

“Global and local in Indonesian Islam”, *Southeast Asian Studies* (Kyoto) vol. 37, no.2 (1999), 46-63.

[Indonesian translation: "Islam lokal dan Islam global di Indonesia", *Tashwirul Afkar*, *Jurnal refleksi Pemikiran Keagamaan & Kebudayaan*, Edisi No. 14 (2003), 68-85.]

Martin van Bruinessen, "Global and local in Indonesian Islam",  
*Southeast Asian Studies* (Kyoto)  
vol. 37, no.2 (1999), 46-63.

## **Global and local in Indonesian Islam**

To foreign observers as well as to many Indonesians themselves, Indonesian Islam has always appeared to be very different from Islam at most other places, especially from the way it is practised in the Arabian peninsula. From Raffles to Van Leur, it has been claimed by colonial civil servants and missionaries that, especially in Java, Islam was not more than a thin veneer, underneath which one could easily discern an oriental world view that differed in essential respects from the transcendentalism and legal orientation of Middle Eastern Islam. The religious attitudes of the Indonesians, it was often said, were more influenced by the Indian religions (Hinduism, Buddhism) that had long been established in the Archipelago and the even older indigenous religions with their ancestor cults and veneration of earth gods and a plethora of spirits.

Two categories of residents of the Archipelago were singled out as exceptions to the syncretistic rule and as a security risk: the Arab traders and religious teachers (especially those claiming to be descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, the *sayyids*) and those Indonesians who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajis*), many of whom had changed their lifestyle, their public behaviour and their

political attitudes upon return. Both categories represented, or so it seemed, an incursion of Middle Eastern Islam into Indonesia. Several authorities have claimed that the *hajis* remained an alien element in Indonesian society. Even such an acute and relatively sympathetic observer as C. Snouck Hurgronje remarked in the late 19th century that when parents wished to scare disobedient children they threatened that they would call a *haji*. (The only human beings that were considered as even more frightening than *hajis* were European soldiers.)[\[1\]](#)

Here we have side by side two contrasting forms in which Indonesian Islam appeared to (European) outsiders and, no doubt, to many Indonesian Muslims as well: the local and the global. *Hajis* and *sayyids* most visibly represented the forces of globalisation that appeared to be breaking up local structures, patterns of thought, tastes and habits. Local Islam was, in the view of many observers, not really Islamic but at best superficially Islamicised. "Global" Islam was, in the late 19th century, not only perceived to be a less pleasant form of this religion but inherently threatening because of its transnational character. Pan-Islam was, in those years, a bogeyman taken very seriously by most colonial administrators.

*"Hindus" or local Muslims?*

In the mid-20th century, American social scientists made the now classic dichotomy of *santri* (more or less strictly practising Muslims)

and *abangan* (nominal Muslims with syncretistic beliefs and practices) cultural patterns, in Geertz' schema complemented with an elite variant of the latter, *priyayi*.<sup>[2]</sup> Following his reformist Muslim informants, no doubt, Geertz described many *abangan* (and *priyayi*) practices as non-Islamic and occasionally referred to them as Hindu. Ancestor cults and spirit beliefs with sacrificial meals as the chief form of ritual, magic and forms of mysticism that emphasised the ultimate unity of God and humanity, ascetic exercises in isolated places: all this seemed alien to Islam and closer to Hinduism or "spiritism".

The beliefs and rituals of the *abangan*, to be sure, are very much at variance with those of learned, scripturalist Islam, and especially with the textbook presentations of it. Few of the observers of Indonesian Islam who pontificated about its being so different from Arab Islam, however, had ever been to another Muslim country. What they compared was a living practice on the one hand and an abstraction devoid of social basis on the other. In fact, many of the practices typical of *abangan* Islam are also found in other parts of the Muslim world.<sup>[3]</sup> It is instructive to compare Geertz' description of *abangan* religion with the observations on everyday life of the Egyptian peasantry in the early 19th century made in another classic study, Lane's *Manners and customs of the modern Egyptians*. Some of the least Islamic looking Javanese practices appear to have been known to the Egyptians too.

As an example, take the following type of divination

practised by certain magical specialists (*dukun*) in Java after a theft or burglary in order to establish the identity of the perpetrator. The thumbnail of a young girl, who acts as the *dukun*'s assistant, is blackened with ink and she has to stare into it until she sees the features of a person. This is believed to be the perpetrator, and it is said that persons apprehended on the grounds of the girl's description usually admit their crimes. This practice would strike most Indonesianists as typically Indonesian, but the very same practice is also described in Lane's book.

Some of the magical practices that reformist Muslims frown upon as un-Islamic originate even more unambiguously from the Muslim heartlands. Much of the contents of the popular compendia of magic and divination, known as *primbon* or (in their more Islamicised form) *mujarrabat* booklets, derives directly from the works of the 12th-13th century North African Muslim writer, Shaykh Ahmad al-Buni.[\[4\]](#)

Many apparently local beliefs and practices thus appear to be part of a global cultural complex that one can hardly call anything but Muslim or "Islamicate".[\[5\]](#) Many contemporary Indonesian Muslims refuse to recognise them as Islamic because they conflict with modern conceptions of (universal) Islam. In many cases, however, they came to Indonesia as part of Muslim civilisation, even if they did not perhaps belong to the core of Muslim religion. They represent an earlier wave of Islamisation. It is misleading to speak of Islamisation as if this ever were a one-time event; it is a process that started, for

Indonesia, some time in the 13th to 15th centuries and that is not completed (and probably never will be). The pilgrimage to Mecca, the *hajj*, has played, until relatively recently, a crucial role in this process. Islam was first brought to Indonesia by Muslims of various regional and ethnic origins (the entire coastline from South Arabia to southern China appears to be represented). Once significant numbers of Indonesians had started making the pilgrimage, however, it was predominantly returning pilgrims and students who steered the process of Islamisation.

### *The hajj and the quest for spiritual powers*

The attraction that Mecca has exerted on Indonesians is in itself perhaps a part of traditional, pre-Islamic Indonesian religious attitudes and practices, notably the quest for spiritual powers through voyages to sacred places. Indonesians are better represented during the hajj than many other peoples who live nearer to Mecca.

There are very few authentic sources on the history of Islam in Indonesia before the 17th century, but from 1600 on we have documentation of persons of high positions making the *hajj*, staying in Mecca several years for study, and acquiring influential positions in the indigenous states, as judges and councillors to the ruler, upon their return. Thus for instance Abdurrauf of Singkel in Aceh, Yusuf of Makassar in Banten and somewhat later Arshad al-Banjari in

## Banjar.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the *hajis* did not represent an opposition to the indigenous authorities, to the contrary, they were generally honoured by the latter. They were also highly respected and sometimes feared because of the magical powers attributed to them. One of Java's court chronicles, the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, notes that at the time of the nine saints who reputedly Islamicised Java, the Javanese were in search of supernatural sources of martial prowess (*kadigdayan*). Islam appeared as just one more such source, and Mecca as the most numinous spots where the appropriate spiritual exercises might result in the acquisition of important additional powers. This may in fact be why we find so many persons from court circles making the pilgrimage.

In fact, there are indications that these persons considered some of the knowledge they had acquired as something not to be divulged to the common public. It was by spiritual and magical superiority that the rulers legitimated themselves and maintained their dominant positions. The magically effective knowledge was in the first place the practical mysticism of the sufi orders (*tarekat*). Each of these orders had its own specific exercises — recitation, breathing, bodily positions, meditations — which sufficiently resembled the type of exercises that the Javanese had been acquainted with. Several sufi orders had a number of Indonesian followers from at least the early 17th century on, among the elite, but as far as the evidence allows us to judge, it was only in the second half of the 18th century

that orders like the Qadiriyya and the Rifa`iyya begin to find a mass following among lower strata of the population. Until that time, they appear to have been carefully reserved for court circles.[\[6\]](#)

To many Indonesians, Islam must initially have appeared as yet another source of powers, additional to the ones that were already available, not replacing them.[\[7\]](#) Elements of Islam or Muslim culture were gradually incorporated into Javanese practices. Among the various food offerings for ancestors and other spirits that we find enumerated by the late 19th century there is one named *ngrasulaké*, a Javanese compound based on the Arabic word *rasul*, "Prophet".[\[8\]](#) Similarly we find various techniques associated with one *tarekat* or another entering popular magical and devotional practices, almost imperceptibly Islamicising existing local practices. Some of these mystical techniques must themselves have been borrowed from other religious traditions and may have been easily adopted by Indonesian Muslims because they were already familiar. Whatever their origins were, however, they were incorporated in a Muslim system of meaning and therefore cannot be called non- or pre-Islamic.

One Muslim mystical sect in Java teaches a form of meditation based on the perception of coloured lights that is very similar to Tantric meditation techniques known in Java's Hindu-Buddhist past. As I have attempted to show elsewhere, however, this technique may in fact represent a remnant of an early incursion of the Kubrawiyya sufi order, with which some Javanese appear to have become acquainted in Mecca

in the 16th century.[\[9\]](#)

A practice associated with the Rifa`iyya sufi order, i.e. piercing the body with sharp metal objects (*dabbus*) to show one's complete surrender to God (and God's protection, due to which no harm comes from the act), was introduced into many parts of the Archipelago. It has been assimilated to pre-existing Indonesian invulnerability techniques and was thereby somewhat transformed: in *debus* (as the practice is commonly called in Indonesia), sewers and swords do not pierce the skin, due to the protective powers of the prayers recited. All these prayers are unambiguously Islamic.[\[10\]](#)

### *Two dimensions of Islamic reform in Indonesia*

Each consecutive generation of pilgrims returning from Mecca has tended to reject the local forms of Islam existing at home in their days in favour of the supposedly "purer" Islam that they had encountered and studied in Arabia. Even certain beliefs and practices that had also come from the heartlands of Islam at an earlier time were perceived to be aberrations that had to be reformed. The reform of Islam has been an ongoing process through the centuries, and each generation of new returnees from the Hijaz has brought forth a new wave of reform.

For the sake of analysis, we may distinguish two independent components of reform (although in real life they may be hard to separate from each other). The most important of these was the effort

to bring belief and practice of the Indonesian Muslims more in line with those of the Muslims of Arabia, especially those in the Holy Cities, whose religion was assumed to be purer and more authentic. The struggle against indigenous rituals, beliefs and values has been a chief concern of reformists.

The second component, the importance of which has tended to be exaggerated by outside observers, is derivative of the various reformist and revivalist movements in the Middle East, from the Wahhabiyya through the Salafiyya to more recent movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and even the Iranian revolution. The Islamic ideas that successive generations of hajis and students encountered in the Holy Cities were not the same. Debates taking place in Mecca or elsewhere in the Muslim world impacted on Indonesia and were replicated there.

It was certainly not the case, however, that returning *hajis* were exclusively, or even primarily, agents of puritan, *shari`a*-oriented reform in Indonesia. All sorts of developments in the Muslim world were mediated by the same channel. Thus the typically Indian sufi order Shattariyya, flourishing in the subcontinent in the 16th and 17th centuries and known for its easy accommodation with local practices, reached Indonesia by way of Medina. Some of the *hajis* returning from Mecca in the first half of the 20th century were *shari`a*-minded reformists, determined to purge Indonesian Islam of "alien" practices; others, however, brought mostly magical lore back from Arabia. Both

existed side by side.

Indonesia was not a passive recipient in this process — the new influences were incorporated into existing religious and cultural patterns and thereby to some extent modified — but it was a recipient, not an active actor in these global exchanges. Well into the 20th century, a centre-periphery model with Mecca and Medina as the centre and Indonesia as the periphery adequately represents Indonesia's relationship with the world of Islam. Other peripheral regions generated global influences which, as said, also reached Indonesia through the Holy Cities. Indonesian Islam produced its own specific cultural forms but these at best spread within the region and probably never made an impact in the wider world of Islam. It is only in the case of the Arab communities settled in the Archipelago that one can speak, if one so wishes, of Indonesian influences on non-Indonesian Islam.

Individual Arab traders, mostly from Hadramaut, had been coming to the Archipelago for many centuries. Many of them also acted as religious teachers, representing another major source of "global" Islam. The *sayyids* among them, especially, had a great impact on the devotional attitudes of Indonesian Muslims, which were partly directed towards themselves as *ahl al-bayt*, in whom the Prophet's blood flowed. Living in close interaction with the Indonesian Muslims and being at the heart of their religious lives, the resident Arabs could not help but be affected by their religious attitudes (if only because, in order to make an impression on the

Indonesians, they had to emphasise those aspects of religion that appealed most to the latter).

*The place of the shari`a in Indonesian Islam and anti-shari`a reactions*

Contrary to what has often been supposed, it was not only mysticism that came to Indonesia in the early phases of Islamisation. Among the oldest Indonesian manuscripts existing, brought back by European merchants ships around 1600, we find several *fiqh* works in the Javanese language, showing that at that early age the Law (*shari`a*) was taken seriously, studied and applied in at least some indigenous circles. The great Indonesian Muslim authors of the 17th century, Nuruddin al-Raniri and `Abdurra'uf al-Sinkili (al-Fansuri) have primarily been studied as mystics but they also wrote *fiqh* works, which probably served more direct practical needs. The various indigenous states had their *muftis* and *qadis*, and law courts where the *shari`a* was in many cases implemented besides, and usually in harmony with, the rulers' edicts and customary regulations.

In the 19th century, however, the situation has changed: colonial rule had become (or was becoming) effective in many parts of the Archipelago, and many of the indigenous states had lost their independence. We see then the emergence of an apparently new type of religious leader, not at the court but in the periphery and often acting or speaking in opposition to the courts and the "Kompeni", i.e.

the Dutch administration. This is the period when *hajis* appear as radical and alien elements in colonial society, potential or actual rebels delegitimising the colonial order and the social hierarchy of indigenous society.

It is in this period that we also encounter for the first time, in certain circles, a hostile response towards Islamic reform. The *hajis* are no longer universally respected persons but gradually turn into scarecrows with which parents can threaten their children. The responses of "syncretistic" Javanese Muslims towards late 19th century would-be reformers range from apologetics to an outright rejection of Islam as such.

The *Aji Saka* tale as recorded in East Java in the late 19th and early 20th century may be read as an apologetic response, a refutation of the *hajis'* claims and an affirmation that the Javanised form of Islam, to which most Javanese still adhered, was far superior to its Arabian variant. Aji Saka, the culture hero to whom the Javanese attribute the invention of their culture, is in this late version of the myth depicted as a student of the occult sciences who had first absorbed all Knowledge of the Javanese earth god Antaboga and then went to Mecca to perfect his understanding under the guidance of the prophet Muhammad. He associated there with Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman and Ali as his peers. Meeting the angel `Azazil (one of the names of the fallen angel, Satan), he forced the latter to teach him his own special magic skills. When the prophet Muhammad saw that Aji Saka had learned all there was to learn, he gave him a *kropak* and a

*pangot* (a palm leaf book and a knife for writing on palm leaf, symbols for Javanese scripture) as a farewell gift and sent him to Java to spread his knowledge. Javanese civilisation, this myth appears to affirm, already included all the prophet's teachings besides those of other great teachers, so why should this be given up for what the *hajjis* claimed they had learned from latter-day Arabs?[\[11\]](#)

A more hostile attitude towards *hajjis* and towards Islam as such is found in the Javanese literary texts of the second half of the 19th century, *Serat Dermagandul* and *Suluk Gatoloco*. Unlike earlier Javanese works, that presented Islam as an integral part of Javanese civilisation, these works attack Islam as alien and far inferior to Javanese Knowledge (*ngelmu*).[\[12\]](#) These texts appear to represent the response of a section of the indigenous elite that felt under threat: threatened on the one hand by the colonial state that had taken their independent power away from them even though they had become its allies, and on the other hand by Muslim teachers who no longer took the legitimacy of their positions for granted. This legitimacy could ultimately only be defended with reference to the traditional social order that was associated with the pre-Islamic kingdoms of the Archipelago, most famously Majapahit.

In the early 20th century, members of the Javanese elite who were in contact with Freemasonry and Theosophy — these were the only European-founded organisations that accepted Indonesians and Chinese as equal members — embarked upon a search for ancient wisdom in the pre-Islamic past. Sympathising European scholars and

administrators, who were enamoured with oriental civilisation (and, in most cases, very negatively disposed towards Islam), stimulated this nostalgia for a past golden age and the longing for a revival of indigenous spiritual values. Local prophets and seers, such as there had always been, gained a higher degree of social and intellectual respectability, as the representatives of a living spiritual tradition. In the 1930s, several of these visionaries organised their followings into something much like a Muslim Sufi order, with standardised rituals and a form of initiation. These were the first *kebatinan* (Javanese mysticism) movements, the most formalised indigenist response to Islamisation.

During the first decades of Indonesia's independence, the *kebatinan* movements strove for official recognition as religious and philosophical systems on a par with the officially recognised religions (Islam, Catholic and Protestant Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism). Muslim leaders fiercely resisted these efforts, which they perceived as an attempt to undermine (reformist) Islam and to empower the *shirk* and *bid`a* of local practices. [\[13\]](#)

### *Adat versus Islam*

In many parts of the Archipelago, including those that had been Muslim for a long time, it was not abstract Muslim Law that was decisive in all matters concerning marriage, divorce, inheritance, economic transactions, but local custom, commonly known as *adat*.

The first person to draw attention to this was Snouck Hurgronje, who on the basis of this observation urged the Dutch Indies administration to reform legal practice. Whereas court cases involving Indonesian Muslims were commonly adjudicated according to Islamic (Shafi'i) law, Snouck advised that primacy should be given to *adat*, and that the *shari`a* should only be applied where, and to the extent that, it had found acceptance and been incorporated into local custom (this came to be known as the 'reception theory').

This was the beginning of a systematic attempt on the part of the Dutch authorities to compile handbooks of *adat* law for each cultural zone, meant for practical use in the courts. This process of codification turned *adat* into something that it had, in my view, never been before: a fixed and rigid system instead of a fluid, ever-changing and negotiable practice. Whereas local Muslims had rarely perceived a contradiction between *adat* and Islam, the codification turned *adat* into a system competing with the *shari`a*, and heavily favoured by the Dutch.

The result was a lasting disaffection of committed Muslims with *adat* law and its prerogatives, seen as a deliberate Dutch policy to weaken Islam, a policy continued by post-independence Indonesian governments. *Adat* as codified by Dutch scholars appears often to reflect the interests of the traditional authorities. In several regions there have been conflicts over *adat* and Islam that appear in reality to have been based on socio-economic conflicts between different groups in society. In practice, however, *adat* and *shari`a* have often

co-existed without overt conflict, and many Indonesian Muslims are convinced that their *adat* is in agreement with the *shari`a*.

The most conspicuous differences between the two legal and moral systems concern the position of women, *adat* being in general more favourable to women than the *shari`a* regulations. This has been most clearly so in the case of the Minangkabau (West Sumatra), the one ethnic group with a matrilineal system of inheritance, but elsewhere in the Archipelago too, women have traditionally played more prominent roles than Islamic scripture allows for. Not surprisingly, it was especially in West Sumatra that local custom has repeatedly come under attack by Muslims from the region who had studied in Arabia and who had come to consider local *adat* as incompatible with Muslim law.[\[14\]](#)

It would be wrong to assume that *adat* represents pre-Islamic custom or is somehow non-Islamic. Even though many customs are believed to originate with distant, and therefore implicitly non-Muslim ancestors, the impact of the Islamisation process on *adat* — which, as I believe, always was a fluid and adaptable, imperceptibly changing system of norms and regulations before it was codified — should not be underestimated. It is significant that even the term *adat* is an Arabic borrowing and that it is the same term that is used elsewhere in the Muslim world to refer to custom that has no explicit Islamic legitimation. *Adat* was (and is) an integral part of the Islamicate cultures of the Archipelago, not a fortress of resistance against Islamisation. As was argued in a previous section, contact

with the Arabian heartlands of Islam resulted in the adoption not only of elements of "scripturalist" Islam into the Indonesian Muslim cultures but also of a fair amount of Arabian *adat*.

The state ideology of Pancasila is in many respects a sort of *adat* on the national scale, combined with a set of *kebatinan* beliefs enlarged into an ideology. Like *adat*, Pancasila is not inherently in conflict with Islam, and some elements in it may in fact have Islamic roots. Committed Muslims have at various times in the history of the Republic been at loggerheads with the government over the interpretation and imposition of Pancasila and the legitimisation of *kebatinan*. Like *adat*, Pancasila is inherently non-universal, in spite of occasional claims by people close to Suharto that it deserves being propagated as an example for the whole world.

*Santri and abangan: inherently antagonistic?*

Relations between *santri* and *abangan* have not always been as antagonistic as they were in the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, one wonders whether the apparent existence of the three patterns *santri*, *abangan* and *priyayi* was not simply an artefact of the political struggle between the Muslim parties (Masyumi, NU), the Communist Party and the nationalist PNI of those years. A few decades earlier, the first political mass movement of the Indies, Sarekat Islam, had mobilised *santri* as well as *abangan*.

The polarisation of the 1960s ended in the mass politicicide of

1965-66. The following two decades witnessed a remarkable Islamisation of the nominal Muslims ("*abangan*" and "*priyayi*"), a process that Indonesians sometimes refer to as "*santrinisasi*". One contributing factor to this process was the political situation. The fear of being accused of atheism and therefore communism made many *abangan* turn to Christianity or Hinduism and, in the end in larger numbers, to Islam. In the beginning perhaps a formality only, the conversion led in due time to a wholesale change in religious attitude; even formerly leftist political prisoners became practising Muslims.

There were, however, other factors as well that led to the decline of *abangan* practices as well as *kebatinan* movements and the rise of scripturalist Islam. Most important among them was the social and economic transformation of Indonesian society that took place during those years. Communities that had been relatively closed were opened up, mobility increased, numerous people migrated to the cities (even if only temporarily in many cases). The country was opened up to foreign capital and tourism and to diverse cultural influences, many but by no means all of them Western. Mass education widened people's horizons and gave unprecedented numbers access to written texts. One effect was the acceleration of secularisation, but at the same time these developments also strengthened scripturalist Islam. As a Muslim, a person could feel himself a participant in modern urban civilisation in a way an *abangan* never could.

Under Indonesia's New Order, brought about by General Suharto and his closest advisers, the country's relative economic and cultural isolation from the West came to an end. Great foreign-assisted investments in infrastructure (schools, roads, telecommunication) under the supervision of the World Bank and the IMF led to significant economic growth and firmly integrated the Indonesian economy into the capitalist world system. The country also became much more open to foreign cultural influences that it had been until then, due to increased foreign travel, study abroad, the presence of large expatriate communities, and of course radio and television. The process of globalisation had, as elsewhere, superficially the form of Westernisation or, more precisely, Americanisation, and in fact much of the middle class that emerged in this period deliberately adopted what it perceived as Western lifestyles. In reality, however, cultural flows were much more complex; Japan, Singapore, India and the newly affluent Arab Gulf countries exerted a much greater influence on Indonesian economy and culture than is apparent at first sight.

The ongoing Islamisation was part and parcel of this complex globalisation process. By this time, Islamising influences no longer reached Indonesia from a single centre, as had long been the case. Besides Mecca (where traditionalist learning was precariously surviving under Wahhabi rule), Cairo had from the early 20th century on become a source of great influence, where increasing numbers of Indonesians studied at al-Azhar or one of the other universities. It was especially reformist inclined persons who went to Cairo, attracted by

the fame of Muhammad `Abduh and Rashid Rida. By the 1970s, however, al-Azhar had become a highly conservative institution, which many Indonesians found more backward than their own *pesantren*. They were also in contact, however, with more radical Islamic thought such as that of the Muslim Brothers. The works of Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, translated into Indonesian and widely distributed, became extremely influential.[\[15\]](#)

The number of centres of Islamic dissemination impacting on Indonesia multiplied. An early centre was British India; the Ahmadiyah movement sent its first missionaries to Indonesia in the mid-1920s, and these had some success in spreading modernist Islam among Java's traditional elite. Indonesia's present Ahmadiyah communities maintain contacts with the centres at Lahore and Qadian. The Lucknow-based traditionalist education centre Nadwatul `Ulama regularly attracts a number of Indonesian students (and the works of the leading ulama of this centre are widely available in Indonesian translations). After the Islamic revolution, Iran made a significant impact (although the first contacts with its modern Shi`i thinkers were made through English and Arabic translations).

The centre-periphery model, in which the periphery, i.c. Indonesia, evolves under the influence of a dominant centre, was long an adequate model to explain the process of ongoing Islamisation. By the 1970s, however, there were not only more centres, but the influences had also become more diffuse, and a network model

represents the flow of influences more adequately. One did not have to go to Mecca or Cairo to find stimulating Islamic ideas. Students of medicine or political science at an American university were as likely to emphasise their Muslim identities and to encounter fascinating new Islamic thought. Journals and books, in such international languages as English and Arabic or in Indonesian translations, became the major vehicles of Islamic dissemination.

During the Sukarno years, Islamic discourse and action in Indonesia had been dominated by the large Muslim political parties, Masyumi and NU. Under Suharto, the dominant discourse — dominant at least to some extent because of official sponsorship — was that of the so-called "renewal" (*pembaharuan*) movement that emerged from the Muslim students' association HMI, with Nurcholish Madjid as its most eloquent and charismatic spokesman. This movement distinguished itself by its rejection of primordial Muslim politics — famously summed up in the slogan "Islam yes, partai Islam no!" — and by its tolerance towards other religions, which it did not see (at least Christianity) as erring but as valid alternative ways of worshipping God. Impatient with the externalities of religion, the *pembaharuan* group emphasised that Muslims had to seek the essence of God's message to the Prophet and not content themselves with a formal and literal reading of scripture. This inevitably necessitated sensitivity to context — the context of revelation as well as the context where the message had to be put into practice. Nurcholish' thought was initially influenced by American sociology of religion and liberal theology, later he did a doctorate in Islamic Studies in

Chicago under the Pakistani neo-modernist scholar Fazlur Rahman.

More explicitly than other Indonesian Muslims, the *pembaharuan* movement saw "Indonesian-ness" as a legitimate dimension of their own Muslim identities. The concept of a genuinely Indonesian Islam, which was anathema to most modernist Muslims (who insisted on Islam's universality), strongly appealed to them.[\[16\]](#) Although Nurcholish and his friends took care to distance themselves from *kebatinan*, which most Muslim modernists considered as un- or even anti-Islamic, they held a positive view of Pancasila, which they associated with the idea of an authentically Indonesian Islam.

In the course of the 1970s and 1980s, the *pembaharuan* group managed to gradually entrench themselves within the professional, bureaucratic and business elites. Their ideas received generous press coverage and patronage because they gave an Islamic legitimisation to the New Order development effort. This group constituted the core of an emerging Muslim middle class, both self-consciously middle class and self-consciously Muslim.

Very similar religious ideas, if not even more liberal, were developed by Abdurrahman Wahid and his circle. Wahid never belonged to the *pembaharuan* group, although he often met with them. He had a very different background, not coming from a Muslim modernist family but from the elite of the traditionalist Muslim organisation Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and combining a modern secular education with a traditional Islamic one. Staying close to traditionalist

discourse on the one hand, he formulated even more daring ideas about equal rights for women and religious minorities, secularism, national integration and democratisation than the *pembaharuan* group did. Since becoming NU's chairman in 1984 he has stimulated unprecedented intellectual activity in traditionalist circles.

Another person deserving special mention is Munawir Syadzali, who was Minister of Religious Affairs from 1983 to 1993. Though not a member of the *pembaharuan* group, he was close to their ideas and acted as their protector. Moreover, he had the courage to formulate ideas that few Indonesian Muslims had dared to say aloud before. He toured the Islamic universities of the country with a lecture about "verses of the Qur'an that are no longer relevant" and radical proposals for a contextual interpretation of the Qur'an (with an interesting remark about women's share in inheritance).<sup>[17]</sup> Munawir also spoke of the need to formulate a specifically Indonesian *fiqh* — a very daring affirmation of the local as a creative adaptation of the global. He presided over efforts to codify Muslim law and jurisprudence.<sup>[18]</sup>

It is interesting, though not really surprising, to note that it was precisely the most cosmopolitan and intellectually sophisticated Muslims who spoke out in defence of an Indonesian Islam. The most uncompromising rejection of this concept and identification of true Islam with that of the global networks was to be found among those Islamic modernists who were (at least until the late 1980s) disaffected

with Suharto's rule and the New Order.

*Other voices: political dissent and "fundamentalism"*

The most vehement critics of the *pembaharuan* movement, especially of Nurcholish himself, were to be found in former Masyumi circles.

The party Masyumi had been dissolved in 1960 after its participation in an abortive regionalist rebellion against Sukarno; in spite of their welcoming the fall of Sukarno and the destruction of the Communist Party, Suharto never allowed its leaders to play a prominent role in political life again. The party board transformed itself into an organisation for Islamic dissemination (*dakwah*), the Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia, and occasionally spoke out as a political critic from the margin. Al-Banna's Muslim Brothers appear to have served as the model that the Dewan wished to emulate; it always refrained, however, from open political opposition and never openly embraced Sayyid Qutb's more radical views. The Dewan Dakwah established close contacts with (and received financial support from) the Saudi authorities. Mohamad Natsir, the chairman of both Masyumi and Dewan Dakwah, became a vice-president of the World Muslim League (*Rabitat al-'Alam al-Islami*), and the Dewan Dakwah came to represent the conservative, neo-fundamentalist form of Islam emanating from Riyad.

The leaders of the Dewan Dakwah took offence at many of the ideas represented by the *pembaharuan* movement: its stand against Muslim political parties, its legitimation of the New Order, its

defense of secularisation, its openness towards other religions, and its respect for local forms of Islam.[\[19\]](#) Dewan Dakwah authors polemicised against *kebatinan*, against Christianity and Judaism. Their world view became increasingly one in which Islam was under threat from a new Christian Crusade and international Jewish conspiracies. Following the Iranian revolution, Shi'ism (which appealed strongly to Indonesian Muslim students because of its perceived revolutionary potential) was added to the list of threats; the Dewan published a whole series of anti-Shi'a tracts and books.

The Dewan Dakwah represented the politically uncompromising wing of Indonesian Muslim "modernism" (as Indonesians commonly term it) or "puritanism" (a more appropriate term). Its major objective was to purge ritual and belief of all elements that do not derive from the Qur'an and *hadith*. It found neither traditional practices nor liberal new interpretations acceptable and, as said, increasingly drifted towards the Hanbali-Wahhabi views of its Saudi sponsors.[\[20\]](#)

One remarkable effect of globalisation on thought and discourse in the Dewan Dakwah and related groups is the emergence of a virulent anti-Semitism. This is a new phenomenon in Indonesian Islam, that has no precedent apart from a single foreign-inspired journal article published during the Japanese occupation. It is through Saudi and Muslim Brothers contacts, as well as through Kuwait and Pakistan, that a wide range of anti-Semitic literature has become

available. Much of this literature (which includes at least three different versions of the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*) is of Russian, German or American origins, and it was translated into Indonesian from the Arabic. Indonesia has no Jewish population, apart from a handful of families of European or Ottoman Jewish descent, but like elsewhere that has not prevented the spread of anti-Semitism. The anti-Semitic literature appears to be used as a weapon in the struggle against all forms of cosmopolitanism: Chinese, "*pembaharuan*" or otherwise.[\[21\]](#)

Muslim anti-Semitism is usually associated with the Palestine-Israel question, and this is also the case in Indonesia. It has its strongest reverberations among those Muslims who profess international Muslim solidarity, notably the Committee for Solidarity with the World of Islam (KISDI), which became conspicuously active as a pressure group during the 1990s. Apart from organising demonstrations in support of the Palestinians (but against the peace process), KISDI mobilised mobs against newspapers who published articles it did not like. Towards the end of Suharto's rule it became increasingly openly anti-Christian and anti-Chinese, considering Indonesia's Chinese business community and Christian bureaucrats as part of a world-wide Jewish conspiracy to destroy Islam.

### *Conclusion*

The question that 19th-century observers asked themselves — and usually answered in the negative because Indonesian Islam was

"different" — is being raised again. Is Indonesian Islam going the same way as Islam in the Middle East, is it following a global "fundamentalist" trend? Abdurrahman Wahid, the prominent liberal Muslim leader, has repeatedly raised the spectre of "Algerian" developments, implicitly accusing groups as the Dewan Dakwah and KISDI of striving for an Islamic state, in which minorities will be deprived of equal rights and liberal voices will be silenced.

It is true that radical, often intolerant political Islam was increasingly prominently present in Indonesia during the 1990s. Ironically, however, its successes were not primarily due to global trends but to Indonesia's internal political dynamics. It was Suharto's turning against some of his erstwhile Chinese and Christian allies and co-opting a large part of the educated Muslim population through the establishment of the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI) that strengthened radical political Islam. The unstable situation in the period leading up to and immediately following Suharto's involuntary resignation offered various "fundamentalist" groups allied with various political and military factions favourable conditions for further strengthening their positions.

The elections of June 1999 have meanwhile shown that radical political Islam does not have much of a constituency in Indonesia. Indonesian Muslims voted overwhelmingly for parties that were not exclusively Muslim and that emphasised an Indonesian identity that incorporates ethnic and religious diversity.

This is not to say that Islam is retreating from the public sphere and that globalisation reins in Islamisation. The visibility of Islam and public performance of Islamic ritual go on increasing. In the present phase of globalisation, however, a wide range of Islamic influences have become available, and Indonesians eclectically pick what pleases them. Unlike in the past, when Meccan Islam represented the example to be emulated, there is not a single authoritative form of Islam. Individuals enter into networks that link them with Muslim movements in various parts of the globe, they read books and journals reflecting a wide range of Muslim thought, they try out various Muslim life-styles. The various global influences appear not to be leading to a homogeneous "Middle Eastern" type of Islam but to an ever growing variety of ways of being Muslim.

## **Bibliography**

Mona Abaza, *Indonesian students in Cairo*. Paris: Cahiers d'Archipel, 1994.

Taufik Abdullah, "Adat and Islam: an examination of conflict in Minangkabau", *Indonesia* 2 (1966), pp. 1-24.

Philippus van Akkeren, *Een gedrocht en toch de volmaakte mens: de Javaanse Suluk Gatolotjo* (Ph.D. thesis, Utrecht, 1951).

Benedict Anderson, "The Suluk Gatoloco", *Indonesia* No. 32

(October 1981), 109-150, No. 33 (April 1982), 31-88.

Martin van Bruinessen, "Kitab Kuning: Books in Arabic script used in the pesantren milieu. Comments on a new collection in the KITLV library", *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 146 (1990), 226-269.

Martin van Bruinessen, "*Pesantren and kitab kuning: continuity and change in a tradition of religious learning*", in: Wolfgang Marschall (ed), *Texts from the islands. Oral and written traditions of Indonesia and the Malay world [Ethnologica Bernica, 4]* (Berne: University of Berne, 1994a), pp. 121-145.

Martin van Bruinessen, "Najmuddin al-Kubra, Jumadil Kubra and Jamaluddin al-Akbar: Traces of Kubrawiyya influence in early Indonesian Islam", *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 150 (1994b), 305-329.

Martin van Bruinessen, "Yahudi sebagai simbol dalam wacana Islam Indonesia masa kini" ("The Jews as symbols in contemporary Indonesian Muslim discourse"), in: *Spiritualitas baru: Agama dan aspirasi rakyat* (Yogyakarta: Dian/Interfidei, 1994c), pp. 253-268.

Martin van Bruinessen, "Shari`a court, tarekat and pesantren: religious institutions in the Banten sultanate", *Archipel* 50 (1995), 165-199.

Martin van Bruinessen, "Islamic state or state Islam? Fifty years of state-Islam relations in Indonesia", in: Ingrid Wessel (Hrsg.),

*Indonesien am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg: Abera-Verlag, 1996), pp. 19-34.

Edmond Doutté, *Magie & religion dans l'Afrique du nord* (Alger: Adolphe Jourdan, 1908).

G.W.J. Drewes, "The struggle between Javanism and Islam as illustrated by the Serat Dermagandul", *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 122 (1966), 309-365.

Clifford Geertz, *The religion of Java* (New York: The Free Press, 1960).

Robert W. Hefner, *Hindu Javanese: Tengger tradition and Islam* (Princeton University Press, 1985).

Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The venture of Islam*, vol. I (The University of Chicago Press, 1974).

J.E. Jasper, *Tengger en de Tenggereezen* (Weltevreden: Java Instituut en G. Kolff & Zn, 1927).

Robert R. Jay, *Santri and abangan, religious schism in rural Central Java* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957).

Muhammad Hassan Kamal, *Muslim intellectual responses to "New Order" modernization in Indonesia* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1982).

Edward W. Lane, *Manners and customs of the modern Egyptians* (London, 1836).

J.C. van Leur, *Indonesian trade and society* (The Hague: Van Hoeve, 1955).

R. William Liddle, "*Media Dakwah* scripturalism: one form of Islamic political thought and action in New Order Indonesia", in: Mark R. Woodward (ed.), *Toward a new paradigm: recent developments in Indonesian Islamic thought* (Arizona State University, Program for Southeast Asian Studies, 1996), pp. 323-356.

C. Poensen, "Bijdragen tot de kennis van den godsdienstigen en zedelijken toestand der Javanen. Eene be-schouwing van den inhoud van eenige voorname geschriften der Javaansche literatuur", *Mededeelingen van wege het Nederlandsche Zendelinggenootschap* 13 (1869), 153-236.

C. Poensen, *Brieven over den Islam uit de binnenlanden van Java* (Leiden: Brill, 1886).

J. Prins, *Adat en islamitische plichtenleer in Indonesië* (Den Haag/Bandoeng: W van Hoeve, 1954).

Thomas Stamford Raffles, *The history of Java*. 2 vols. (London, 1817).

Merle C. Ricklefs, "Six centuries of islamization in Java", in:

Nehemia Levtzion (ed.), *Conversion to Islam* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979), pp. 100-128.

C. Snouck Hurgronje, "Brieven van een wedono-pensioen", in his *Verspreide Geschriften* vol 4/1 (Leiden: Brill 1924).

Stange, Paul, "'Legitimate' mysticism in Indonesia", *Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs* 20 no. 2 (1986), 76-117.

Mark R. Woodward, *The shari`ah and the secret doctrine: Muslim law and mystical doctrine in Central Java* (Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Illinois, 1985).

Mark R. Woodward, *Islam in Java: normative piety and mysticism in the sultanate of Yogyakarta* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1989).

---

## Notes:

[1] C. Snouck Hurgronje, "Brieven van een wedono-pensioen", in his *Verspreide Geschriften* vol 4/1 (Leiden: Brill 1924). This long essay was originally serialised in *De Locomotief* from Jan. 7, 1891 through Dec. 22, 1892.

[2] The most celebrated study is that by Clifford Geertz in *The Religion of Java* (1960); the earliest analysis of this cultural dichotomy was however by Robert Jay in his *Santri and abangan* (1957), a perceptive study that is undeservedly almost forgotten.

[3] Mark Woodward went to another extreme in his study of religious life in the urban districts surrounding the *kraton* of Yogyakarta (1985, 1989). Finding that the court rituals and other religious practices that he observed did not correspond to anything he had read in books on (scripturalist) Hinduism, he concluded that they could not be Hindu in

origin. Eager to show that *abangan* beliefs and practices are Muslim (a thesis with which I can concur to a large extent), he attempts to find Muslim *origins* for each of them and appears to neglect that many of these practices are part of popular religion throughout the archipelago, irrespective of the scriptural religion nominally adhered to.

[4] On the use of al-Buni's works, especially his *Shams al-ma`ârif* (which is very popular in Indonesia), in North Africa, see Doutté 1908. Most of the so-called *mujarrabât* ("time-tested methods") books are simplified excerpts from the *Shams al-ma`ârif*; the books known as *primbon* have more diverse contents. On this literature see Bruinessen 1990.

[5] The historian Marshall Hodgson (1974: 57-60) has proposed the term "Islamicate" to avoid the association with an essentialised Islam that the terms "Islamic" or "Muslim [civilisation]" might too easily arouse and to distinguish what belongs to the world of Islam ("Islamicate") from what directly derives from the teachings of Islam ("Islamic").

[6] See Martin van Bruinessen, "Shari`a court, tarekat and pesantren: religious institutions in the Banten sultanate", *Archipel* 50, 1995, 165-199.

[7] The first scholar to make this point, to my knowledge, was Merle Ricklefs in his survey of Islamisation in Java (1979).

[8] Snouck Hurgronje 1924: 165. *Rasulan* or *ngrasulaké* was a frequently made food offering intended to draw the attention of the spirit of the Prophet and request his intercession.

[9] Bruinessen 1994b. The viewing of coloured lights is a central element of Kubrawi mysticism but it retains none of the associations that similar techniques have in Tantric Buddhism and Hinduism.

[10] On *debus* and its transformations, see Bruinessen 1995: 187-9.

[11] Various versions of this myth were recorded. I have followed here the one recorded by Jasper among the Tenggerese, an ostensibly non-Muslim community in East Java (Jasper 1927: 41-2; cf. Hefner 1985: 126-141, where the myth is retold at length). The Protestant missionary, C. Poensen, describes a Javanese manuscript with similar contents titled *Aji Saka*, that he apparently found among the nominally Muslim population of Kediri, where he worked for many years (Poensen 1869: 191).

[12] Drewes (1966) studied the *Serat Dermagandul* as an expression of a clash of civilisations. The *Gatoloco* was briefly discussed by Poensen as early as 1873 and seriously studied by van Akkeren (1951). Anderson (1981-82) translated it into English and wrote a brief introduction.

[13] The *kebatinan* movements lost this struggle in the course of the

1970s, when all government dealings with them were, due to Muslim pressure, transferred from the Department of Religious Affairs to that of Culture. Non-Islamic elements in *kebatinan* mysticism were increasingly suppressed or at least de-emphasised, and their discourse became ever more Islamicised. See Stange 1986.

[14] See Prins 1954, Abdullah 1966.

[15] On the Indonesians studying in Cairo, and on the changing intellectual climate experienced by three generations of them, see Abaza 1994.

[16] A collection of Nurcholish' articles and papers of the 1970s and 1980s was published under the title of "Islam, modernity and Indonesianness" (*Islam, kemodernan dan keindonesiaan*, Bandung: Mizan, 1987). The first group of articles in this collection, all dating from the mid-1980s, discuss Indonesian culture as one particular Muslim culture among other Muslim cultures (and not, as is common in much modernist literature, as a half heathen, imperfectly Islamicised culture).

[17] Munawir argued that the unequal division of an inheritance, in which a woman receives only half as much as a man in the same genealogical position, reflected the situation in Medina, where men were the providers for their families, and was not a universally valid rule. In the Javanese city of Solo (his own hometown), he continued, the bulk of family income was produced by women; a proper contextual understanding would lead to the conclusion that in Solo the Islamic division of an inheritance should allot women a greater share than man. His argument did not convince many *`ulama*, however.

[18] This was done through a questionnaire that was delivered to all Muslim organisations. The questionnaire consisted of a long list of questions on concrete cases in which *fiqh* conceivably should be applied contextually. Most organisations rejected this interpretation, so that Indonesia is now saddled with more rigid (for codified) Islamic rules.

[19] Early criticism of Nurcholish from Masyumi and "fundamentalist" points of view is presented in Kamal 1982 (originally a 1975 Columbia University Ph.D. thesis).

[20] For a more detailed insight in the ideas current in Dewan Dakwah circles in the early 1990s, see William Liddle's content analysis of the Dewan's journal, *Media Dakwah* (Liddle 1996).

[21] See Bruinessen 1994c.