

Chapter 1: Introduction

POINTS OF DEPARTURE: REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

...syncretism is very conspicuous in the religion of Java. This perhaps results from the flexibility of the Javanese people in accepting various incoming religions from the outside world. In historical times, upon their underlying animistic beliefs, Javanese had successively accepted Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, and "Javanized" them all. And as can be seen...worship of various spirits strongly exists in the deep stratum of folk psychology. It is said ... among the Javanese: "Sedaya agami sami kemawon" ... Although 90% of the inhabitants ...profess Islam, they all belong to ..."wong abangan", whose Islamic beliefs seem to cover the surface of their traditional concepts. This is well proved by the continuing existence of the various salamatan ...¹

This quotation reflects a view adopted by some Indonesianists who hold as an axiom that Javanese Islam is syncretic. Its basis is a conviction that animism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam have formed layers of Javanese culture. From this conviction derives an approach of seeing Javanese Islam as founded on multi-layered syncretism. Everything is then analysed and explained in terms of this 'multi layered' schemata.

One version of this syncretic argument is championed by Clifford Geertz who developed an *abangan-santri-priyayi* trichotomy for seeing the socio-religious pattern and development of Java.² His approach has enjoyed currency among many Indonesianists for the last few decades. Subsequent work on Javanese socio-religious discourse cannot proceed without reference to him. For this reason, I wish to take his work as the focus of my initial discussion.

According to Geertz's historical representation, before the advent of Hinduism, the Javanese were animists. In about AD 400, Hinduism, and then Buddhism, began to gain a stronghold. Around AD 1500 Islam came through sea trade expansion.³ The notion of essentially tolerant, accommodative and flexible Javanese is taken as another crucial point by which, instead of opposing any incoming religion, the Javanese were thought to have taken everything as necessary ingredients to form a new synthesis, i.e:

... the village religious system (which) commonly consists of a balanced integration of animistic, Hinduistic, and Islamic elements, a basic Javanese

¹ Bekki, A. (1975), "Socio Cultural Changes in a Traditional Javanese Village" in *Life in Indonesian Villages*, Institute of Asian Studies, Tokyo: Rikko (St. Pauls) University, p. 20.

² Geertz, C. (1960), *The Religion of Java*, Glencoe: The Free Press. (My own reference is Phoenix Edition, 1976, Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

³ Geertz, C. (1976), p. 5

syncretism ... the island's true folk tradition, the basic stratum of its civilisation;⁴

The extent to which each religion has contributed to this syncretism was accounted for in a threefold manner: (a) the sequence and the time span of its presence in Java, (2) the basic nature of the religion; and (3) the group of people by whom the religion was initially brought and adopted. As animism was the first religion on Java that had long become an established tradition, it is argued accordingly that animism has made a major contribution. As animism is essentially a religion adopted by commoners, animism must have a stronghold among the village peasants and must have shaped their syncretism. Hinduism, which came and has been taken to constitute Javanese state craft and state polity for more than a thousand years, must also have been a contributory factor which had a major impact on overall Javanese cultural formation. As Hinduism, through its inherent caste doctrine, legitimates elite domination, its impact must have been the strongest among the court aristocrats because they benefited from this religion. Accordingly, Hinduism shaped these aristocrats' syncretism and world-view. Islam, on the other hand, which came late via trade expansion, and had its further spread hampered by the presence of European colonialism and the spread of Christianity, must have had less influence. It touched only the surface of the already existing Hindu/Buddhist animistic cultural rock. Consequently, Islam, according to Geertz,

... did not move into an essentially virgin area, ... but into one of Asia's greatest political, aesthetic, religious, and social creations, the Hindu-Buddhist Javanese state, which though it had by then begun to weaken, had cast its roots so deeply into Indonesian society (especially on Java, but not only there) ...⁵

Accordingly, in Java, "Islam did not construct a civilisation, it (only) appropriated one."⁶ To the Javanese, Islam was an alien tradition adopted and brought by unsettled traders in the coastal areas. Only after a long peaceful assimilation did Islam gradually form enclaves of trading communities in towns and among rich farmers. These Muslim communities adopted a syncretism which stressed Islamic cultural aspects. The net result of this overall process on Java is contemporary Javanese society with its intricate socio-religious groupings, consisting of:

Abangan, representing a stress on the animistic aspects of the over-all Javanese syncretism and broadly related to the peasant element in the population; santri, representing a stress on the Islamic aspects of the

⁴ *Ibid.* (The word between brackets is my own).

⁵ Geertz, C. (1975), *Islam Observed*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 11.

⁶ *Ibid.*

syncretism and generally related to the trading element (and to certain elements in the peasantry as well); and *prijaji*, stressing the Hinduist aspects and related to the bureaucratic element ...⁷

It was this schemata which, to my understanding, was taken by Geertz as his efficient, albeit simplistic, tool to analyse the abundant ethnographic data from Modjokuto, a small town in East Java. He partitioned the data according to this predetermined schemata, the *abangan-santri-priyayi* trichotomy. By adding a conflict scenario to his schemata he produced *The Religion of Java*, a controversial portrait of the socio-religious life of the Javanese.⁸

Response to Geertz

Response to Geertz's treatment varies from total and uncritical acceptance to strong rejection. In between these two extremes there have been some who accept it with caution and some others who merely repeat his jargon and use it for different purposes and different situations. Siddique (1977) perhaps, belongs to the later type. She uses the jargon of *abangan-santri-priyayi* especially to single out the participant group elements in the celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, the *Panjang-Jimat* ceremony, in the court of Cirebon.⁹

Strong criticism of this syncretic argument and the ensuing *abangan-santri-priyayi* trichotomy have come from a number of scholars. Bachtiar (1973), an Indonesian sociologist who knows much about Java, was one among those who spoke rigorously. To Bachtiar, *The Religion of Java* is an excellent work in the sense that it contains an abundance of detailed descriptive material concerning many aspects of Javanese religious beliefs and practices. As the work is put under scrutiny, major shortcomings readily appear at almost every point. Bachtiar points out among other things, the problems of Geertz's theoretical orientation, especially regarding what constitutes religion, and the way this precipitates confusion on how religion is distinguished from other governing values, codes of conduct and behaviour including, for example, *adat* or local traditions. Confusion also occurs in regard to the concept of religious syncretism and the sociological role of pluralism. Bachtiar explains that every Javanese is not just a Javanese. He is also a member of a household, *desa* community, the Indonesian

⁷ Geertz, C. (1976), p. 6.

⁸ This mode of analysis appears throughout *The Religion of Java*. The deterministic logic and the argument developed from it are evident in the 'Introduction.' The partitioning of ethnographic data appears in the division of the book into three parts, 'The "Abangan" Variant, The "Prijaji" Variant and The "Santri" Variant.' An example of the simple way of putting what belongs to which variant is: *slametan* for *abangan*; the prayers, the fast, the Pilgrimage, for *santri*; etiquette and mysticism, for *priyayi*. A person named Paidjan must be an *abangan*; Usman or H. Abdul must be a *santri*; Sosro must be a *priyayi*; etc. The terms 'abangan,' 'santri' and 'prijaji' are truly Javanese, but they are employed by Geertz, without full understanding of their meaning, to label his ingenuously predetermined animistic group, Hindu/Buddhist group and Islamic syncretic group.

⁹ See Chapter Five.

nation, the Muslim community, a political party, each with a certain position in it. Each position necessitates the performer to exhibit a certain mode of behaviour which does not necessarily reflect religious activity. Doing all these things at the same time, according to Bachtiar, does not reflect religious syncretism but rather the role of pluralism. Further, Geertz misunderstands the meaning of *abangan*, *santri* and *prijaji*, as the Javanese actually use these terms. In this respect, Geertz confuses the Javanese reference to certain religious behaviour (with reference to *abangan-santri*) and social strata (with reference to *priyayi-wong cilik*). With such confusions, it is therefore difficult to accept Geertz's major propositions.¹⁰

Other critics, such as Suparlan (1976), Koentjaraningrat (1963) and Nakamura (1984), also point out the inadequacy of the *abangan-santri-prijaji* theoretical framework and its use as a clear cut device to categorise Javanese society. With regard to doctrinal aspect, Dhofier (1985:6) points out that Geertz's claim that Javanese Islam is 'Hindu-Buddhist' is misleading and distorts the real situation. Hodgson (1974:551) states that Geertz made a major systematic error by taking only what the modernists and reformists happen to agree on and gratuitously labelling much of the Muslim religious life in Java, "Hindu." Geertz's comprehensive data intended to prove his contention, according to Hodgson, give no evidence that Islam in Java, even in its inner part, is "Hindu." Pranowo (1991) makes a definite claim that Geertz's theoretical framework does not work at all operationally when it is applied in a real situation. He found this when he studied traditional Muslims in a Central Javanese village. Woodward (1989) was also frustrated in trying to trace the Hindu/Buddhist elements of ideologies and ritual modalities even in the most allegedly Hinduistic ceremonies, such as *Grebeg Mulud* at the Yogyakarta court.

Javanese society is like other societies and the Javanese culture is as complex as others. My respect and appreciation of Geertz is for his ingenious contribution in bringing Java and Javanese issues to the academy. Enthusiastic responses from others, positive or negative, substantiate his success. All this has made the Javanese socio-religious discourse an outstanding subject of scholarship. Yet, as more and more scholars recognise that Geertz's treatment is ill-founded, the question is whether Javanese culture in general, and their socio-religious patterns and development in particular, can be fruitfully analysed based on such a 'deterministic' logic as Geertz has attempted.¹¹ In this regard I am also sceptical

¹⁰ Bachtiar, H.W. (1973), "The Religion of Java: A Commentary," *Madjalah Ilmu-Ilmu Sastra Indonesia*, Djilid V, No. 1. (Written originally in 1964 in English, and published as it is without revision). The "*wong cilik*" is absent throughout Geertz's work.

¹¹ 'Determinism' is a philosophy which considers all events, including moral choices, are completely determined by previously existing causes that preclude free will and the possibility that man could have acted otherwise. In the 18th century, Pierre-Simon, Marquis de Laplace, for example, advocated that the present state of universe is the effect of its previous state and the cause of the state that follows. Omar Khayam, a Persian poet, also exhibits a similar tone in the concluding part of his quatrains by

as to whether the syncretic argument can be a useful tool to analyse the socio-religious traditions of the Javanese.

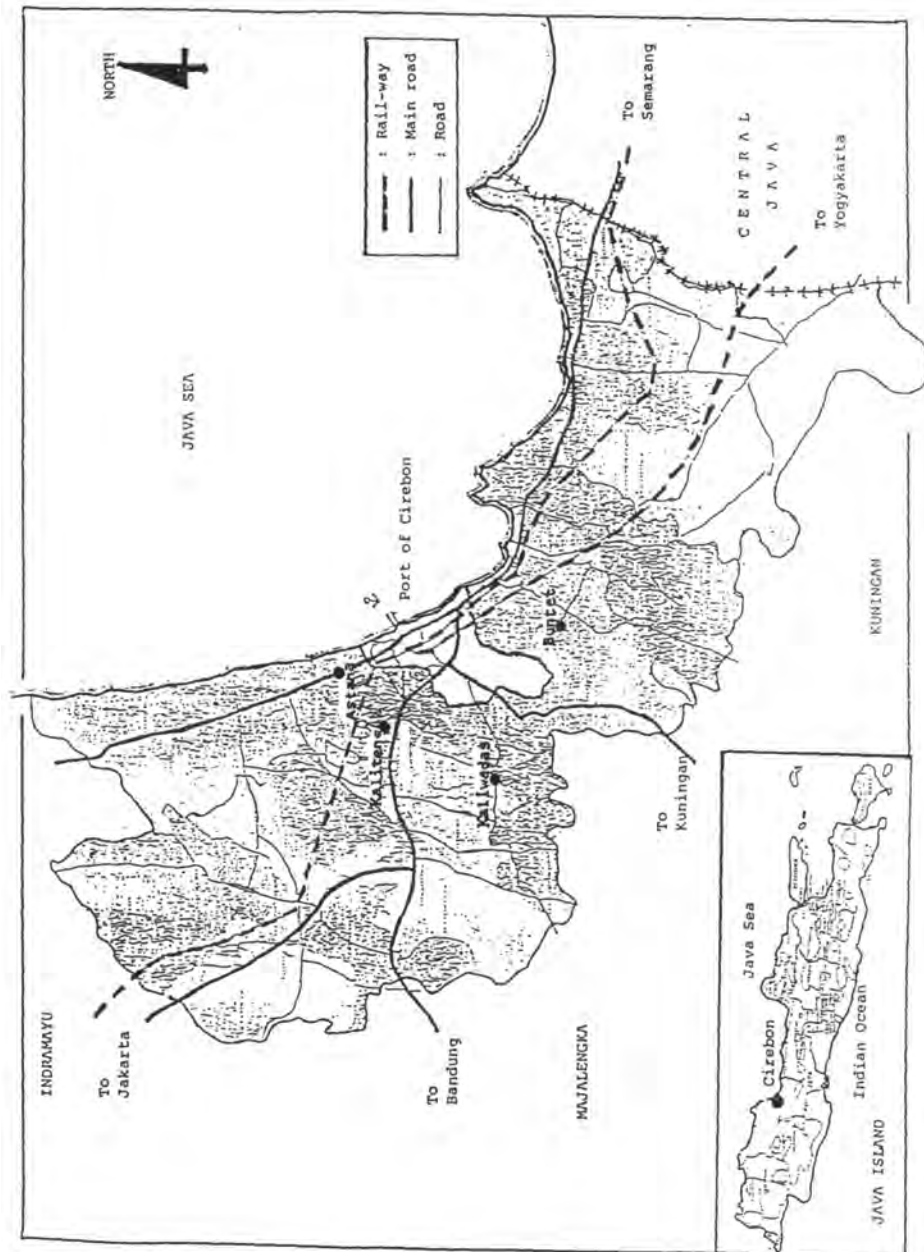
THE STUDY IN PERSPECTIVES

Being sceptical about syncretism, I wish to explore an alternative approach which renders a better understanding of Javanese socio-religious life. More specifically, I wish to seek an alternative understanding of the nature and dynamics of Islam on Java. In addition, I also wish to consider the genuine manifestations of Islam within the Javanese cultural context and thus, amidst the whole spectrum of Javanese cultural traditions, I shall attempt to make these manifestations identifiable and locate them in a single coherent frame work. This is an ambitious job and challenging endeavour. Before confronting the main issue, I wish to begin my discussion by recalling two considerations: the issue of demography and of the folk narratives regarding Islam that prevail among the Javanese.

The Demographic Issue: Statistical records

Statistical records, official or otherwise, indicate that the majority of Indonesians and the majority of Javanese (about 90 per cent), profess Islam. This means that even before considering whether the overall influence of Islam on Java is deep or rudimentary, this statistical data alone may provide grounds to assume that within the various Javanese socio-religious manifestations, there must be certain identifiable elements which can be considered as purely Islamic or which genuinely constitute parts of an Islamic tradition. Setting aside at the first stage, the extent to which Islam might have influenced Javanese socio-religious life, identifying and elucidating elements of an Islamic tradition within the Javanese society is a challenging task. With special reference to Cirebon, a region in north-coast Java, I would like to face this challenge and then explore the extent to which Islam has influenced Javanese social life.

The Regency of Cirebon



The Popular Narratives of Early Islam in Cirebon

Most historical accounts of Cirebon have always associated the region with the early development of Islam on Java and, in particular, in West Java. The rise of an Islamic kingdom, which has its roots in the 15th–16th century, would suggest that Cirebon has its own significant importance in the configuration of the Islamic era. The founder of the Islamic kingdom in Cirebon, Syarif Hidayatullah, later known as Sunan Gunung Jati, according to folk narratives is one of the *wali* or Islamic saints, the early propagators of Islam on Java. Although different traditions reveal different lists of *wali*, Sunan Gunung Jati is one whose name is always included on all *wali* lists. Older traditions such as the *Babad Tanah Jawi* and the *Babad Kraton* put forward eight *wali*, but each with different names. Those who are mentioned in the *Babad Tanah Jawi* are: Sunan Ampel, Sunan Giri, Sunan Bonang, Sunan **Gunung Jati**, Sunan Kalijaga, Sunan/Shekh Siti Jenar (Lemah Abang) and Sunan/Shekh Wali Lanang. The *Babad Kraton* on the other hand, mentions: Sunan (Ng)Ampel, Sunan Giri, Sunan Bonang, **Sunan Cirebon (Sunan Gunung Jati)**, Sunan Ngundung and Sunan Bantam.¹² At present the most widely accepted tradition mentions nine *wali* (*wali sanga*), namely: Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Sunan (Ng)Ampel, Sunan Bonang, Sunan Giri, **Sunan Gunung Jati**, Sunan Drajat, Sunan Kalijaga, Sunan Kudus, and Sunan Muria.¹³ These *wali* are regarded as of ‘foreign’ origin, except for Sunan Kalijaga, who was a Javanese ‘native.’ At this stage, the narratives imply that Cirebon stood as an inseparable part of the whole and systematic network of Islam on Java. If the notion of ‘foreign’ and ‘native’ origin of the *wali* is drawn into a wider context, its implications crosscut the geographic boundaries of Java and the archipelago. It is concerned with a worldwide Islamic network centred in the Middle East. This network was maintained and has evolved over centuries even during the period when Indonesia was under foreign rules.¹⁴ This network may have undergone up's and down's but it is certainly wrong to assume, as Geertz (1976) does, that Islam on Java was once totally cut off from the centre of Islamic learning in the Middle East and thus has lost its genuine genius and orthodoxy. It is this type of preserved Islam whose current manifestations I would like to identify.

According to local literary traditions, unlike other *wali*, who concern themselves mostly with religious matters while leaving other business to the king, Syarif Hidayatullah was himself a king beside being a *wali*.¹⁵ He therefore, bore in his

¹² See also: Fox, J.J. (1991), “Ziarah Visits to the Tombs of Wali, the Founder of Islam on Java,” in Ricklefs, M.C., ed., *Islam in Indonesian Social Context*, Melbourne: CSEAS, Monash University, p. 23).

¹³ See also: Salam, S. (1960), *Sekitar Wali Sanga*, Kudus: Menara, p. 23.

¹⁴ For the existence of continuous intellectual network between the Middle East and Java, see Azra, A. (1992), *The Transmission of Islamic Reformism to Indonesia: Network of Middle Eastern and Malay-Indonesian ‘Ulama’ in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century*, unpublished Ph D dissertation, Columbia: Columbia University.

¹⁵ See also: Chapter Seven.

hands both religious as well as political power, and had the possibility, if he wished, of either institutionalising religion in the polity or of using religion to exercise political interest. Due to his sainthood, he chose the first rather than the second. He maintained contact with other leaders of Islam at that period, but was not intent on making Cirebon a political force. He even summoned his uncle Cakrabuana to return to Cirebon to attend a meeting of the religious leaders of Java, *wali sanga*, the nine *wali*. That is why, as far as those traditions indicate, Cirebon never developed into an important state, as De Graaf and Pigeaud (1989) noted. He was too religious to have strong ambitions of becoming a politically powerful king. Moreover, Syarif Hidayatullah had already had Sabakingking, a son from his marriage with a noble princess of Banten, a ruler in Banten. Sabakingking was later known as Sultan Hasanuddin. Thus, he was satisfied that his son in Banten was politically powerful enough that it was unnecessary for him to pursue politics in Cirebon, and he could, therefore, concentrate more on his religious mission. In addition, his sons in Cirebon, Jayakelana (who married Ratu Pembayun daughter of Raden Patah, King of Demak) and Bratakelana (who married Ratu Mas Nyawa, also a daughter of Raden Patah) preceded him, passing away soon after marriage. Later, Bratakelana's half brother, Pangeran Pasarean, who was supposed to be his direct successor, also died.¹⁶ From these multiple grieves his sainthood grew stronger and he turned to focus more on religious matters, while at the same time, he expected his son in Banten to be even more powerful. His grandson, Pangeran Swarga, son of Pangeran Pasarean, who succeeded him in Cirebon was still a young child and thus could not exercise an effective leadership. When Panembahan Ratu succeeded Pangeran Swarga, Cirebon was left behind while Banten had already become an established empire vis-a-vis Mataram in Central Java.

Whether or not this narrative is warranted, my main concern at this stage is to suggest at least two things. One is that Islam in Cirebon may already have been long established at the early stage of Javanese conversion to Islam; the other is that Islam in Java has become part of folk tradition. These observations provide grounds to assume that Islam may have a strong influence on Javanese social life. Under such an assumption, looking at how Islam manifests itself and molds people's traditions is an interesting subject to deal with.

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Islam, like other religions, is a spiritual and moral force which influences, motivates and gives colour to individuals' behaviour. To elucidate the tradition of Islam within a particular society is to locate the Islamic traits which are manifest within the popular tradition. At this point, an immediate problem one encounters is what constitutes 'tradition,' and more importantly what constitutes

¹⁶ See: 'the marriage alliance' between Sunan Gunung Jati and Raden Fatah in Chapter Six.

the 'Islamic Tradition.' I would like to suggest that the term 'tradition' is generally conceived as 'knowledge, doctrines, customs and practices, etc, transmitted from generation to generation as well as the transmission of such knowledge, doctrines and practices.¹⁷ Islamic tradition is thus all the things which come from, are associated with, or bear the spirit of Islam. But how can we know that a certain tradition or elements of tradition come from, are associated with, or bear the spirit of Islam, and thus have become Islamic? In this context, it is interesting to refer to Barth who remarks on the relation between acts and intention in human interaction. He says among other things:

"...the outcomes of (acts and) interaction are usually at variance with the intentions of the individual participants..."¹⁸

Barth's point allows us to assume that a tradition or elements of tradition can be Islamic when the performer intends or claims that his act is performed within his Islamic spirit. This of course is simplistic and at best, it provides only a starting point. Barth however is a contemporary scholar who acknowledges the importance of intention in human action.

More than a millennium ago, long before Barth, the Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam, had put forward this point explicitly. He said among other things that the validity of actions is based on intention and thus the value of everything is dependent on the intention attached to it. If something is intended for a worldly end then its value is there, whereas if something is intended for the sake of God, then its value is a devotion to Him (which is very precious). This is both clear and authoritative indicating how important intention is for the Muslims.¹⁹

Now let us turn further to formal Islamic scholarly discourse. Here I would like to refer to remarks from Nasr (1981:1). He states that Islamic tradition is something which incorporates both the message received by the Prophet Muhammad in the form of the Scriptures as well as all that Islam, as a religion, absorbed according to its own genius and made its own through transformation and synthesis. It embraces all aspects of religion and its ramifications based upon sacred models. Further, Nasr argues that the Islamic tradition is like a tree. It has roots which are sunk in the Divine revelation, and from these roots grow over time trunk and branches. Islamic tradition is therefore a tree composed of

¹⁷ Funk and Wagnalls (1984), *Standard Desk Dictionary*, Cambridge: Harper and Row.

¹⁸ Barth, F. (1993), *Balinese Worlds*, The University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

¹⁹ "Innama'l-a'mal bi'l-niyat fainna likulli imrii ma nawa..." "This is a fairly long hadith but widely known, at least this part of the hadith. It is narrated by Muslim (Abu'l Husein Muslim bin al-Hajjaj bin Muslim al-Qushayriy al-Naisabury), one of the most reliable and authoritative hadith narrators. The hadith also appears on the first page of Nawawi's collection of 40 precious hadith and thus there is no need to explain its position and influence in shaping the view of (traditional) Javanese Muslims. For the complete text of the hadith see for example: Dahlan, A. (1988), *Hadits Arba'in Annawawiyyah*, Bandung: Al-Ma'arif.

roots, trunk and branches. Its core is religion, its sap incorporates God's grace (*barakah*), the sacred, the eternal and the immutable Truth, and the perennial wisdom and its continuous application according to various temporal and spatial conditions (Nasr, 1981:12).

Following Nasr's definition, Islamic tradition may be conceived as a vast embracing entity. It may include knowledge, world view, values and mode of behaviour where the Scriptures and the spirit of the Scriptures are the ultimate reference. Viewed in a technical context, it follows that to know to which religion a certain tradition belongs (Islamic, Christian, Hinduist, Buddhist, etc) is to find out in which religious Scriptures the tradition has its roots. By considering all these, it is also possible to draw the lexical meaning of 'tradition' into Islamic perspective and then to posit the tradition of Islam as something which involves 'tradition' wherein the owner or performer intends to do or claims that his action comes from, is associated with, or bears the spirit of, Islam; and that his intended or claimed behaviour is verifiable through, and finds its roots or justification in, Scriptures.

Taking Scriptures of various degrees of authority as a standard notion for justifying to which religion a certain tradition belongs should not be confused with using Scriptures to justify a legal and theological position as theologians, jurists and clergy do. Rather, we treat the society's reference to Scriptures directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, as a sociological fact and empirically observable and testable phenomenon. Thus, when an observer sees that many things belonging to a society's beliefs and practices find their roots and justification in Scripture, he is neither collecting relics of revelation nor assembling a chronicle of error, as Geertz negatively implies.²⁰ As Graham points out, in a culture, the influence and importance of a scriptural text extends beyond the specifically religious sphere. One of the most obvious, according to Graham, is its effect upon language.²¹ While this effect, as Graham says, is evident in Western Christendom, similar effects should not be ignored in Javanese Islam. The intrusion of an Islamic vocabulary and Arabic language upon the Javanese is enormous. As a tiny example, the prominent Javanese political jargon (Indonesian as well), the word *adil* (Arabic: 'Adl) to mean just, such as in *Ratu adil* (the just king), is a word that appears many times in the Qur'an. So too is the word *salam* and *salamat* (pl. of *salamah*) meaning 'safe' which the Javanese slightly corrupt to *slamet*. No single Javanese word can replace *adl* (*adil*) and *salamah* (*slamet*). Even if for example, as Geertz (1976:14) tries in invoking a talk on etymology. He explains that in Javanese the word *slamet* means '*gak ana apa-apa*'--'there isn't anything' or, which according to Geertz 'more aptly'

²⁰ Geertz, C. (1975), *Islam Observed*, p. 19.

²¹ Graham, W.A. (1987), "Scripture", in Eliade, Mircea, (ed), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, New York: MacMillan.

(though not apt at all), 'nothing is going to happen (to anyone).' All these phrases and explanations, unfortunately, still do not reflect the real meaning of *slamet* as the original Arabic word implies. That is why the Javanese took it intact into their language. Even with such a simple thing, Geertz does not realise that the word he uses to refer to the core of *abangan* 'animistic ritual,' the '*slametan*,' is in fact, derived from the Qur'an and thus essentially Qur'anic. The *slametan*, may be a religious symbol peculiar to Javanese Muslims. As we shall see however, it is not alien to the universal Islamic tradition; the name, the words recited in it, the procedures and the nature of its performance are after all Islamic.²²

It is also from this point of view that a work like *The Religion of Java*, while stimulating, is also at the same time quite disappointing. Its author unhesitatingly judges various elements of Javanese tradition as belonging to a certain religion such as Hindu, Buddhist and animist, without a clear and definite standard for his judgement. This judgement appears to be based on the author's personal whims and simple rules of thumb. Throughout this work, not even a verse of formal Hindu or Buddhist Scriptures such as Veda or Theravada is cited. Geertz, the author, occasionally mentions the 'Ramayana' (p. 263) and 'Mahabharata' (pp. 263, 269ff, 278ff). Yet everyone knows that these epics, although they enjoy wide acceptance, are, like the *Kamasutra* and *Kakawin Arjunan Wiwaha*, not religious constituents of either Hinduism or Buddhism. Although these epics are enunciated through *wayang*, *wayang* takes more than these epics as its themes. *Wayang*, for a small fraction of Javanese, may be a ritual but for a majority of others, *wayang* belongs to the arts and the arts are entertainment and not a formal religious ritual as Geertz (1976:261ff) implies. Certainly, a deeply artistic entertainment like *wayang* may cause a certain degree of aura. To most Javanese (Muslims), all these things are part of their cultural heritage. The Javanese are proud to have them, good or bad, as signs of being a civilised society. Nevertheless, pride does not force an individual to take and mix them with his formal faith. What may be part of Islam—or other religions as well—is a respect for heritage, as respecting something, including a refined cultural heritage, is considered religiously meritorious and embedded deeply in Islamic Scriptures.

Kyai Fuad Hasyim, a religious orator of Pesantren Buntet, for example, is a genuine *santri* but he has been one of the fanatic lovers of *wayang* since his childhood.²³ On many occasions he unhesitatingly, even proudly, imitates a *dalang* to attract his audience, takes *wayang* figures to show both exemplary and derogatory behaviour, uses Sanskrit (Hindu/Buddhist) terms, vocabularies and *wayang* philosophies, to explain a theological or theosophical outlook and then finds the relevant Qur'anic verses, the Hadith or the work of *ulama* that enunciate

²² See Chapter Five.

²³ Another *kyai*'s appreciation and love of *wayang* as well as other arts is demonstrated quite clearly by Pranowo (1991).

the issues he is talking about. Is Kyai Fuad religiously syncretic? Few, if any, would consider him so.

While considering religion as a moral force which motivates human behaviour, I do not take the individual, household and community as units of analysis and then describe them based on predefined cultural traits. Rather, I stress action and behaviour. Thus, I identify and observe a certain behaviour, then trace it culturally within the sphere of a scriptural context. My approach therefore involves more 'contextual explanation' rather than that of social unit analysis.²⁴ Taking Scriptures into consideration in the study of Islam on Java has gained some currency. Studies that do this include the works by Dhofier (1985), Simuh (1988) and Woodward (1989). Through a detailed account based on my own data, I shall endeavour to demonstrate that the Javanese beliefs and practices, which are manifest in the life of the Javanese, including many things that Geertz claims as necessarily syncretic, are in fact genuinely part of an Islamic tradition, or an Islamic refinement of local tradition. Not only do the performers claim their tradition as Islamic but also find their roots and justification come from the basic sources of Islam: The Qur'an, the Hadith and the work of the *ulama*.

THE FIELD WORK

The field work on which this study is based was carried out in Cirebon, a region in the north-coast of eastern West Java, during the period between December 1991 to February 1993. Cirebon, which is located about 250 kilometres east of Jakarta, deserves a special attention for a number of reasons. Geographically the region is strategically located on the north-coast of Java and on the border between West and Central Java. Consequently, not only is it the gateway into and out of the two provinces but it is also the melting pot for Sundanese and Javanese sub-cultures. It forms a synthesis between the two cultures which is distinct from both, but bears in it the elements, influence and characteristics of both. This new synthesis is evident in the language the people speak, in some specific foods they eat and the specific arts they perform. *Bahasa Jawa Cerbon* or *Omong Cerbon* (the Cirebonese dialect of Javanese) for example, is unique. Although some claim that the language is *Omong Jawa* (Javanese language), ordinary Javanese-speaking people living in Central and East Java would not understand it, at least not initially. But as these Javanese would pay more attention to the language, they would soon recognise that the language is really similar to their own, or at least, they could understand it and be able to catch the main idea of what Cirebonese people are saying.

²⁴ Tjitrajaya, I. (1989), "Contextual explanations: A Methodological Examination," *Berita Antropologi*, Th XIII No. 45 Januari - Maret 1989, pp 1-10. Vayda, A.P. (1983), "Progressive Contextualization: Methods for Research on Human Ecology," in *Human Ecology*, 11, pp. 265-28.

Cirebon's location on the north-coast of Java entails some other implications. As one would expect, the sea has indeed provided a livelihood for the fishermen and sailors. Fish and other produces such as dried fish, *petis* (fish cream) and *terasi* (fish paste) are important trade goods. It is said that in ancient time *terasi* was also used as tribute. So many *rebon* or small shrimps were found in the area that according to literary tradition, this provided the name of the town and the region.²⁵ The nick name *Kota Udang* or Prawn Town is also used to refer to the city of Cirebon. In addition, the sea has certainly connected this region since long ago, not only with all corners of the archipelago but also with other nations and countries. Traders and other new comers from other parts of Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi as well as from China, India and other parts of Asia settled there.

Once, according to local literary traditions, the region was named *Caruban*, meaning the place where various people mixed and lived together and thus, the notion of melting pot takes on a wider spectrum.²⁶ The range of cultural elements it possibly accommodates becomes wider and goes beyond Javanese and Sundanese cultural boundaries, although these two cultural traditions are predominant.²⁷ In short, the geographic position has endowed the region with a richness of cultural traditions and access to continuous relations with other parts of the world. Currently, through the development efforts launched by the government and by the application of modern technology, especially in communications and transport, rural areas have been somewhat urbanised. Even the remote villages in the rural areas have now been linked with modern facilities. Paved streets, electricity, motor vehicles, radio, television and, to a much lesser extent, telephone, are within the reach of the common people; so are educational opportunities, at least at the primary level, and recently at junior secondary level. In some semi-urban dwelling areas, parabolic antenna to receive overseas T.V. broadcasts are used by well-to-do individuals. Urban-rural and coastal-inland differences in life-style and world-view therefore, have been narrowed but not been extinguished.

Geographic Descriptions

What is traditionally known as the Cirebon region was the former Dutch Residency (*Karesidenan*) of Cheribon which comprised the *Kotamadya* (Municipality) of Cirebon and the four *Kabupaten* (Regencies) of Indramayu,

²⁵ Cirebon means the water of tiny shrimps. It is a contraction of *Ci* and *rebon*; *ci* (or *cai*), in Sundanese, means water and *rebon* means tiny shrimps. The initial *ci* marks Sundanese names usually given to rivers: Cimanuk, Citarum, Ciliwung, etc; lakes or springs: Ciburuy, Cigugur, Cibulan, etc, and places associated with water: Cipanas, Cisaat, Ciawi, etc.

²⁶ The name *Caruban* and *Cirebon* represents an interesting linguistic phenomenon. Both are very close in pronunciation, used to refer to the same thing. But their lexical meaning, derivation and origin differ significantly. The first is Javanese the second is Sundanese.

²⁷ The influence of Chinese and Arab is quite marked in some forms of arts performance such as: the *Barong Sae* dance or the *Genjring* (flat drums) music.

Majalengka, Kuningan and Cirebon. The region covers an area of about 5,642,569 square kilometres and in 1990 had a population of about 4.5 million inhabitants. Lying on the border between West and Central Java, the region is bounded on the east by the Tegal regency in Central Java, by the sea on the north and the north-east, by Subang and Sumedang regencies on the west, and by the Ciamis regency on the south. Mount Ciremai, located to southwest of the city, is an active volcano. It is the highest mountain in West Java (3076 m) and the second highest on Java next to Semeru (3676 m). On its slopes there are a number of sulphur and hot water springs. The biggest are at Sangkanhurip (20 km south of Cirebon city) and at Gempol (10 km west of the city).

Administratively, the region of Cirebon is part of West Java province. Following the nationwide administrative system, each *kabupaten* and *kotamadya* has equal status. Each is under the West Java governor. Under the *kabupaten* and *kotamadya* are *kecamatan* (districts), each of which is headed by a *camat* (district chief). Some *kecamatan* have *kemantren*, headed by a *mantri*, a *camat's* assistant. A *kecamatan* usually consists of about 10 to 12 *desa* (villages) or *kelurahan*, the lowest level of administrative units. Each *desa* or *kelurahan* is headed by a *kades*, which stands for *kepala desa* or *lurah*, formerly known as a *kuwu* (chief). Although a *desa* is the lowest level of administration, it is not the smallest unit. A *desa* is usually divided into a number of *dusun* (hamlet), formerly *rukun warga* (R.W.), led by a *kadus*, which stands for *kepala dusun* (hamlet chief), who coordinates *rukun tetangga* (R.T. or neighbourhoods). An R.T. consists of a number of households; the maximum number is 70. It is the R.T., headed by a *ketua R.T.* (R.T. chief), which constitutes the smallest unit within the *desa*.

Kabupaten and Kotamady Cirebon, in which the field work was conducted, lies between longitude 108° 40' and 108° 50' east meridian, and latitude 6° 30' and 7° 00' south of equator. It is an area of 984.15 square kilometres, or about 2.15 per cent of the West Java province. From west to east it extends for 54 kilometres and from north to south 39 kilometres. In 1991 the *kabupaten* had a population of 1,524,267 inhabitants whereas the city had 254,486. The proportion of male and female inhabitants in both areas was about 49 against 51 per cent. The population density in the *Kabupaten* was 1,549 per square kilometre, whereas in the *Kotamadya* it was 6,812. The *Kabupaten* had 21 *kecamatan*, 8 *kemantren*, and 424 *desa*; the city had only 5 *kecamatan* and 22 *kelurahan*.

The northern part of Kabupaten Cirebon is mostly a flat and marshy plain of less than 20 metres height above sea level. This plain areas constitutes about 80 per cent of the kabupaten, while the rest, at its southern part, is hilly. Most of the lands are agricultural land where 62.88 per cent of its total is wet rice terrace (*sawah*). Beside rice, peanuts, corn, cassava, vegetables and sugar-cane are also grown. Only 17 per cent of the land is used for settlement, 12 per cent for plantations to grow coffee, tobacco, rubber and tea. The rest is reserved forest

(4 per cent) and other (5 per cent). As can be expected, most people (about 52 per cent) are engaged in agriculture. This sector is the largest contributor (32 per cent) to the local GDP.²⁸ Trade, which involves only 12 per cent of the population, contributes almost as much and is the second largest contributor to GDP next to agriculture.²⁹ The city of Cirebon is an important producer of cigarettes. The biggest factory is owned by the British American Tobacco (BAT) Company. Among the other produce of the *Kabupaten* and *Kotamadya* of Cirebon are machine tools, chemicals, textiles (including batik), cement, pottery, furniture, cane crafts, sugar, fish and crude oil. All these things make the people of Cirebon an urbanised and mobile society.

The field work strategy

With anthropological training in mind, initially I was inclined to employ a holistic approach to a society in a particular locality. I chose a village in Plered, a small urban settlement about seven kilometres west of the city of Cirebon, to concentrate my research. I intended to work intensively and rigorously within the village milieu. I took residence at Pak Shofie's, a devout family living in a partly renovated old house with a small prayer house, in *Desa Kalitengah*, three kilometres north of Plered. I tried to get settled there and started working.³⁰

As soon as I had started, I became dissatisfied. Neither in terms of socio-economic and political spheres nor in religion do the people of Plered belong to a self-contained society. They are dependent on, and affected by, many things that exist and occur in other places. For religious purposes, sometimes the people go many kilometres away from the village to *kramat* (shrines), at other times to the *kraton* (court). On one occasion they might go to a *pesantren* (a traditional boarding school), on another they might go across the village to attend a festival, a religious gathering or a *pengajian* (public speech). Still on another occasion they may invite a famous religious orator from in or outside Cirebon region to speak in the *desa* mosque. Considering the subject I would be dealing with, I

²⁸ Gunawan, W. (1992), *Industri Gula di Jawa Dalam Perspektif Model "Inti-Satelit," Kasus di Kabupaten Cirebon*, Bogor: Pusat Studi Pembangunan, IPB, p 4.

²⁹ Gunawan, W. et al. (1991), *Pembentukan Modal di Pedesaan, Kasus Kabupaten Cirebon*, Bogor: Pusat Studi Pembangunan, IPB, p. 9. (It is not stated, how much its contribution is to the local GDP).

³⁰ I thought Kalitengah was interesting in that, while most people are predominantly traditionalist, it has also become the centre of *Muhammadiyah*, the Modernists Muslim organisation, which began to appear in this *desa* in early 1960s. Here the Branch (*Cabang*), which coordinates the sub-branches (*Ranting*) of the surrounding *desa*, has its secretariat and has built a mosque. Traditionalist and Modernist tensions seemed to have been more apparent in Kalitengah than anywhere else in Cirebon and still appeared when I was there. Contrasting argumentations between the two sides around a number of practices often occurred where the traditionalists argued for keeping some practices, the Modernists argued against, even condemned, them. The Modernists are small in number but they tend to be militant and aggressive. The traditionalist, on the other hand, although sometimes militant, tend to be more defensive. Although claiming a larger number of members, through various gatherings, including formal meetings and rituals, I noticed that this organisation recruited no more than 300 supporters, including those from other surrounding *desa*. Compared with the population of *Desa Kalitengah*, which is more than 3000 inhabitants, Muhammadiyah is small but many of its members are rich.

felt it necessary to get a good understanding of what happened outside the village milieu in whatever the people of the village where I stayed were involved. Meanwhile it was impossible to find another village where all these things were available together at one place. In this situation, it was already clear that village traditions and religious life do not stand apart from other centres of tradition. What prevails in the village is confirmed in *kramat* or vice-versa; the roots of what occur both in the village and in *kramat* can be traced to *pesantren* and *kraton*; whereas, the sufistic nature and Islamic flavour of both the *kraton* and the *pesantren* is clearly evident in the village.

I was caught in a dilemma whether to concentrate on locality at the expense of losing sight of other relevant activities, or to study activities at the price of a probable insufficiency of a village-based ethnography. I decided to take the latter direction because I considered that relevance is more important than local detail. I initially wandered from one religious site to another throughout Cirebon, spending a couple of days or weeks at each place, leaving it for a couple of days or weeks and then coming again. All this was done to follow what was going on in the village, at *kramat* sites, in *pesantren*, *tarekat*, and at the *kraton* (Kanoman, Kesepuhan, Keceribonan and Kaprabonan). In the meantime I still kept my residence in Kalitengah as a base camp. At the same time I treated this village as a starting point to see an approximate model of the traditions of people's daily religious life. By so doing, and benefiting by being conversant in Javanese, Sundanese and the Cirebon vernacular (*Omong Cerbon*), I could establish good relationships and felt free to watch and get involved, as well as to observe and participate in many important activities as an outsider on some occasions, and as an insider on others.

According to the 1985 official statistics issued by the Department of Religious Affairs in Jakarta, there are at least 274 known *pesantren* throughout the region of Cirebon. They are scattered in various places, seven of which are in the *Kotamadya* (Municipality) and 91 in *Kabupaten* (Regency) of Cirebon. The rest are: 39 in Indramayu, 65 in Majalengka and 72 in Kuningan regencies. The latest figures for *pesantren* throughout the *kabupaten* and the city of Cirebon are also available at the local office of the Department of Religious Affairs. These show that there has been at least 30 per cent increase in *pesantren* in the last ten years; by 1992 the number of *pesantren* was 133.

I visited thirty *pesantren* before I decided to concentrate attention on only two. I stayed in both *pesantren*, first in Buntet, the biggest *pesantren* in Cirebon for quite a long time and only a couple of weeks in Tarbiyatul Banin. This is a newly established *pesantren* led by Ki Kuwu Nasir, who is a *kuwu*, a healer, a

businessman and a *kyai* at the same time.³¹ This *pesantren* specialises in educating pre-school and school age children.³² When I stayed in Buntet I benefited in knowing about *Tarekat Syatariah* and *Tarekat Tijaniyah*, two important Sufi orders in Cirebon. In this work I only present a description of Pesantren Buntet and the Sufi orders operating within this *pesantren* precinct. It was readily apparent that *pesantren* and Sufi orders, through *ngaji pasaran* (public lectures) and *tarekat* gatherings, are major sources for the diffusion of Islamic orthodoxy among the mass populace of villagers.

Islamic learning in Cirebon may neither be as old nor have reached a comparable degree as in Acch. But there is enough grounds to assume that traditions of Islamic learning in Cirebon are not something new. Ignoring the *Babad*, which tells us about Shekh Datu Kahfi who started a formal *pesantren* at Gunung Jati, and without taking into account the *pesantren* within the court circle, traditions of Islamic learning could have been in existence since the sixteenth century. The oldest *pesantren* in Cirebon are Pesantren *Pusaka* in the Lemahabang District and *Nurul Huda* in Cilimus, each of which claims to have been established in the second half of the seventeenth century. Currently the largest *pesantren* in Cirebon, Pesantren Buntet, claims to have been first established in 1750. It is difficult to check these claims historically. But Hoadley (1975) may be right in maintaining that the one element contributing to the high esteem enjoyed by Cirebon was its reputation as the region's most revered centre of Islamic piety and learning, a reputation dating from the era of Java's conversion to Islam.³³ In addition, Cirebon as a coastal city may accord with John's assertion that coastal city states had the potential to become "centres for the diffusion of Islamic ideas to the peasant interior."³⁴

Pijper describes Cirebon as a place where there are a large number of *kramat*.³⁵ According to the local authority at the local office of the Department of Education and Culture, the number of revered places known as *kramat* is more than 300. They are dispersed in many locations. I visited around forty of them but stayed a fairly long period at only some of them. Those places, mostly tombs of revered

³¹ Certainly, this person poses a problem to the Geertzian framework as to which category Kuwu Nasir belongs. Is he an *abangan* because he is a healer, a *santri* because he is a *kyai*, or a *priyayi* because he is a *kuwu*? There are many others like Kuwu Nasir in Cirebon.

³² During field work I visited this *pesantren* regularly at least once every two weeks to see my beloved son (who was 5 years old) staying in this *pesantren* to learn Qur'an for about 11 months. His stay, at least partly, contributed to my easy access of observing how a *pesantren* works. Although, after a fairly long adaptation, he enjoyed staying at this *pesantren*, I need to apologise for separating him at this early age from his beloved mother, sisters and peers in Jakarta.

³³ Hoadley, M.S. (1975), *History of the Cirebon-Priangan "Jaksa College", 1705–1735*, unpublished, Ph D dissertation, Cornell University, p.10.

³⁴ Johns, A.H. (1985), "Islam in Southeast Asia: Problems of Perspective", in Ibrahim, A., Siddique, S., and Husein, Y. (1985), *Readings On Islam in South East Asia*, ISEAS: Singapore, p.21

³⁵ Pijper, G.F. (1934), *Fragmenta Islamica* (Indonesian translation by Tujimah, 1987), Jakarta: U.I. Press. pp. 79–80.

figures of various standing, attract many visitors. One which is the most prominent is the *Astana Gunung Jati* grave complex, where Sunan Gunung Jati is buried. Visitors to this place come with various purposes and from various strata, ranging from ignorant laymen to famous scholars including *ulama* like Buya Hamka, from poor peasants to very rich Chinese businessman like Mas Agung, and from jobless individuals to famous politicians like former President Sukarno.³⁶ Until now, there are around one thousand people coming and going to visit this place every day. This number increases to five thousand or more on an ordinary Thursday evening (*Malam Jum'at*), twenty thousand or more on Thursday evening *Kliwon* (*Malam Jum'at Kliwon*), and hundreds of thousand at the time of festivals.

The second biggest *kramat* after Astana Gunung Jati, in terms of the number of visitors, is *Kramat Mbah Buyut Trusmi* at Trusmi. Next to Trusmi are *Lemah Tamba* at Lemah Tamba, *Nyi Mas Gandasari* at Panguragan, *Kramat Talun* at Cirebon Girang, and *Syekh Magelung* at Karangkandal, to mention only a few. After the Astana, it was to these places that I made my most frequent and longest visits. Unlike the Astana grave complex which stands under the direct control of the Cirebon *Kraton*, many other *kramat* stand more or less independently. Nevertheless, most of them in one way or another, still claim to be under the *wewengkon* (auspices) of either the *Kesepuhan* or *Kanoman* court, two of four *kraton* which still draw attraction to Cirebon.

Siddique has excelled herself in her study of the Cirebon *kraton*. By employing Berger and Luckman's sociological theories she has produced an interesting sociological analysis of the role of *kraton* in relation to the overall fabric of the Cirebonese social system.³⁷ My primary concern with the *kraton* was to explore whether there are traditions within the *kraton* circle which have some relation to village life. I found that some *kraton* traditions of ceremonies and feasts are in fact exemplary models for various feasts, including many forms of *slametan*, adopted by the people in the villages. In addition, through *Babad* and other literary traditions, the *kraton* are the major source of people's perception or knowledge about history and myths as well as ideal ethics and customs. In addition to this, *kraton-pesantren* differences can only be identified in terms of institutional and political orientation, not in basic Islamic orthodoxy.

While being sceptical about a syncretic argument on Javanese Islam, I am also rather sceptical about considering Islam in Arabia, Egypt or elsewhere as the sole standard by which to judge certain religious practices and traditions as Islamic or non-Islamic. I am convinced that it is necessary to consider a certain practice as Islamic if it is dominated by Islamic norms or spirit, regardless of its

³⁶ Buya Hamka refers to Prof Dr. H. Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (Hamka), former chairman of Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*).

³⁷ Siddique, S. (1977), *Relics of the Past?* Unpublished Ph D. dissertation, Bielfeld: Universitat Bielfeld.

origin. Take for example, the use of the *bedug* (large drum) and *kentong* (a hollowed log with slit hole in its centre) at the mosques and prayer houses in the villages, *kraton* and *pesantren*. They are Islamic in nature because they are used to inform people that the prayer time has come although their origin may be of the Hindu, Buddhist or some other tradition. Both of the objects and the sounds have become symbols of local Islamic identity.³⁸ This example can be expanded to many other objects and practices, including the *slametan*, Geertz's core *abangan* ritual which to him is indicative of animistic-Hindu-Buddhist syncretism.³⁹

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Study on this subject and especially in this area is still very rare. Pijper (1934) however, has thrown interesting light on aspects of Islam in Cirebon. In the introductory to his account of the rise of *Tarekat Tijaniyah*, he mentions specifically: (1) that the areas of Banten and Cirebon are marked by many *kramat* and many *pesantren*; (2) that the influence of *kyai* or religious scholars among the villagers is very strong; (3) that traditional village religiosity is still evident; (4) that the modernist Islamic movements such as *Muhammadiyah* and *Sarekat Islam* were unable to make inroads in these areas; (5) that only the conservative *Nahdlatul Ulama* was able to do so; (6) that it was in Banten and Cirebon where the people's religious piety was the most clearly apparent; (7) that strict observation of religious duties, particularly in performing prescribed daily prayers when the time comes, even while being at work, were characteristic of people's religious life in the villages. To make things clearer, he illustrated that such practices as unhesitatingly doing prayer at the road side or in the midst of a paddy field or anywhere else that made it possible to do so were common among the villagers.⁴⁰ This study contributes to highlighting and substantiating Pijper's assertions.

Among the older generation in Cirebon, the term *Jawa* (Java or Malay) is inseparable from Islam. Being *wong Jawa* or Javanese is necessarily to be a Muslim; *wong-Jawa* is distinct from *wong Cina* or Chinese and *wong Welanda* or Dutch not only in terms of race as their appearances are different, but mainly in terms of religion as exemplified by the following informant's statement:

“The Javanese are those whose religion is the religion of Java, that is Islam, worshipping Allah, praying at mosque; whilst the Chinese, their religion is the religion of Chinese worshipping Tao Peh Khong (idols),

³⁸ While a bell is used in the church, *bedug* and *kentong* are found in mosques or prayer houses.

³⁹ See Chapter Five.

⁴⁰ Pijper, G.F. (1987), *Fragmenta Islamica* (Indonesian translation), pp.80–81.

praying at temple; the Dutch, their religion is the Dutch religion, that is Christianity, worshipping Jesus, praying at Church.’⁴¹

Pijper's description about people's religious performances in Banten and particularly Cirebon which he calls “devout” but “still traditional”, and under the “strong influence of *kyai*”, is in marked contrast, for example, with what I found and experienced sometimes in Jakarta among fellow modern intellectuals, mostly modernist proponents. While discussing how Islam fits or can be fitted to modern times, that proposing the Muslims to do this and that in order that they become developed, arguing this and that will make Islam a moral force for modernisation, the call for prayer from the nearby mosque was treated as no better than the roar of motor vehicles in the nearby street. There was no sign that anyone in the group is being called upon to do a special (divine) duty. Some of us carelessly let prayer time pass and leave our duty undone although, according to our own standard of belief and knowledge, performing prayer is the core of being a good Muslim.

The situations are different, so are the contexts. My fellow intellectuals in the city have their own reasons, so do the villagers; both groups are more likely to claim themselves devout although they exhibit different expressions. Neither do I recall these contrasts to direct attention to traditional-modern issues. Rather, I want to recall to mind that now, in this era of globalisation, the largest segment of Indonesian society (around 90 per cent of the Muslims) keep professing and perceiving Islam differently from contemporary modernist intellectuals. Their form of Islam deserves our scrutiny.

It is already well known that many practices of traditional Islam in Java have been abandoned by the modernists-reformists, because according to them, these practices are not Islamic. On the other hand, the traditionalists see their modernists-reformists counterpart as attempting to deprive them of the meritorious practices which for them have real sacramental values. Currently, the major studies on Islam in Indonesia seem to favour the modernist-reformist discourse with tendencies to undermine the traditional one. To avoid showing contempt and to have sympathy for those who are caught in this undertow, some form of balancing attempt is worthwhile. Such an attempt has already appeared. Dhofier (1985) is a clear example. While pointing to the lack of serious study of traditional Islam, he criticises some writers who misjudged traditional Islam. He points out that such writers as Geertz, Samson and Noer who undermine traditional Islam by claiming it to be syncretic, Hindu-Buddhist, animistic,

⁴¹ Field notes. During field-work I heard such expressions several times from different people. This version is from Mang Tumari (67 yrs), a blind massaseur. Its original Javanese is: “Wong Jawa iku agamae agama Jawa, yaiku agama Islam, nyembae ning Gusti Allah, sembayange ning mesigit; ari wong Cina, agamae ya agama Cina, nyembae ning tempekong, sembayange ning klenteng; wong Welanda, agamae agama Welanda, yaiku agama Kresten, nyembae ning Nabi Isa, sembayange ning greja”.

conservative are, according to Dhofier, onesided, unfair and unwarranted because they tend to distort reality. Throughout his work he then shows how traditional Islam, particularly that which is maintained within the *pesantren* tradition, more specifically among the *Kyai*, has real vigour and vitality. It is because of its inherent vitality and dynamics that until now traditional Islam has never ceased from winning so many followers.⁴²

The notion of 'followers' is one thing that I wish to underline in that traditional Islam is not only adopted by knowledgeable individuals like *kyai*, but also by the mass populace, the 'followers', whose knowledge of the Scriptures vary considerably, from not knowing to being very knowledgeable. The former group, is called *wong bodo* (ignorant), the second group is the small number of *wong alim* or *wong pinter* (knowledgeable people).⁴³ In between, the largest in number, are people with rudimentary or general knowledge. Part of this group are devout (*wong santri*), another part are non devout (*dudu wong santri* or *bli santri*). This religio-devotional categorisation is further complicated by moral or ethical categorisation in relation to daily conduct, ranging from *wong bener* (right or good people) to *wong mlaun* (sinners). *Wong bener* refers to those who keep from *malima* (the five sins): *madat* (taking opium), *malang* (stealing), *maen* (gambling), *madon* (womanising) and *mabok* (drinking alcohol); whereas the latter (*wong mlaun*) refers to those who commit one or more of the *malima*. This categorisation does not at all reflect a static and clearcut grouping but rather is dynamic in that a sinner at one time can later be very devout, or vice versa. These categories stand independently from each other. *Alim/pinter-bodo* is a grouping based on mastery of knowledge; *santri-bli/dudu santri* is based on devotion to God especially regarding the prescribed prayers; *bener-mlaun* is based on individual conduct and behaviour. Ideally, a *wong alim* is both a *wong santri* and *wong bener* at the same time, but this is not automatically so. In theory, it is quite possible to find an *alim* who is neither *santri* nor *bener*, or *wong bodo* who is *santri* and *bener*. In reality however, the former rarely occurs, the latter occurs frequently.

My concern in this work is to delineate the forms of Islam to which these people claim to belong. Such claims are manifest in their participation and commitment in various religious activities which to them are part of their tradition, the very tradition to which I personally claim to belong. I was born, raised and nurtured within this tradition. Thus I shared the feelings, knowledge and experience of these villagers. With rudimentary knowledge I also participated in village

⁴² Dhofier, Z. (1985), *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi tentang Pandangan Hidup Kiyai*, LP3ES: Jakarta, pp.4–7.

⁴³ The term '*wong alim*' (Arabic: '*alim*', meaning knowledgeable individual, pl. '*ulama*') refers specifically to individuals with profound religious knowledge. *Wong pinter* (literally means clever people) refers to knowledgeable people in general in either religious or secular knowledge. The term *santri* is also applied to students of *pesantren* (traditional boarding school). Used in this way, its matching pair is *kyai* rather than *bli/dudu santri*. Thus, it is mostly used to refer to the student-teacher (*santri - kyai*), relationship. Going to a *pesantren* and becoming a *santri* (student at *pesantren*), in Cirebonese socio-linguistic context, implies a hope of growing into becoming a *wong santri* (devout individual). *Santri* are models of devout.

activities for the maintenance and preservation of the tradition. This work, therefore, represents a genuine observation from within. Being in this position, I was never trapped into what I would call an “elite cage” that I suspect many outside (especially foreign) observers usually find themselves in. Very often an outside observer becomes a “distinguished guest” who is given special treatment. In turn, this observer relies for much of his information on this elite host. In this situation, most elites, for their own interests, more often than not, temper the information they provide. In contrast, beside my being flexible as a participant observer, my informants are various individuals from various strata of the society, ranging from the *wong bodo* to very knowledgeable *kyai*; from the *wong mlaun* to *wong santri*; and from *priyayi* in the *kraton*, clerks and officials in the offices, to *wong beburu* (labourers), *wong tani* (farmers) and even people with uncertain occupations in the villages and streets; from the *wong sugih* (rich people) to the *wong mlarat* (poor people) and *wong bli duwe* (the have-nots). I was free to move in and out the mosques and prayer houses, sleep in *kramat* with pilgrims, participate in rituals and ceremonies, and mix amidst spectators. Despite the fact that my main concern was with the grassroots’ tradition, inclusion of some elites (*kyai*, government and *kraton* officials) among my informants was inevitably necessary because in many cases, the *kyai* and the *priyayi* are in fact, masters of this tradition. Information from them was, however, confined to something relevant or related to their own roles and views, not about something else, unless it was needed for verification purposes.

This study, differs from other studies that have already appeared. Although it is closely related, it differs for example from Dhofier's. Dhofier's excellent work is concerned with knowledgeable *kyai*. In contrast, my concern is with the grassroots. In some way, it may be regarded as an expansion of Dhofier's with a much wider spectrum involving not only their world view, but also beliefs and practices. This study also differs from those such as Geertz's. Geertz is an outside observer who supposedly worked within a tradition similar to mine. Unfortunately, I think, he misconceived the real situation from the start, misunderstood as he went through and misinterpreted at the end. He, for example, took only the modernists’ stance uncritically when he started working.⁴⁴ He speaks about *santri* but very little, if anything in his work, reflect *santri* traditions. Finally, he distorted part of what really occurs. In fact, except for a portion on Javanese *adat*, *The Religion of Java* reveals very little about Javanese religious tradition. Instead of seeing it as an account of the “religion” of Java, Geertz's stimulating work is much more concerned with ‘adat ritual’ and ‘politics’ in Java. It presents an interesting account about conflicting groups resulting

⁴⁴ Clifford Geertz, who studies Javanese Islam, takes the Modernists' stance and limits the scope of 'Islam' to only those things which the Modernists happen to approve of. This is why Hodgson (1974:551) refers to him as: “...caught to major systematic error.”

from the intrusion of Western type political parties into Javanese village life.⁴⁵ It is Geertz's narrating talents which wrap everything up to look like religion.

Just as traditional Islam maintained in *pesantren* has been misunderstood and distorted by some observers, so too has been the traditional Islam of the populace, the 'popular Islam'.⁴⁶ Some modernists, including ignorant or 'popular' modernists, to which I also belonged during my High School period,⁴⁷ stigmatise the performers of this form of Islam by derogatory references such as *jumud* (static), *taqlid* (to follow others uncritically), *bid'ah* (innovations), and *syirik-musyrik* (equating God with something). These stigma are launched merely because these people rarely question the authority of the *ulama*, especially the *kyai* who preserve the *pesantren* tradition. Ironically, at the same time and in the same manner, these (ignorant) modernists rarely question the authority of the modernist orators. They only believe that these orators are true and the others are wrong. The beliefs and practices of the traditionalists are alleged as idolatrous, mingling with them the beliefs and practices of pre-Islamic past, merely because these beliefs and practices do not conform with the modernists'.⁴⁸ Yet for those performers who happen to be incapable of enunciating their ideas, almost all these condemned practices find their roots and justification in formal Scriptures. While standing between those who condemn these practices and the performers of these practices, it is interesting to delineate what the performers hold from their point of view. It is also here that I would like to make a contribution to an understanding of Islam on Java.

Malinowski (1935) rightly implies that doing genuine field work can be difficult, more so is organising its results into a readable coherent work. Faced with the difficulty in sorting out the wide range of popular tradition, I shall present this work in nine chapters which I think properly represent the popular tradition of Islam that prevails in the area under study. After this Introduction, which I designate as Chapter One, follows Chapter Two which discusses the Cirebonese

⁴⁵ Seen in this way the title of its Indonesian version "*Abangan, Santri, Priyayi Dalam Masyarakat Jawa*" (Abangan, Santri, Priyayi in Javanese Society), Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, is much more appropriate than its original title, "The Religion of Java."

⁴⁶ I use the term 'popular Islam' to refer to the form of Islam which can generally be seen in the villages, *kramat* and other places especially outside the *pesantren* precincts.

⁴⁷ I was a fairly active member of "Pelajar Islam Indonesia (PII)" in Cirebon during my Junior High and in Bandung during my Senior High Schools. PII was an Indonesian Moslem Students Union, holding a Modernists' stance.

⁴⁸ Those attributes are commonly heard when modernists speakers refer in their speeches to the traditionalist's beliefs and ritual practices. Examples of such reference can be found in modernist's writings, one of which is Noer, D. (1973), *The Modernists Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900-1942*, Oxford University Press, especially p. 300. As a modernist, Noer has made a significant contribution in delineating the nature, rise and development of Modernism in Indonesia. Unfortunately, he was tempted to get involved rather deeply in an unnecessary and unbalanced judgement of another group (the Traditionalists) to which Noer himself did not belong. Repeating Geertz, his subjective and sometimes emotional judgements of the Traditionalists in favour of the Modernists marred a great deal on the value of his scholarly work.

belief system. It discusses peoples' basic concept of and belief in God, spiritual as well as physical beings and their position in relation to God. Chapter Three is concerned with the mythology and cosmology of Cirebonese traditions. Included in this discussion are the myths of creation, both the creation of the universe and the creation of human beings, as well as the origin of the Javanese and their religion, the idea of calamity, the afterlife world and Cirebonese numerology. The latter is the science of the meaning that involves manipulating numbers to speculate about bad or good times to do certain work.

Chapters Four, Five and Six deal with ritual practices, the many religious practices in which most people in Cirebon are frequently involved. Chapter Four is concerned with *ibadat*, formal religious devotion to God, officially prescribed by Islam as everyone's duty so long as he or she is a Muslim. It is the commitment to this *ibadat*, especially daily prayers, by which a Muslim is locally considered as devout or non devout. Although failure to fulfil this duty is religiously considered sinful, in reality, due to various reasons, many people take the risk of being in this condition. Chapter Five discusses many forms of ceremonial undertakings, none of which is a formal religious duty and thus, failure to perform such activities are not considered sinful despite the fact that by local social standards, such non-performance may cause a sort of embarrassment. These ceremonial undertakings, regarded as *adat*, for those who like to do them and can afford them, are considered religiously meritorious. Many people use them either to express their Muslim identity or to ensure harmonious relationships among themselves in the light of God's mercy. Many forms of *slametan* fall into this category and for this reason these undertakings are discussed in detail in this chapter. Chapter Six contains a discussion of the veneration of *wali* and holy men. This form of ritual belongs to what is considered *adat*. While the *adat* discussed earlier is more concerned with relationships among the living, the *adat* discussed in this chapter concerns relationships between the living and the deceased, also in the light of God's mercy. The overall tenor of *wali* and holy men veneration is the belief in possible merits, in this world and in the hereafter, of establishing relationships with the venerated dead. As God loves the pious, establishing a good relationship with the pious, dead or alive, is itself considered a pious act. The dead, with whom a relationship is more likely to bring merit, are individuals who were known to have excelled themselves during their lifetime in pious acts and in extra devotion to God. The best known individuals of this kind are *wali* and holy men. It is these persons who, by their piety, are venerated. The widely practiced veneration of *wali* and holy men requires *ziarah* (visits) to their tombs, known as *kramat* (shrines). It is not clear when all these traditions began to appear but certainly they are as old as Islam on Java.

Seen from a wider context, *ibadat* and *adat*, including *wali* veneration cannot be separated from each other. Rather, as we shall see, there are mutual

interrelationships because there are some forms of *adat* in the performance of *ibadat*, and ethically, there is a certain sense of *ibadat* in the *adat*. All these traditions, in one form or another, have been transmitted from generation to generation through various means and by various individuals. There are, however, certain institutions which are considered as most responsible for this transmission. These institutions are discussed in Chapter Seven which deals with *pesantren*, and Chapter Eight which deals with Sufi orders (*tarekat*). Both chapters lead to Chapter Nine, the conclusion of this thesis.

This work is neither perfect nor complete. There may be many things not included here. To the best of my effort, however, what I have put into this work constitutes the most essential parts of the manifestations of the Islamic tradition in Java and, in particular, in Cirebon. Hopefully, this work will provide a basis for further study and exploration as well as stimulate better understanding of the richness and intricacy of the long established tradition of Islam in Java.

Plate 1: Kraton Kesupuhan.



Plate 2: Pakuningrat S.H., Sultan Kesepuhan.



Plate 3: A business centre: a scene in the city of Cirebon.



Plate 4: A scene in the village.



Plate 5: Two children at play: a scene in the village.



Plate 6: Pak Shofie (right), his family and close kin.

