ngoko). Modern novels have been written in Javanese in the past, but the current fate of this literature is unclear to me. Certainly there is no sign that it is prospering, but whether it is facing extinction is not clear.

These cultural changes are driven only partly by the forces of deeper Islamisation. Modernisation generally, the availability of other forms of entertainment, education that has led to general decline in knowledge or

130 Kmps, 7 Sept. 2009.
131 For an earlier stage in the writing of modern novels in Javanese, see George Quinn, The novel in Javanese: Aspects of its social and literary character (VKI vol. 148; Leiden: KITLV Press, 1992). A more comprehensive overview by Quinn of issues related to Javanese in recent times, in which he discerns some positive signs even though he writes that ‘it would be unrealistic to claim that the fall of the New Order has restored a healthy glow to the emaciated face that Javanese acquired under the New Order’, may be found (p. 68) in his chapter, ‘Emerging from dire straits: Post-New Order developments in Javanese language and literature’, in Keith Foulcher, Mikihiro Moriyama and Manneke Budiman (eds), Words in motion: Language and discourse in post-New Order Indonesia, Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2012.
sympathy regarding older views of spiritual powers and declining command of the Javanese language have all played their role. But certainly those pressing for deeper Islamisation are an important part of this story, for they have been championing their cause on all fronts. It is to the smaller groups of Islamic activists that we now turn, for it is they who, as in a classical Greek drama, have most often played the role of protagonist, opening the play and setting its plot in motion, requiring responses from others, and thus moving Javanese society towards something very different from what it was just half a century ago.