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### Mysticism and Syncretism on the Island of Java

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MYSTICISM AND SYNCRETISM ON THE ISLAND OF JAVA

Smith, Ryan

Dr. Ni Wayan Ariati

Whittier College

SIT Study Abroad Indonesia: Arts, Religion, and Social Change

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## Introduction

In his *The Perennial Philosophy*, Alduous Huxley demonstrated the idea that within every religion, the same truth is told. This truth is formulated by those who dive deep into their spiritual practice in order to gain personal experiences of the Divine. These people make up what is referred to as esoteric sects or lineages within a religious tradition. They are also often referred to as mystics. Ultimately, Alduous Huxley did not formulate the Perennial Philosophy, but reintroduced it to the world stage with his book. This philosophy identifies five main characteristics that can almost be used as a sort of template when it comes to discussion of these mystical sects. 1). There is an Ultimate Reality, which is the unmanifested principle of all manifestation. 2). The Ultimate is transcendent and immanent. 3). It is possible for human beings to love, know and, to become actually identified with this Reality. 4). To achieve this deep knowledge, to realize this supreme identity, is the final end and purpose of human existence. 5). There is a Law or Dharma, which must be obeyed, a Tao or Way, which must be followed, if men are to achieve their final end. Ultimately, whether you look to the Kabbalah of Judaism, the mysticism of Christianity, Sufism in Islam, Vedanta in Hinduism, Tantrayana of Buddhism, and just about any other religious tradition, these truths will ring true. On the Indonesian island of Java, there is a religious tradition referred to as *Kebatinan*, which can be seen as the mystical branch of the indigenous religion of Java called *Kejawen*. However, unlike the mystical traditions of other religions, mysticism is critical to the entire popular practice of *Kejawen* and is not simply reserved for a select few. There are, on the other hand, a select number of people who fully understand the philosophical notions associated with *Kebatinan* and so can still be considered the “mystics” of the *Kejawen* faith. What these principles of mysticism have ultimately manifested as in Java, has been an ability to adapt to the international religions that

have made Java their home, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. Since mystical sects are usually far less dogmatic than their more popular, exoteric forms, mystics accept the truths offered by other religious traditions. While this is the case, *Kebatinan* practitioners have struggled to preserve their unique identity while adapting and blending with other religious traditions. They have struggled to gain full recognition since the independence of Indonesia was declared in 1945. Still, *Kebatinan* and *Kejawen* as a whole have infiltrated nearly every aspect of Javanese life, manifesting in art, politics, and all forms of popular culture. While syncretism has flourished on the island of Java for centuries thanks to the flexible belief systems of *Kejawen* practitioners, there is still a great deal of discrimination toward this community for their not following the template offered by the Indonesian government concerning what constitutes “official religion.”

### **Mysticism In Java**

Ultimately, the main premise of any form of mysticism is quite simple: there is no difference between subject (me) and object (the external world). Further, the subject and object are not only one and the same, but are actually identified with the Ultimate Reality, the Ground of Being, the Absolute, or, if you prefer, God. At the root of the Self is God and at the root of the external world is God. All is ultimately God. In order for mystics to finally reach the end goal of self-realization and knowledge of God, a process of “deprivation” or “emptying” of one’s limited, egoic self is used in order to reach the root of one’s true self, or Ultimate Self, which is beyond all change.<sup>1</sup> Every mystical path has a series of steps to take in order to aid this emptying

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<sup>1</sup> In Van der Leeuw, Gerardus. *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*. Princeton University Press, 2014: 495.

process. In Sufism, for example, the steps include repentance, abstinence, renunciation, poverty, patience, trust in God, and satisfaction.<sup>2</sup> In *Kebatinan*, all of life is seen as a mystical journey of four stages from outer to inner realms.<sup>3</sup> Like Sufism and other mystical paths, the first step of the mystical journey is to focus your efforts on creating a right and just livelihood in the external world. One must abide by certain rules of conduct such as non-violence, non-anger, and non-jealousy. One will begin to lose one's self through certain practices like control of breath, contemplation, mediation, and prayer. The second step continues this perfection and reflection on one's behavior in this physical world and our interactions with other beings during this life. During the third step, one's attention turns away from the physical world and toward the spiritual world and one's connection with the Divine. During this step, "differences between various forms of religious ritual appear meaningless."<sup>4</sup> At this point, the apparent differences between religious practitioners in terms of how one prays or how one worships God no longer really matter, for the truth that binds all religious traditions is the only thing given importance. Finally, the last step occurs when one fully unites with the eternal Godhead. Mystics do not often completely withdraw from the temporal world, but the fleeting material world simply has less importance for them. As the Mundaka Upanishad states, "As the rivers flow to their rest in the ocean, released from form and name, so the knower, liberated from form and name, passes onward to the divine, supreme Spirit."<sup>5</sup> After the emptying of the egoic self, one's name given at

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, Van der Leeuw, Gerardus. 2014: 495.

<sup>3</sup> Wright, Astri. "Javanese Mysticism and Art: A Case of Iconography and Healing." *Indonesia* 52, 1991: 86.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Wright, Astri. 1991: 87.

<sup>5</sup> In Van der Leeuw, Gerardus. *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*. Princeton University Press, 2014: 498.

birth and the body that the soul has found itself within no longer matter to a great extent.

Identification is purely with Spirit.

The ultimate method for reaching self-realization according to these mystical paths is to turn inward, to the eternal, rather than outward toward the temporal. The path inward is the path of meditation. The meditational practices of *Kebatinan* practitioners involve first understanding one's Self, then the world and nature around the Self, and finally the Universal Principle. It is a process of movement from the Micro, to the Macro, and eventually the Cosmic or Universal.<sup>6</sup> Where one finally ends up experientially is in a state of "void" or "nothingness". This is a silent place that no words can describe, but is often referred to as the "rich nothing" or the "the spark" or the "soul of the soul".<sup>7</sup> Essentially, no matter what religious practice one has chosen to follow, the ideas of religions can only assist a mystic up to a certain point until those belief structures also pass away, which are made of words, and the Ultimate is wordless, and the void remains the void no matter if one is Christian or Hindu or residing in India or France.

Traditionally, those practicing *Kebatinan* on the island of Java before colonization were those who were part of the *Priyayi* elite class. When Clifford Geertz first studied Java, he came up with the three-part classification for describing the religious life of the islanders. First were the pious Muslims, whom Geertz called *Santri*. Secondly, the nominal Muslims who truly were practicing popular forms of the *Kejawen* religion with animism and ancestral worship, were referred to as *Abangan*, whom he saw made up the majority of peasants. Finally, the traditional, urban gentry, who were also nominally Muslim, and practiced a form of mysticism (*Kebatinan*),

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<sup>6</sup> Wright, Astri. "Javanese Mysticism and Art: A Case of Iconography and Healing." *Indonesia* 52, 1991: 87.

<sup>7</sup> In Van der Leeuw, Gerardus. *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*. Princeton University Press, 2014: 499.



were identified as *Priyayi*.<sup>8</sup> Although these classifications no longer truly apply to the people of Java, and more people than the nobility currently practice *Kebatinan*, it is interesting to note who the people who traditionally practiced this form of mysticism were. The *Priyayi* were royal servants of the kings of Java. These kings were given nearly divine status on the island and were seen as the mediators between man and God. Although traditional social distinctions were no longer relevant by the twentieth century, the spiritual views of the *Priyayi* on the relations of God and man and the nature of man and society would continue to influence the entirety of Indonesia.

In traditional Javanese kingdoms, the king was seen as the link between society and the entire universe. The Monarch is at the center of the kingdom just like God is the center of the Universe. Being that the monarch's divinity was central to Javanese society, it certainly makes sense that the king's ministers and officials, the *Priyayi*, would take to the mystical practices associated with *Kebatinan*. Being that mysticism entails a unity between God and self, Master and servant, the practices of *Kebatinan* surely appealed to the social positions of the *Priyayi*, who would hope to become spiritually united with their master, the King. It was a belief in aristocratic court society that "the servant should become one with the king like the sun and its ray of light."<sup>9</sup> All individuals contain two essential aspects; one being associated with the mundane world and one associated with the sacred. In this way, all individuals contain elements of servant and master. The mundane aspect of self is referred to as *Si Aku*. It is "the unrefined self, man's mundane identity created in, constantly interacting with, and being changed by the

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<sup>8</sup> Beatty, Andrew. "Adam and Eve and Vishnu: Syncretism in the Javanese slametan." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 1996: 273,

<sup>9</sup> Errington, Joseph. "Self and Self-Conduct Among the Javanese Priyayi Elite." *American Ethnologist* 11, no. 2, 1984: 278.

spatiotemporal environment perceived through the senses... the *Aku* is not inherent in man but is acquired or learned.”<sup>10</sup> The second aspect of self is referred to as the *Ingsun* in *Kebatinan*, the Great Life, which is “at once God and the individual in his finest, all-pervading aspect.”<sup>11</sup> The mystic hopes to fully identify not with the *Aku*, but with the *Ingsun*. It is said in *Kebatinan* that where the *Aku* is, God is not. Where God is, the *Aku* is not.”<sup>12</sup> The human can be seen as a painting and God the painter, but the painter resides within the painting and we must uncover where He resides within us. The *Aku* can be seen as the servant while the *Ingsun* is Master.

The *Priyayi* also identified one other pair of opposites to aid in mystical practice: the *lahir* and the *batin*, from where the word *Kebatinan* derives. While the *batin* refers to the interior of humans, the *lahir*, or *lair*, refers to the external world. While both the *Aku* and *Ingsun* dwell within man, the *Ingsun* is the true heart of the *batin*. It is pivotal for a mystic to discipline one’s physical body (*lahir*) by not giving into all natural urges because the physical world is of least importance to the mystic. The internal is where God is to be found and, so, one must bridge the gap between the external and internal. This bridge is called *Rasa* in *Kebatinan*. *Rasa* is “the ability to intuit or sense nonphysical, finer, more *alus* (spiritual) manifestations of interior nature.”<sup>13</sup> *Rasa* is the intuition that every being possesses, but that mystics work to cultivate. It is through the cultivation of *rasa* that one will become more in tune with the spiritual world and more closely connected to the *Ingsun*, *gusti*, or divine within each being. When one cultivates *rasa*, all profane aspects of life, including the *lahir* and the *Aku*, can be transcended. Ultimately, this bridge between the external and internal must be formed in order to achieve the goal of mystical unity. This can be done though the denial of bodily needs and desires as mentioned

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* Errington, Joseph. 1984: 279.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* Errington, Joseph. 1984: 278.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* Errington, Joseph. 1984: 280.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* Errington, Joseph. 1984: 281.

above, which are practices referred to as “*nglakoni*” in Javanese, or “instinctual deprivation” by Geertz.<sup>14</sup> Or, the mystic can penetrate directly to his/her *batin* through mental concentration or meditation, which is referred to as *semedhi*, *tapa*, or *meditasi*. One will detach the *Aku* from worldly interaction and focus on the *Ingsun*. This is a method of “polishing the soul until you can receive messages from the heavenly broadcasting station.”<sup>15</sup> These “messages” may come in the form of vibrations that one can become attuned to through *rasa* cultivation. To return to traditional Javanese society, it is said that the king, having a completely attuned *rasa*, would be able to know all happenings within his kingdom without ever leaving the palace. One’s conduct in the world can be an indication of one’s *batin* and which “self” is ruling one’s interior. Selfish actions indicate the *Aku* rules while selflessness indicates that the *Ingsun* is in control. To be able to predict future events is to show one’s *rasa* cultivation. One’s character will portray if one is in a state of *eling*, remembrance, or awareness, of God and one’s true self, as opposed to a state of *lali*, forgetfulness.<sup>16</sup> The *Priyayi* knew that what their physical bodies, their *lahir*, portrayed would show others what state their *batin* was in. The *Priyayi*, thus, hoped to cultivate the *batin* in order to foster humility and patience and become one with the king, just like the modern mystic hopes to become one with God. The ideals of unity and harmony also seemed to be the greatest hope for achieving social balance, and so the ethics associated with *Kebatinan* soon became the very “essence of Javanese-ness, even of Indonesianness” and the spiritual practice continues to greatly “inform the political-cultural practice of the present”.<sup>17</sup>

### **Manifestations of Kebatinan in Modern Javanese Society**

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Errington, Joseph. 1984: 282.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. Errington, Joseph. 1984: 282.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Errington, Joseph. 1984: 284.

<sup>17</sup> Mulder, Niels. *Mysticism in Java: ideology in Indonesia*. Kanisius, 2005: 77.

The most evident portrayal of the ideals of *Kebatinan* in modern Javanese society can be found within art. *Wayang*, or shadow puppetry, can be seen as a clear “visual expression of *Kebatinan*.”<sup>18</sup> Mystics dive deeply into the symbolism and inner-nature of what may appear to the ordinary layperson as mundane. However, what must be remembered in any study of mysticism is that, to the mystic, there is not duality between the sacred and the secular, or the holy and the mundane. In fact, there is no duality at all in mystical teachings. Duality only exists in our limited, egoic minds. In reality, according to the mystic, all things contain divinity. While there exists apparent dualities in *Kebatinan* thought such as the *batin* and the *lahir*, and the *Aku* and the *Ingsun*, the root of all things remains as God. Mystics practice penetrating what appears to be the mundane world into the true nature of things. For example, in a *Wayang* performance, the average Javanese person will be amused by the stories he/she has heard since they were children and they will enjoy the performance as a cornerstone of Javanese culture. Those with more insight into *Kejawen* philosophy and the Hindu epics, which inform the performances, will be able to gain insight into the themes and messages being told by the particular stories, such as the fight between good and evil as portrayed through the epic of the *Mahabharata*, which depicts the battle between the *Pandawa* and *Korawa*. For the practitioner of *Kebatinan*, though, the apparent dualities of good and evil are resolved. Mysticism promotes the idea that “ultimate reality is amoral and timeless and cannot be fathomed by men.”<sup>19</sup> The figures shown in a *Wayang* performance actual portray something that the physical eye is unable to see. Just like the *Mahabharata* epic can be viewed in two perspectives, so can the *wayang* performances that portray the story in Indonesia. On the one hand, one can view the story at its surface level: it

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<sup>18</sup> Wright, Astri. "Javanese Mysticism and Art: A Case of Iconography and Healing." *Indonesia* 52, 1991: 89.

<sup>19</sup> Wright, Astri. "Javanese Mysticism and Art: A Case of Iconography and Healing." *Indonesia* 52, 1991: 90.

shows the great battle between two warring families and shows that good will always prevail over evil. On the other hand, the battle can be seen “as an allegory of the struggles of a single human being between his earthly, physical, and material desires and his longing for spiritual development – between the self and the soul.”<sup>20</sup> In this way, the *wayang* figure can portray both the *lahir* aspect of the human being and the *batin* aspect of each individual, which is constantly connected to God, who in a *wayang* performance, would be the *Dalang*, the puppeteer.

Aside from *wayang*, other traditional forms of art found within Java can depict mystical thought. In architecture, the *Candi*, or temple, represents *Mahameru*, the mythical mountain that is home to the gods of legend. The base of the *candi* represents the sphere of mortals, the body of the temple symbolizes the realm of the purified souls, while the superstructure of the *candi* represents the sphere of the gods. Architecture, in this way, can represent the steps taken during a meditation practiced by a *Kebatinan* mystic, where he/she will penetrate to the inner nature of self from the physical realm to the more subtle levels of the mental and spiritual self. In the art of *Batik*, where certain patterns, such as the *Kawung*, a pattern derived from the shape of a fruit with four ovals inside a square, is thought to represent “a universal source of energy” and the cross design represents the structure of the universe.<sup>21</sup> There are other symbols and colors used in Javanese *batik* and painting that are often used to symbolize certain aspect of *Kejawen/Kebatinan* thought. While water symbolizes the unification of polarities, being that it comes from the heavens to penetrate the earth and produce life, fire and the color red represent the passions of man and a desire for wealth.<sup>22</sup> Astri Wright worked with several Javanese artists who also practice *Kebatinan* and one of those artists, Jomaya, stated that, in his art, he “applied a

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Wright, Astri. 1991: 92.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Wright, Astri. 1991: 99.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Wright, Astri. 1991: 103.

notion of self similar to the *Kebatinan* idea of a soul or spirit, separated from but journeying towards reintegration with the absolute, universal soul. In this perspective, the making of a work of art becomes equivalent to the mystical journey. The artist attempts to overcome the limitations of the individual self through meditating on and manipulating the materials, uniting mind with action and matter. Transforming matter becomes a metaphor for transforming the soul.”<sup>23</sup>

The influence of *Kebatinan* reaches into more than just the popular artistic culture of Java. The *Nalo*, or national lottery, has been a subject of great interest to the Javanese people for many years. Niels Mulder, who has studied Javanese Mysticism extensively, saw that certain *Kebatinan* leaders have been able to garner much fame due to their ability to predict winning lottery numbers that came to them in the form of symbols during meditations. It is believed that certain mystical masters, or gurus, can be so in tune with the higher order of reality that certain future events can become known to them. By simply analyzing the behavior of a guru, it is believed that winning lottery numbers could become known. Since all events have already been written and ordained by God, through the “principle of necessity”, these events can become known to those who have become deeply connected to the inner batin, where God resides, by attuning the *rasa*, or intuitive capacity of an individual, as mentioned above.<sup>24</sup> There is no greater example of how influential *Kejawen* thought, and, thus, *Kebatinan*, has been on the whole of Indonesia than the philosophy of the *Pancasila*. In order to achieve a unity in diversity, to bring together vast swaths of people speaking different languages, belonging to different nations and cultures, practicing immensely varied spiritual traditions throughout the archipelago, something had to be created that all Indonesian people could share and value. Sukarno formulated the *Pancasila*, the five principles, and deeply indoctrinated every citizen in order to

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Wright, Astri. 1991: 103.

<sup>24</sup> Mulder, Niels. *Mysticism in Java: ideology in Indonesia*. Kanisius, 2005: 80.

avoid all social cleavages and disharmony. The *Pancasila* is largely a Javanese invention since the Javanese make up the largest ethnic group within Indonesia, and, thus, the *Pancasila* is seen by many as one of a multitude of examples of Javanization throughout the country. Oneness is the primary foundation of both the *Pancasila* and *Kejawen* thought. It is taught in civics classes throughout a child's primary education that the whole of Indonesia is one big family and devotion to this family means devotion to the state and to the government and to the leader of that government. All Indonesians must depend on one another because they are all interconnected. Just like the aim of the mystic is union with God, the aim of the citizen is union with the totality of the nation. This practically allows for a subordination of the citizen to the state and its leader. Disciplining the *lahir* is not only important spiritually, but also socially if one wishes to be a "Complete Indonesian Man" of *Pancasila* society.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Kebatinan* and Religious Syncretism**

While basic premises of *Kebatinan* and *Kejawen* may have been used to promote conformity within Indonesian society, *Kebatinan* is actually focused on the individual and this can be clearly seen in its relationship to the other religious traditions of Indonesia, including the majority religion Islam and the other recognized religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. Mysticism is concerned with the internal rather than the external and so the mystical journey is a journey inward. Religious laws and rituals, including daily prayer and honoring elders, form the basis of only the first step along this journey. It is soon learned that "God is not to be met in Mecca, but in the heart."<sup>26</sup> At *Kebatinan* meetings, adherents of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism may congregate together for meditation and discussion about individual experiences. While *Kejawen* and *Kebatinan* foster a religious worldview, it

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Mulder, Niels. 2005: 117.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. Mulder, Niels. 2005: 45.

paradoxically devalues institutionalized religion and strict dogma, instead preferring an exploration of the great mysteries of life and individual spiritual experiences. *Kebatinan* promotes the idea that real knowledge is “both mysterious and subjective” rather than objective and dogmatic.<sup>27</sup> *Kebatinan* has been present on the island of Java long before the religious traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity gained converts. Even as these religions have gained great popularity and power on the island over the last several centuries, *Kejawen* and *Kebatinan* have persisted both because of its ability to accommodate new religions due to its acceptance of the core truth found in all faiths and because of the fact that the missionaries and proselytizers of these new religious traditions had to accommodate to the spiritual culture they found. This ability of both the indigenous spiritual culture and the colonizing faiths to accommodate has resulted in a profound example of religious syncretism. Today, one may find unique versions of religious traditions found only on this island, which can only be termed *Kejawen* Islam, *Kejawen* Hinduism, *Kejawen* Buddhism, and *Kejawen* Christianity.

### ***Kebatinan* and Religious Syncretism: Islam**

Being that Java is predominantly populated by Muslims, I will begin with the syncretism of Islam and *Kejawen*. The primary reason Islam spread so successfully in Java was due to where exactly it was coming from. The first wave of Muslims to the island were coming from Gujarat in India. This Indian form of Islam had already coexisted and assimilated with the Hindu culture of India for quite some time, so it was able to easily assimilate to the Hindu-Buddhist culture found on Java. The second wave came primarily from Persia and was heavily influenced by the Sufi tradition found in that region. Sufism is the mystical sect of Islam and has very similar

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. Mulder, Niels. 2005: 82.



ideologies to those of *Kebatinan*. Being that the “majority of Javanese seem to be more esoteric while avoiding the exoteric dimension (black and white and legalistic),” the “transition from mystical Hindu-Buddhism to mystical Islam was thus presumably eased by conceptual continuities.”<sup>28</sup> These Sufi Muslims heavily promoted the idea of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* – the process of becoming one with the Universe, which was an idea that can be found within the Hindu tradition that came from India and the tradition of *Kebatinan* already found on the island.<sup>29</sup> The Islamization of Java shows us just how a society will determine which values of an incoming culture fit to its own cultural values and which do not. The mystical aspects of Islam fit greatly within the cosmology of *Kejawen*, so this form of Islam was easily accepted by a great portion of the Javanese population. The “mystic synthesis” that has resulted from the combination of the mystical force of Islam and the mystical force of *Kebatinan* consists of an Islamic identity (although sometimes only a nominal one), the fulfillment of the five pillars of Islam, but also an acceptance of “local spiritual forces like the acceptance of the queen of the Southern Ocean” and other traditional beliefs that make up the cosmology of *Kejawen*.<sup>30</sup>

Due to the powerful nature of Sufism to propagate the Islamic faith not only in Indonesia, but elsewhere throughout Asia and other parts of the world, this mysticism does require special attention. Due to the origins of the Sufi traditions coming to the islands of Indonesia, there are now two primary strains of philosophical Muslim mysticism on Java: the Malay Sufi version with Indian and Middle Eastern Influence and then the local version of mysticism practiced by

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<sup>28</sup> Hy Hilmy, Masdar. "Towards A Religiously Hybrid Identity? The Changing Face of Javanese Islam." *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 12, no. 1, 2018: 54.

<sup>29</sup> Pratisti, Siti Aliyuna. "Truce and Tolerance: Syncretism of Islam and Java Revisit." In *International Conference on Culture and Language in Southeast Asia (ICCLAS 2017)*. Atlantis Press, 2017: 190.

<sup>30</sup> Hy Hilmy, Masdar. "Towards A Religiously Hybrid Identity? The Changing Face of Javanese Islam." *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 12, no. 1, 2018: 54.

Javanese Muslims.<sup>31</sup> Philosophical mysticism, no matter where it is practiced, emphasizes experience over rationality. This means that mystical experience is often irrational and may not be able to be explained scientifically or with language at all. Mystics, therefore, realize that language can only purport ultimate reality to a certain, rather limited extent. Experience is what validates theory or belief, which is held as secondary. Whether coming from the Malay world or the local Javanese tradition, this truth holds true. However, the differences and similarities between these two strains of mysticism will serve this exploration to show just how similar the beliefs coming to Java are to those already present on the island, which goes to show just how easily it would be for this Islamic world view to translate to that of the Javanese. In the Malay Sufi worldview, “God and humanity are inseparable,” and that “once knowledge of God, gnosis, is recovered, man begins to understand that he is not he, but He.”<sup>32</sup> Shams al-din al-Sumatrai, a famous Malay Sufi, propagated the concept of the Seven degrees of Existence (*martabat tujuh*), which depicts the presence of God from the highest to the lowest levels of existence. The basis of this concept is that God reveals Himself in various guises. At the highest level, God is only known to God, and in the words of the prophet Muhammad, “Only Thou knows Thy true self.”<sup>33</sup> God then manifests via his self-disclosures from the unseen, to the visible, to “the reality which comprehends the two.”<sup>34</sup> Creation is seen as the shadow of God, as He is the only truly real thing in the entire universe. This idea is often referred to as monism or pantheism, which would be certainly considered heretical to more orthodox Muslims, but these concepts meshed quite well with the ideas already present in Java due to not only the mysticism of *Kebatinan*, but also

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<sup>31</sup>Nasir, Mohamad Nasrin. “Philosophical Dimension of Southeast Asian Muslim Mysticism.” In *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*. *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, 2020: 1.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid. Nasir, Mohamad Nasrin. 2020: 2.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. Nasir, Mohamad Nasrin. 2020: 3.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. Nasir, Mohamad Nasrin. 2020: 3.

philosophical concepts found within the Hindu-Buddhist faith that came to dominate Java before the influence of Islam. The Javanese world is now a “mix of Hindu metaphysics and Islamic metaphysics.”<sup>35</sup> Examples of both monism and pantheism can be found within Javanese *Suluk* literature. Due to the foundation of *Kebatinan* and Hinduism, monistic Islamic teachings coming from Acehese scholars in West Sumatra took hold in the Islamic dynasties of Cirebon and Priyangan.<sup>36</sup> The immanency of God in the world and his self-disclosure through the seven levels discussed above became primary ideals within Javanese mysticism.

This mystical form of Islam was not the only way the faith spread on Java, though. Soon, not only was Sufism propagated, but also the faith based on the teachings of Sharia, which has led to the two groups of Muslims classified by Geertz: *Santri* and *Abangan*. While the *Abangan* Muslims were only nominally Muslim while truly continuing their practice of *Kejawen* and *Kebatinan*, the *Santri* Muslims were strict followers of Qur’anic law.<sup>37</sup> This has led to differing practices between the *Abangan* (*Kejawen* Muslims) and the *Santri* Muslims. For example, the *Abangan* will celebrate the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, while the *Santri* will not. *Abangan* will also make pilgrimage for their deceased relatives and partake in the traditional Javanese feast of *Slametan*, neither of which will *Santri* Muslims engage in. Another ritual, called *Nyanggar Janur Kuning*, was examined by Dewi Puspita Sari. She says that while this ritual was often “claimed as a legacy of the Javanese tradition, it actually developed after the colonialism in Indonesia ended” and it acted as a “way for Islam to control the region of Java by infiltrating its culture.”<sup>38</sup> *Nyanggar* is a ritual which is used to tell the fortunes of those who have

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Nasir, Mohamad Nasrin. 2020: 6.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Nasir, Mohamad Nasrin. 2020: 6.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Nasir, Mohamad Nasrin. 2020: 7.

<sup>38</sup> Sari, Dewi Puspita, Dwi Susanto, and Marimin Marimin. "The Form of Kejawen Islam in Nyanggar Janur Kuning Rituals in Indonesia." *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 7, no. 1, 2020: 623.

it performed. It combines both the local *Kejawen* culture that promotes the use of magic and Arabic prayers of Islam. The ritual utilizes coconut leaves and is done in front of the gravestone a Yosodipuro I, a palace poet and the king's whisperer in Surakarta. Yosodipuro is believed to be a messenger of God, which is why he was often believed as having the ability to foretell future events for the King.<sup>39</sup> It is usually done at midnight and fortunes are told to visitors completely in Arabic. The *Kejawen* belief system has God as the Supreme force of the Universe, but also holds that ancestors can be intermediaries between humans and God and have the ability to communicate with God on behalf of their descendants. In this way, the continuation of this *Kejawen* belief is promoted through the ritual, while at the same time, the use of Arabic, allowed the language of Islam to become more accessible to the masses. The same is true in the ritual of *Slametan*, where Arabic has largely replaced Old Javanese as the language of choice for the speeches made during the feast. The *Slametan* represents a great process of acculturation, a process which has eased the spread and synthesis of Islam and *Kejawen*. Current *Slametan* rituals "undoubtedly represent a creative novelty invented by an elder generation of Muslim propagators in order to attach Islam into the structure of Javanese religious life."<sup>40</sup> There is certainly no precedent for the ritual of *Slametan* in the Qur'an or Hadith, due to the fact that the ritual was practiced long before Muslims ever stepped foot on the island. The elements of the *Slametan* were "occupied by the non-Islamic symbols such as offerings and sayings or prayers spelled out in old Javanese language. In addition, the rituals were led by a local Javanese *dukun* ... it is not until lately that the *Slametan* have commonly been led by *kiai* (Muslim preachers or clerics) who are well-versed in Islamic knowledge and are usually *pesantren* graduates."<sup>41</sup> These *kiai*

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. Sari, Dewi Puspita, Dwi Susanto, and Marimin Marimin. 2020: 625/

<sup>40</sup> Hy Hilmy, Masdar. "Towards A Religiously Hybrid Identity? The Changing Face of Javanese Islam." *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 12, no. 1, 2018: 55.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. Hy Hilmy, Masdar. 2018: 55.

would be the ones to replace all Hindu-Buddhist elements with Islamic ones taken from Arabic sayings and prayers found in the Qur'an and Hadith. Traditional *Keraton* Court life also changed with the influence of Islam. The King was no longer seen as an incarnation of God, but, rather, His representative in the world. In this way, the King was stripped of his divine status, but his legitimacy was still strong with his new title. This continuation (although now altered) of the Javanese tradition, may have been used as a way to fight colonial power. The promotion of "Javaneseness" would strengthen a national and cultural identity amid an influx of new cultural traditions.

While, historically, it may have been easy to make the distinction between the *Santri* and *Abangan* Muslims, there has never been such a clear, binary division of the two groups. While some *Santri* Muslims may continue to uphold their Javanese heritage by practicing some rituals that may be seen by more orthodox Muslims as "un-Islamic" or heretical, there are also some categorically *Abangan* Muslims who may be unwavering in some practices that are considered orthodox. Due to this complexity, the categories proposed by Geertz no longer truly fit the reality seen on the island of Java. Masdar Hilmy rejects both the theory put forth by Geertz, and that put forth by Woodward, another prominent scholar of Javanese Islam, who stated that that Javanese Islam is the same Islam found elsewhere in the world because it comes from the same root. Instead, Hilmy suggests that "Javanese Islam has transformed into a hybrid identity different from each of these opinions above due to Islamization and acculturation."<sup>42</sup> Ultimately, Javanese Islam is quite unlike the Islam found in other areas of the world because of its ability to accommodate to not only the Hindu-Buddhist culture that dominated before it, but also the *Kejawen* culture that persisted even before Hinduism came to Java. Java is no different from

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. Hy Hilmy, Masdar. 2018: 46.

other parts of the world where Islam has come to dominate. It has had to “translate its message into the local way of life” no matter what part of the world it comes into contact, which is why Woodward’s hypothesis of a static Islamic tradition simply cannot be true.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, since Geertz first came to Java and classified the different forms of Islam which he was presented, there have been many exchanges of identity between the groups he described as *Abangan* and *Santri*.

In recent years, those who were described as *Santri* by Geertz have grown in number due to the “deepening process of Islamization” that has been prevalent on the island, which, conversely, means that the existence of *Kejawen* Islam has declined.<sup>44</sup> There has been an increase in normative observance among Indonesian Muslims, which includes five daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan, almsgiving, and pilgrimage to Mecca. Traditionally, those classified as *Santri* would not have opposed the idea of acculturation. They would not have viewed the process of accommodating the *Kejawen* belief system as mutually exclusive to upholding Islamic orthodoxy. The process of acculturation, as seen above through the *Slametan* and other rituals, can be as simple as replacing the prayers and speeches normally conducted in Old Javanese with prayers of the same sentiment recited in Arabic. However, these were the *Santri* found by Geertz when he conducted his research in Java during the 1950s. Those that would be classified as *Santri* today, those who are unyielding in their orthodox tendencies, those who are currently referred to as modernists as opposed to traditionalists, would feel acculturation and syncretism is not reconcilable with orthodox Islam.<sup>45</sup> This tension between modernists and traditionalists will be discussed at length later in this study. On the other hand, it must be considered that just like

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. Hy Hilmy, Masdar. 2018: 49.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. Hy Hilmy, Masdar. 2018: 52.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. Hy Hilmy, Masdar. 2018: 60.

the binary distinctions between *Santri* and *Abangan* do not really hold true today, neither do the strict classification of either traditionalist or modernist. The Islamic identity for Javanese Muslims is too fluid for such static characterizations. Those practices that may be regarded as *Kejawen* or *Abangan* can still be shared by both modernists and traditionalists. Modernists may practice some Javanese cultural practices associated with their traditional heritage not as a matter of faith, but as a way to renew one's cultural identity. These practices can become secularized and desacralized so that there is no tension between one's Muslim identity and one's Javanese identity. Similarly, while wearing the hijab may mark a Muslim woman as modernist, she may not be a practicing Muslim at all, or at least not a strictly orthodox one. It is possible that she sees the hijab as a way to stay current in Javanese fashion. There is ultimately no right or wrong way to be a Javanese Muslim and there is certainly no room for clear, distinct boundaries between Muslim groups in Java when the border between them is not as rigid as it often appears.

### ***Kebatinan* and Religious Syncretism: Other Javanese Faiths**

While Islam is the dominating religious tradition on Java, it is certainly not the only faith present. *Kebatinan*'s promotion of pluralism and syncretism has done its part in allowing the flourishing of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity as well, while still preserving its core elements. To begin, we must continue with an exploration of the distinction between traditionalists and modernists, but this time in the predominantly Buddhist village of Kalimanggis in Central Java. Like in Javanese Islam, those who consider themselves traditional Buddhists adhere to the *Kejawen* belief system, which is predominantly based in animistic beliefs, and, as mentioned above, is the more popular form of *Kebatinan*. As an animistic belief system, they believe that all natural beings contain a spirit and are worthy of reverence—

especially old wells, tall trees, and caves, which are believed to be possessed by the spirits of ancestors and guardian spirits.<sup>46</sup> When the Buddhist faith became popular in the village, the spirits within these natural objects were given new names associated with Buddhism, such as *Rukkha Deva* and *Bhumi Deva*.<sup>47</sup> The ideal of *eling*, which was defined above as remembrance of God, especially when it is associated with Sufism, which stresses the practice of *Dhikr*, the chanting of the names of God in order to be fully conscious of Him at all times, has a similar meaning in Javanese Buddhism, but when it is put into practice, it may appear different. The definition of *eling* as “awareness” is used in accordance with Buddhism rather than “remembrance of God,” because traditional Buddhist teaching actually does not recognize a particular Deity as Creator or as Omnipotent. For Buddhists, the concept of *eling* is actually associated with the *pali* word “*satisampajanna*” which means “being aware and conscious.”<sup>48</sup> Awareness, or mindfulness, is essential to the Buddha’s *Dharma*, or Teaching. He wished for his followers to constantly be aware of all thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, and to recognize them as fleeting and impermanent, which the whole of creation is characterized by. In its highest form, the practice of *eling* “causes all names and forms to vanish,” which results in a state of emptiness.<sup>49</sup> This state of emptiness is also referred to in Java as *mati sajroning urip* (dead in life), *suwung* (vacant), or, simply, *sunyi* (empty). Emptiness is that which leads to the Ultimate goal and the only thing in the Buddha’s teaching that is permanent and unconditioned, *Nirvana*. *Nirvana* can be seen as the name of God in Buddhism, although it is not personal, but it is very similar in description to how God in Sufism or Vedanta or *Kebatinan* may be described. Just like

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<sup>46</sup> Tanto, Sugeng. "Syncretistic Beliefs in Javanese Buddhism: A Case Study Focusing on Kalimanggis Village." *Journal of Pali and Buddhist Studies*, 2003: 122.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* Tanto, Sugeng. 2003: 122.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* Tanto, Sugeng. 2003: 123.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* Tanto, Sugeng. 2003: 123.



God in these traditions, *Nirvana* cannot be fully expressed, but it is “without beginning, possesses nothing, and is endless.”<sup>50</sup>

Aside from the concept of *Eling* and the use of Buddhist names for certain animistic deities, there are other ways in which the traditional Buddhists, who still hold on to their *Kejawen* traditions, have incorporated the Buddhist way of life into their own lives. *Kejawen* Shamans (*dukun*) have adopted some guidelines, referred to in Javanese as *Mo Limo*, which are usually only prescribed for Buddhist monks. They take vows of celibacy, abstain from killing, sexual misconduct, lying, stealing, and the use of intoxicants, which are the same rules for pious Buddhists called the Five Precepts. They have also adopted Pali words and partake in the Buddhist practice of taking refuge in the triple gems of Buddhism (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha).<sup>51</sup> Many have come to ascribe to certain Buddhist beliefs about death and rebirth, such as karma and the various realms (animal, ghost, human, and god) that one can be reborn into following their death. The festivals of *Uposatha* and *Asalha*, which celebrate the birthday and first sermon of the Buddha, are also celebrated by traditional Buddhists in Kalimanggis. Certain steps have been taken to ensure the proper observance of Buddhist ideals, such as non-violence. While, traditionally, animal sacrifices were often made for certain holidays or festivals, the Buddhist villagers have begun to make imitations of animals from rice flour to appease village spirits and gods. In this way, they can continue to promote those concepts stressed by the Buddha, while still retaining their *Kejawen* traditions. The villagers of Kalimanggis have successfully integrated the Buddhist belief system into their own way of life. There need not be much sacrifice in regard to giving up their traditional belief system in exchange for a completely new faith. In a similar fashion to Javanese Muslims who still wished to practice and cherish the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. Tanto, Sugeng. 2003: 123.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. Tanto, Sugeng. 2003: 124.

ways of their ancestors and at the same time accept the ways of a new faith that may heighten their spiritual endeavors, often the only necessary change is a change of language. Just as the Arabic language was introduced into certain Javanese rituals like the *Slametan* in order to accommodate both the *Kejawen* and Islamic belief systems, the same has been done in Kalimaggis, but instead of Arabic, the Pali language has been used. Anything further than that has only really been added to the traditional way of life, rather than subtracted from it. As far as the modernist Buddhists of Kalimanggis go, they are simply only more well-educated than the traditional Buddhists, who are often of the peasant class. The modernists are often younger and have studied in government schools or Buddhist institutions.<sup>52</sup> They may adhere to a certain school of Buddhism, such as *Theravada*, *Mahayana*, or *Tantrayana*, while traditional Buddhist villagers do not. They may also either study Pali, Sanskrit, or Old Javanese, while the language instruction of the peasants is rather limited.<sup>53</sup> While the modernist Buddhists may believe that the traditional Buddhists of the village are merely nominal Buddhists who do not truly know or understand the scriptures of Pali or Sanskrit and they may see them as lacking in orthopraxy, it certainly seems as though the traditionalists have translated many concepts found within *Kebatinan* and *Kejawen* quite well into the Buddhist world view, all without sacrificing their ancestral heritage.

In order to see the syncretic nature of *Kebatinan* and Hinduism, one must return to the tradition of the *Slametan*. It is no surprise that the study of the *Slametan* should be crucial to any understanding of the *Kejawen/Kebatinan* belief system because “most anthropologists of Java agree that the *Slametan* lies at the heart of Javanese religion.”<sup>54</sup> The ritual of the *Slametan*

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Tanto, Sugeng. 2003: 122.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Tanto, Sugeng. 2003: 122.

<sup>54</sup> Beatty, Andrew. "Adam and Eve and Vishnu: Syncretism in the Javanese slametan." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 1996: 271.

contains many symbolic objects which mean different things to different people according to their personal beliefs. Andrew Beatty examined many of these symbolic elements of the ritual and saw how the same object can be taken to represent a variety of different things. For example, the red and white porridge that is a crucial element to any *Slametan* has a heavy symbolic weight attached to it. Anyone who has been to Indonesia or simply seen the Indonesian flag will realize that the colors red and white hold a strong importance to the Indonesian people. They are of prime importance to traditional Javanese belief. The white porridge represents the semen of the father, while the red porridge represents the mother's procreative blood. To the Muslim or Christian, the Mother and Father are, of course, Adam and Eve, the first male and female created by God, and, therefore, the ancestral mother and father of all human beings. All pairs of oppositions "such as day and night or right and left, may be linked in the address with this primordial pair."<sup>55</sup> So the *Kejawen* belief of male and female duality, as represented by the red and white porridge, was, thus, interpreted through an Islamic lens, but the *Kejawen* worldview, which is the primary background behind this object, remains. And so does the effect of this symbolism, which is the importance of filial piety. Filial piety is a basic, but strong value of the Javanese. A primary motivation for having a *Slametan* in the first place, is often to honor one's ancestors in order to ensure good fortune. While the red and white porridge may represent Adam and Eve at a deep level, it also represents one's own deceased parents who must be given the respect they require. But to follow the symbolism of the porridge, both male and female, Adam and Eve, contribute four things in conception, but life cannot actually be created if not for a third force, which is not human, but is divine. This third force is given a variety of names, including *Ga'ib* (the Hidden), *Urip* (Life), *Kwoso* (Power), or *Wishnu* (Vishnu).<sup>56</sup> This final name shows

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. Beatty, Andrew. 1996: 278.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. Beatty, Andrew. 1996: 279.

the influence of Java's Hindu-Buddhist past. "The duality of red and white therefore implies a trinity: Adam and Eve and *Wishnu*. The third part of the trinity, the divine spark, is (or some say results from) the confluence of the four elements, earth wind, fire, and water, and these elements continually renew and sustain life."<sup>57</sup> So, just as Muslims have added their Islamic theology onto the basic elements of the Javanese *Slametan*, Hindus have also added their own theology onto the ritual. While all of this symbolism certainly exists, followers of different religious traditions will place the emphasis on different interpretations. Muslims may view the concept of Adam and Eve differently than a practitioner of *Kebatinan*. Muslims will tend to see Adam and Eve as historical figures and Adam as the first prophet of God. For *Kebatinan* mystics, Adam is "Everyman," as every man contains the "seed of humanity in his sperm," and Adam and Eve are similar to one's own parents, as they are simply intermediaries and not the "original source of life and wisdom."<sup>58</sup> Mystics take the creation story of the Qur'an less literally because, to them, it is actually a source of symbols to be interpreted by humans and, therefore, Adam and Eve are not considered truly historical figures.

To follow another interpretation of symbols, Beatty examines the five-colored porridge, which, in the *Kejawen* worldview, represent the four siblings who are the personal guardian spirits and the self. A dish containing the porridge shows black porridge in the north, red south, yellow west, and white east. These colors associated with these directions can still be seen today throughout the Hindu island of Bali, which was influenced heavily by Javanese Hinduism. In the center of the dish is a multicolored porridge, which represents the individual, the focus of the four directions. While Hindus may associate each of these colors and directions to a certain Hindu deity, as is done in Bali today, they may also be linked "to other sets [of four], such as the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. Beatty, Andrew. 1996: 279.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. Beatty, Andrew. 1996: 278.

elements, and to Islamic quartets, such as the four drives, the archangels, and the Companions of the Prophet.”<sup>59</sup> To followers of *Kejawen*, the four siblings have a direct influence on one’s welfare, so they are treated as the ancestors are, with great offerings and homage. *Kebatinan* mystics always take their exegesis a step further, so the four siblings have come to represent the four faculties under the control of *rasa*.<sup>60</sup> Even something as simple as the burning of incense can be interpreted differently, even though the physical act of burning incense is the same to Hindus, Muslims, and Javanese Mystics. Traditionally, incense is one of the ways to please the spirits being honored during a *Slametan*. Along with the smells of food, incense is used to feed the spirits of ancestors. The speech given is also not only addressing the people attending the *Slametan*, but also the various spirits who are present. This “food” and speech could be seen as “a direct address to disembodied spirits, a message to be passed on by intermediaries to God, or a reflective contemplation” depending on one’s spiritual background.

In this way, the *Slametan* further shows how syncretism works in Java. First, there is a foundation of popular *Kejawen* belief that forms the primary basis of the ritual because *Kejawen* and the ritual itself have been present on the island long before any foreign religions came to prominence. Depending on whether one has adopted a foreign religion, one will look at this primary foundation through a new lens. For a Muslim, this lens includes the use of the Arabic language and Islamic theology and cosmogony including the importance of Adam and Eve as historical figures. For the Hindu, this lens will include the importance of the divine spark in the form of Vishnu that is critical to the birth and formation of a new human being. For the Javanese mystic, a practitioner of *Kebatinan*, while all *Kejawen* beliefs will be accepted, a deeper interpretation involving one’s own divine power and constant connection to God through

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. Beatty, Andrew. 1996: 280.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. Beatty, Andrew. 1996: 281.

the *rasa* will play a pivotal role. However, Beattie explains that “however sharp the disagreements may be, they are hidden in the *Slametan* by several factors: the ambiguous phrasing of the address; a refusal to contest meanings in public; a relativism which grants a limited truth to the other's view; and a recognition of common social values and common humanity which override doctrinal differences.”<sup>61</sup> Community is the driving force behind *Slametan*, after all. Aside from honoring ancestors and ensuring good fortune, the *Slametan*'s main goal is to foster a state of *rukun*, social harmony. *Rukun* means accepting the beliefs of others for the sake of community and “the syncretism of the *Slametan* transforms ideological difference into *rukun*.”<sup>62</sup> To quote Beattie one last time, “The very adaptability of the *Slametan* has made conversion from Islam to Hinduism and sometimes back again less troublesome than one might imagine. As a ritual frame adaptable to diverse faiths and ideologies it remains at the heart of Javanese religion. As an example of religious syncretism, it shows how - and with what inventive grace - people can come to terms with their differences.”<sup>63</sup>

Syncretism between Christianity and *Kejawen* can best be viewed in the context of conversion during the colonial rule of the Dutch. The propagation of Christianity throughout Java demonstrates how a foreign religion could only be successful in Java only if the local culture was to be embraced and certain concessions be made regarding pure orthodoxy. There were two main groups of proselytizers of the Christian faith. One group was termed “The Saints of Surabaya” and was made up of European missionaries sent to Java by Dutch mission societies. Those converted were called *Kristen Londo* (Dutch Christians), but there were not many of them because the great Saints of Surabaya were largely unsuccessful in their endeavor of turning the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. Beatty, Andrew. 1996: 282.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. Beatty, Andrew. 1996: 284.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. Beatty, Andrew. 1996: 284.

Javanese toward Christ. At this time, Islam had already become wildly popular on the island, although traditional *Kejawen* and *Kebatinan* beliefs were still largely upheld. Christian missionaries usually achieve little success in Islamic societies and the Javanese language proved extremely difficult to learn, so there were many obstacles in the way of the European Missionaries.<sup>64</sup> The Javanese people also were frightened by the idea of converting to Christianity because they felt it might require abandoning certain cultural traditions such as performing *Slametan*, visiting graves of holy people, playing *gamelan*, and visiting certain places deemed as holy in the Javanese tradition. Muslims were weary of converting because Christianity was seen as the religion of the Prophet Moses, which was superseded by Islam, so many worried they would not join their families on the Day of Resurrection or they would have to abandon the Qur'an, almsgiving, exorcisms, communal meals, and *wayang*.<sup>65</sup>

The second group of converters were Indo-European laypeople with personal roots in Java. These people had mastered the Javanese language and knew of and embraced Javanese customs, so they were much more successful than the Saints of Surabaya. Their converts were called *Kristen Jawa*. Their use of mystical knowledge and supernatural powers attracted the Javanese people who were familiar with the mysticism of *Kebatinan*, but these claims of powers also frightened the colonial administrators and missionaries.<sup>66</sup> One such Christian leader was Conrad Laruens Coolen, who had a Russian father and a Javanese Mother. He moved to the small town of Ngara in the 1820s and set up an agricultural settlement and Church on the land. He gained legitimacy through a demonstration of supernatural gifts. Ngara was passed by during a volcanic eruption, survived a famine in 1853, and never succumbed to opium usage, and all of

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<sup>64</sup> Ricklefs, M.C. "Javanese Christian Communities.: In *Polarising Javanese Society, Islamic and Other Visions*, c. 1830-1930. Singapore: NUS Press, 2006: 105.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* Ricklefs, M.C. 2006: 108.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* Ricklefs, M.C. 2006: 109.

these feats were attributed to Coolen. He was also so successful because he performed *wayang* and *gamelan*, was acknowledged as a *Kyai*, solved riddles, and had visions, each of which proved that being Christian did not mean that one had to give up sacred aspects of Javanese life. He also set himself apart from European missionaries by banning European baptism and by performing certain *Kejawen* harvest rituals, invoking the rice goddess *Dewi Sri* and her brother *Sedana* to promise fertility. He also brought Muslims into the fold by utilizing Sufi-like *Dhikr* practices, but altering the Islamic phrase slightly to invoke the name of Jesus: “There is No God but God and Jesus Christ is the Spirit of God.”<sup>67</sup> Another such figure was Kyai Sadrach Surapranata, who was actually a *Santri* at several *pesantrens*. Although he was a devout Christian, he held *Slametans* and called his Church a *Masjid* and followed various codes of a typical Mosque by having men and women sit apart in order to appeal more to the great population of Muslims in Java.<sup>68</sup> When the Catholic Church finally arrived on Java in the 1890s, the Jesuits followed similar patterns of assimilation and acculturation. The Ganjuran Church in Yogyakarta is a prime example of how Catholics adopted elements of Javanese culture in order to reconcile the differences between *Kejawen* and a religion typically viewed as European and foreign. At Ganjuran, angels are depicted like *wayang wong* dancers, *gamelan* is used during Church services, a temple containing a statue of Jesus as a great Javanese king is in the same style as an Old Javanese temple, and festival participants dress in *Karaton* style with the priest wearing the clothes of a court official.<sup>69</sup> In all, Javanese Christianity proves that not only has syncretism been possible on the island, but that it is absolutely crucial if a new religion is to be adopted at all by the Javanese people.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. Ricklefs, M.C. 2006: 111.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. Ricklefs, M.C. 2006: 115.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. Ricklefs, M.C. 2006: 122.



### **Problems facing the Modern Javanese *Kebatinan* Community**

The problems that the practitioners of *Kebatinan* practitioners face today are both practical problems that interfere with the daily lives of members of this community and fundamental issues that have arisen due to that societal change of Java. Officially, *Kebatinan*, or *Kejawen* for that matter, are not recognized as official *agama* (religion), rather, they are seen as *kepercayaan* (belief). Officially, there are only six religions recognized by the Indonesian government, namely Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Many issues have arisen for practitioners of the indigenous faith of Java due to this lack of recognition. Due to the fact that *Kebatinan* does not claim to have one prophet, a sacred book, nor is recognized internationally, it does not fit the mould of what constitutes religion, according to the government of Indonesia. One of the main issues that has arisen due to this is the lack of religious education for the children brought up in *Kejawen* or *Kebatinan* households until very recent years, and even then, it is not up to par with the education of other faiths. Other problems such as difficulty obtaining identity cards, marriage records, and death certificates have also been the burden of this community. These local beliefs do not even fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Religion, but rather the Ministry of Education and Culture. How the *Kejawen* and *Kebatinan* belief systems will be passed down to the next generations has been a cause of great concern for older community members. There are at least twelve million followers of *Kebatinan* in Indonesia, with 248 central organizations and 980 branch organizations.<sup>70</sup> Despite existing long before the “official” religions ever came into contact with the Javanese people, there is still institutional discrimination against the community. A 1965 Law, PNPS 1/1965, concerned blasphemy and has been used to protect official religions

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<sup>70</sup> Lubis, Dahlia. "Religious Education for Aliran *Kebatinan* Community in Contemporary Indonesia." *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 10.2, 2019: 276.

and disparage local faiths like *Kejawen*, which were suspected as being tied to communism.<sup>71</sup> This caused many in the community to convert to an official religion. Similarly, TAP MPR np. 4/1978 stated that *Kebatinan* is not religion, but culture, and is seen as the primary law which made it difficult for members of the faith to get identity cards bearing their true religious identity, find careers, and get help with various administrative services such as funeral, marital, and other social services.<sup>72</sup> In 2016, after several *Kebatinan* communities sued the Republic of Indonesia, many of these problems were resolved, including the identity cards that could now bear the phrase “*penghayat kepercayaan*.” However, religious education still remains a large issue in Java. Every student must be given religious studies courses according to their religious beliefs in secular schools. While there has been collaboration with local *Kebatinan* communities in recent years, there are still issues involving finding qualified teachers. This has led to some schools replacing religious studies with cultural classes for children who follow *Kebatinan* and sometimes these students must take classes focused other religions and rely on their families to pass down the belief system. Law no. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System should have ensured the proper education of students who follow indigenous beliefs, as it stated that education is “organized in a democratic and just manner and is not discriminatory by upholding human rights, religious beliefs, cultural values, and national pluralism.”<sup>73</sup> Its statement that “every participant in religious education in an education unit has the rights to: a) obtain religious education in accordance with the religion he adheres to and is taught by religious educators” seemed to not fulfill its original purpose, so Regulation Permendikbud No. 27 in 2016 ensured cooperation with *Organisasi Penghayat Kepercayaan*, a leading *Kebatinan* organization,

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid. Lubis, Dhalia. 2019: 277.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. Lubis, Dhalia. 2019: 272.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. Lubis, Dhalia. 2019: 281.

in order to provide students with proper religious educators.<sup>74</sup> Students are legally not allowed to be forced to take religious subjects that do not adhere to their own faith and there are now proper curriculum guides and textbooks for these students. While these have been great strides for the *Kebatinan* community, it is still often considered a “religion that could undermine the purity of the teachings of the official religions.”<sup>75</sup>

This idea of purity leads to a final examination of the current state of the *Kebatinan* community. In recent years, the tension between modernists and traditionalists has strengthened. The issue can best be seen in the context of Islam. Being that there are more Muslims living in Indonesia than any other country on Earth, schisms and tension among the Muslim community are inevitable, and the tension between those who promote modernist Islam versus those who promote traditional Javanese Islam is at its height. “Some Javanese Muslims would just as soon meditate motionless in a pond or burn incense and present offerings to the spirits of saintly ancestors as enter a mosque to perform the *salat*.”<sup>76</sup> Of course those who promote *adat*, Javanese custom, have history on their side, as mysticism and its resulting acceptance of traditional culture has been the cornerstone of Javanese Islam since the faith first came to the island. In fact, the “nine saints,” who are said to have spread Islam throughout the island in the fifteenth century, are believed to have been great mystics capable of supernatural feats such as invisibility and invincibility. Supernatural power would be well received on the island because such concepts were already prominent in the indigenous beliefs systems of *Kejawen* and *Kebatinan*. Many Javanese continue to strive for such abilities and perform great fasts and ascetic endeavors to attain them. More orthodox Muslims today reject those practices and believe that “the only

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid. Lubis, Dhalia. 2019: 281.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. Lubis, Dhalia. 2019: 287.

<sup>76</sup> Hefner, Robert W. "A Gentle Blend of Islam and Adat." *Java*, 1997: 66.

proper avenue to Allah is through ritual acts sanctioned by the Qur'an."<sup>77</sup> This disagreement between the communities is not new, for a certain mystic, Sheh Siti Jenar, was actually burned alive for proclaiming that Allah and the individual are one, a truth which many mystics continue to promote. As seen earlier, there have been many successful attempts to blend orthodoxy and *Kebatinan* throughout history, none more so than in the royal palaces of the Javanese sultans. While they were committed to defending pure Islam as "Allah's representative on Earth," they also continued to practice traditional rituals, including presenting rice-mountain offerings to the four guardian spirits of the islands and the renewal of the marriage between the Sultan and the Goddess of the Southern Sea, which is said to bring fertility to the land of Java.<sup>78</sup> Such rituals are seen by many today as complete heterodoxy and un-Islamic, but the royal courts continue to emphasize syncretism. In fact, it is now believed that it is the loss of power of these great kingdoms to the Dutch colonial rule that such a rise in Islamic orthodoxy and decline in *Kejawen* traditions has occurred. As the sultans lost their power, a "crisis of identity" ensued for many Javanese who saw the only solution as rejecting the royal courts and "identifying more strongly with the new tradition of international Islam."<sup>79</sup> Reformers wished to strip Javanese Islam of its local elements and bring it more in line with the Islam seen in the Middle East. Just as that of the Protestant and Catholics in Europe before it, this reformation in Java led to a counter-reformation of Javanese Muslims who continued to see their traditions as reconcilable with Islam. Now, Javanese Muslims belong to one of two main organizations: *Muhammadiyah*, which formed in 1912 and sees itself as modernist in worldview, wishing to orient Java more toward the Middle East and then *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), a traditionalist organization founded in 1926 in response

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. Hefner, Robert W. 1997: 67.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. Hefner, Robert W. 1997: 67.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. Hefner, Robert W. 1997: 69.

to the modernist movement. The NU stands for religious pluralism, syncretism, tolerance, and the preservation of Javanese culture.

### **Conclusion**

Obviously, the ideological struggle between modernism and traditionalism has many implications for the *Kebatinan* community. It all boils down to a matter of whether one places emphasis on the exoteric or the esoteric when examining a religious tradition. Being part of a mystical faith, practitioners of *Kebatinan* do not believe that rituals form the foundation of any religion, not only Islam. They believe, as all mystical sects of religious communities do, that God is not to be found in solely in the temple or the mosque or the church, but within each being. Those promoting orthodoxy place extreme importance on the outer shape of a religion – how a member of the faithful should pray, when they should pray, and where they should pray. And it is not as though there is no precedent for these measures. They most often refer back to a Holy Book believed to be the Word of God. Mystics, however, do not place emphasis on language at all, for they feel God is infinite and cannot be contained in a single book. Ultimately, they believe all religions contain the same truths at their very core and that the outward rituals may serve an individual on their path toward the Divine, but, in the end, one must look inward if one is to find the true nature of reality. This profound tolerance for the beliefs of others is what has, in my view, allowed for the acceptance of foreign faiths on the island. Of course, the indigenous belief system of *Kejawen/Kebatinan* that allowed for such an acceptance was not to be forgotten. Instead, this acceptance resulted in a great blend of the traditional and the new, so that *rukun*, social harmony, could continue to be prioritized on the island of Java. Javanese society will certainly continue to progress and change. There will continue to be calls for modernity, whatever that may look like. But in the end, there are some aspects of life that never change. It

does not appear that the Javanese emphasis on communal welfare and the mystical worldview that holds God in the heart of every creature, will be forgotten any time soon.

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#### Recommendations for Further Study

In order to truly complete this study, primary source data is required. I hope to conduct a Fulbright Research Project on the island of Java with this study as a foundation of secondary source data. It will be extremely helpful as I approach this intended Fulbright. A full, in-depth study of certain Kebatinan communities, their practices, and theologies will help me to compare their mystical worldview with the mystical sects of other religious traditions. I will also see if the syncretism discussed in this study still holds true.