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## What is Indonesian Islam?

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### *Abstract*

This paper is a preliminary essay thinking about the concept of an Indonesian Islam. After considering the impact of the ideas of Geertz and Benda in shaping the current contours of what is assumed to fit within this category, and how their notions were built on the principle that the region was far more multivocal in the past than the present, it turns to consider whether, prior to the existence of Indonesia, there was ever such a notion as Jawi Islam and questions what modern Indonesians make of their own Islamic history and its impact on the making of their religious subjectivities.

### *What about Indonesian Islam?*

Before I begin I would like to present you with three recent statements reflecting either directly or indirectly on assumptions about Indonesian Islam. The first is the response of an Australian academic to the situation in Aceh after the 2004 tsunami, the second and third have been made of late by Indonesian scholars

The traditionalist Muslims of Aceh, with their mystical, Sufistic approach to life and faith, are a world away from the fundamentalist Islamists of Saudi Arabia and some other Arab states. The Acehnese have never been particularly open to the bigoted "reformism" of radical Islamist groups linked to Saudi Arabia. ... Perhaps it is for this reason that aid for Aceh has been so slow coming from wealthy Arab nations such as Saudi Arabia.<sup>1</sup>

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\* This, admittedly in-house, piece presented at the UCLA Colloquium on Islam and Southeast Asia: Local, National and Transnational Studies on May 15, 2006, is very much a tentative first stab in the direction I am taking in my current project on the Making of Indonesian Islam. I would like to thank Jeff Hadler for inviting me over for such a stimulating workshop hosted by UCLA and UCB, Geoff Robinson, for his valuable comments — which will certainly be taken into consideration — and Barbara Gaerlan for her coordination of a very smooth day.

<sup>1</sup> Greg Barton, on Tsunami relief, 2005 as quoted at: <http://www.sauer-thompson.com/archives/opinion/002749.php>

What is Indonesian Islam? It is about living in a country where women can get an education ... where a woman can ride a bicycle in the street without being stared at ...<sup>2</sup>

Different from the image of Islam in the Middle East, Indonesian Islam has been recognized relatively as the peaceful face of Islam. However, the Bali bombing and the involvement of Indonesian Muslims in the attacks has changed its image. Indonesia is currently perceived as a "hotbed for terrorism." Are militant Islamic movements in Indonesia a recent trend or do they have roots in the history of Indonesian Muslim society?<sup>3</sup>

It would appear that operating behind each of these statements, even if the last problematizes the notion of a national image and asks an important question about the roots of local history, there is the unspoken agreement that there is something recognizable as Indonesian Islam that it is replicated and anticipated in regional forms (in Barton's Sufi Aceh, for example), and that it is certainly under challenge from without by forces inimical to it. That said though, we need to pause and examine what we might mean when we (and I certainly include myself here) use the phrase 'Indonesian Islam', for I suspect that few of us here would deny that we have used it in our discourse – whether academic or social – as a shorthand evaluating Islam in Indonesia; even if we haven't deliberately juxtaposed that Islam with the Islam of others, whether in West Asia or held somehow distinct by an imaginary line slashing through the straits of Malacca or the disappearing forests of Borneo.

It is also worth asking not only where Indonesian Islam manifest itself on the map, but *when* it might be said to exist; for this is more than an issue of comparisons in

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<sup>2</sup> Paraphrase of reaction from Fu'ad Jabali at Bogor in July of 2005 to a question posed by Abdulkader Tayob as to 'What is Indonesian Islam?' Please note, I am still trying to track down the original recording of this comment and to correct / attribute it accordingly.

<sup>3</sup> Outline for 'The Roots and History of Islamic Militancy in Indonesia', a short course led by Azyumardi Azra at the Center for Languages and Cultures, Jakarta, 12 April 2006 (see <http://www.pbb-iainjakarta.or.id/>; accessed 3 May 2006)

line with Clifford Geertz in his *Islam Observed*. In what follows here then I hope to briefly sketch some ideas about the genealogies of how we talk about 'Indonesian Islam' before returning to the question afresh, suggesting that there is another less value-laden way of making sense of the phrase.

*Speaking of comparisons*

Over the last 12 weeks I have been co-teaching a course with my colleague James McDougall (which we called 'Jakarta and Rabat') comparing Muslims experiences in North Africa and Southeast Asia from the 1850s and on (more or less). Few of you would be surprised, I suspect, by our decision to set the ball rolling with Clifford Geertz's classic *Islam Observed*. And few of you would be surprised to learn either, I am sure, that while the students felt that they had something clear and authoritative on which to base future assessments (or to confirm past ones), each of us found juxtapositions that no longer had argumentative power and were less able to recognize the Islams ('our' Islams) with which we were confronted.

Certainly Geertz's amused scepticism about the long-term vitality of the process of Islamization may now be seen to have been misplaced (see Geertz 1968: 16), and each of us took issue with both his historiography and selection of paradigmatic (national) saints. Why is Sunan Kalijaga more representative of Indonesia (read: Java) than Sunan Gunung Jati or Mawlana Maghribi? Is it that he is the obvious local by virtue of his name alone? And does it really come down to a comparison of a restless, active and monocultural Islam of the North African desert to an Islam which for Geertz had been 'at least until recently, remarkably malleable, tentative, syncretistic, and, most significantly

of all, multivoiced'.<sup>4</sup> Yet if for Geertz it was the multi-vocality of Indonesian Islam that was the most significant, looking back now I think that it is actually the phrase 'at least until recently' that is actually the most significant for observers.

Of course Geertz was reading his fields in the spirit of the times, and he was certainly reliant on the renditions of history and religion given by his informants augmented by the available, and very much colonial, historiography of both these sites. Meanwhile Islam was codified in terms of the modernist interpretation of what Islam was supposed to be, a la Muhammadiyah, and that so clearly aligned with contemporary Orientalist conceptions. And where real Islam was of texts and literacy in standard Arabic, of Sharia and sovereignty over self and subject peoples, the local practice of Muslims in Indonesia as much as the Maghrib was cast as being at variance to the 'classical' past of the Mashriq.

In conceptualizing Indonesia, Geertz was reaching back to a pre-Islamic, agricultural, past, of an Indic sovereignty still articulated in the *wayang*, and visibly stacked upon the local soil in the form of the stones of Borobudur and Prambanan. He

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<sup>4</sup> In fact Geertz employed all manner of juxtapositions in the first 11 pages alone. On page four we have contrasted 'a rarefied, somewhat overcivilized tropical Asian country speckled with Dutch culture, and a taut, arid, rather puritanical Mediterranean one varnished with French'. Then at pages ten to eleven: 'Islam in Barbary was – and to a fair extent still is – basically the Islam of saint worship and moral severity, magical power and aggressive piety ... as true in the alleys of Fez and Marrakech as in the expanses of the Atlas or the Sahara ... Indonesia is ... another matter altogether. Rather than tribal it is ... basically a peasant society, particularly in its overpowering heartland, Java. Intensive, extremely productive wet rice cultivation has provided the main economic foundations of its culture for about as long as we have record, and rather than the aggressive, extroverted sheikh husbanding his resources, cultivating his reputation, and awaiting his opportunity, the national archetype is the settled, industrious, rather inward plowman of twenty centuries, nursing his terrace, placating his neighbors, and feeding his superiors. In Morocco civilization was built on nerve; in Indonesia on diligence'.

was, moreover, reaching back to the judgements of European scholarship on Islam and history in the formerly Netherlands Indies, whose own door of independent reasoning had seemingly been sealed by the tombstone of Snouck Hurgronje.

This is not to say that Geertz was deliberately emulating Snouck. It is important to recognize, I think, that Geertz's reading of Dutch orientalism was mediated in part by the contemporaneous work of his good friend Harry Benda, who chipped diligently away at Snouck's edifice in a series of articles on the latter (much to the annoyance of Snouck's heirs in the scriptoria of Leiden like G.W.J. Drewes).<sup>5</sup>

As far as the American academy was (and is?) concerned, it was his landmark *The Crescent and the Rising Sun* (1958) – a work that predates both *The Religion of Java* (1960) and *Islam Observed* (1968) – that was arguably the most influential treatment of what he certainly called 'Indonesian Islam.' But before we ask what Benda made of Indonesian Islam we should also consider the roots of his own understanding, which was formed during his residence in the Netherlands Indies (including a period of internment under the Japanese occupation). It was later developed during his studies at Cornell, at which time he spent some time at the feet of Agoes Salim. As Benda notes affectionately, Salim was the "Grand Old Man" of the Indonesian independence movement and veteran leader of Indonesian Islam' (Benda 1958: xi). Yet he was also a modernist by doctrine and a protégé of the inescapable Snouck (see Laffan 2003).

Leaving aside his *silsila*, and the howls from Leiden, what was Benda's vision? To begin with, and like Geertz's locus, Java was taken as representative of the

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<sup>5</sup> I suspect that my own copy of the *Crescent and the Rising Sun*, which I purchased from Smitskamp's Oosters Emporium may well have belonged to Drewes – or certainly one of his fellow travellers on the caustic path – given the frequent instances of indignant marginalia, especially when Snouck is criticized.

archipelago at large. The reasons for this are understandable. The weight of population, colonial documentation, and certainly of Dutch history, has been on Java. Equally the subsequent course of nationalist political activity was (and remains) focussed there. Certainly history is important. And Benda outlined a set of themes familiar from Dutch scholarship.<sup>6</sup> In a nutshell: Islam had come to the archipelago peacefully in the form of traders from India, and not via some moment of (Arab) conquest (this was largely Snouck's conceptual innovation). It was furthermore palatable to Indonesians because their already Indianized conceptions of state and society were amenable to an Islam 'filtered' by Indian Sufism.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, he averred that this Sufism 'or Islamic mysticism' was distinct from 'Islamic orthodoxy' – a view which cannot be laid at Snouck's door, but which was elaborated by his pupils when they wrote several theses on early, Sufi, texts from the archipelago.

How all these texts made their way to the library of Leiden is another story to be told elsewhere, but it is worth noting that the corpus is largely drawn from former court collections of Aceh and Banten, the leading entrepôts of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. And just as for colonial scholarship, so too for Benda, historical Indonesian Islam was seen as an urban phenomenon adopted at the courts, stimulated into further Islamization by virtue of the competing presence of the Portuguese (cf. Wertheim's idea of a religious race) before seeping into the countryside. The countryside in question though could not be the mountains of Sumatra and West Java, and while Banten and Aceh were crucial to the story of ongoing Islamization, for Benda the crucial moment had come further east in the

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<sup>6</sup> The scholars of leading import for Benda's discussion were Hendrik Kraemer, C.C. Berg, G.W.J. Drewes, and B.H.M. Vlekke.

<sup>7</sup> Here Benda (1958: 12, fn 8) refers to the work of the missionary pupil of Snouck, Hendrik Kraemer.

16<sup>th</sup> century with the conversion of the insular and agrarian dynasty of Mataram, allowing Islam to begin percolating into the networks of village schools (*pesantren*), becoming in time a rural phenomenon under the guidance of the rural *kyais* and ulama.

It was only with this, 'grass-roots' sense, wrote Benda, that Islam was truly absorbed, and which 'rendered the acceptance of colonial rule as a legitimate and lasting form of government impossible in the minds of even the least sophisticated villager.' I find this to be a view which is patterned more on the Acehnese experience of the 19<sup>th</sup> century than many other Indonesian histories, where collaboration was ultimately more common than is usually asserted, but in any case, we should stick with Benda, who writes here:

This political significance of Indonesian Islam, including Javanese Islam, stems in no small measure from the fact that in Islam the borderline between religion and politics is, at best, very thin. Islam is as much a way of life as a religion and even though Indonesian Islamization has been, and continues to be, a gradual process, some of its internal political ramifications made themselves felt at a very early stage. (Benda 1958: 13)

It would seem here that we are moving more and more away from what Indonesian Islam once was and getting into the realms of what 'Islam' should be, was then becoming, and is now being remembered. Clearly Benda prefers the former, and he went further, fusing with what we would see as the voice of Geertz when he states:

As in other Muslim communities, the teachers and scribes of Islam, the *kiyayi* and *ulama*, constituted from the very beginning a distinct social element in Indonesian society. Between the *abangan* tradition of the Javanese peasant – rooted in age-old pre-Hindu mysticism with accretions from later, including Muslim, religious elements – and the *priyayi* civilization of the ruling classes – more firmly rooted in aristocratic Hindu-Javanism – the *ulama* constituted the nucleus of yet a third way of life, that of the *santri*, whose traditional abode lay in the heartland of



Islam.<sup>8</sup> Outside Java, similar dichotomies came into existence between *santri* and *adat*-chiefs. The history of Indonesian Islam is, then, the history of this expanding *santri* civilization and its impact upon the religious, social and political life of Indonesia. (Benda 1958: 13-14)

In this history, Islam developed on two parallel trajectories. There was the legal and administrative branch – of courts and Qadis – which merged with the *priyayi*, and that of the independent *kiais*, who consisted of the nucleus of the *santri* civilization. That said, Benda still saw village Islam as no more than a 'thin veneer' over Javanese religion,<sup>9</sup> with the local *kiais* merely mumbling the incantations of the Sufi *tariqas*, of which they were all presumably members.

Moreover, with colonial overwhelming of the courts, Indonesian Islam (read: Mataram) was cut off from Indian Sufism, and 'started to shed its syncretic characteristics' drawing strength instead from contact with Mecca (Benda 1958: 17). The final push to Orthodoxy came in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the opening of the Suez Canal, and the return of waves of pilgrims and a steady influx of (Hadrami) Arabs. Here Benda commenced his now famous examination of Snouck Hurgronje and colonial policy, which he adjudged to have failed in its attempt to detach Indonesians from Islam due to the Dutchman's allegedly 'facile' separation of church and state in Islam.

Yet for all his accusations of Snouck's facile understanding, Islam for Benda still seems to have been that of Orientalist scholarship that emphasised it as a totalizing rule-based faith of politics, corrupted at some stage by Sufi 'heterodoxy' (even if this was an

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<sup>8</sup> Here he cites Geertz's essay *The Development of the Javanese Economy: A Socio-Cultural Approach* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956, p. 87), which clearly anticipated his later work, as well as predating that of Robert Jay, whose *Santri and Abangan* (1957), Van Bruinessen has noted seems to have been unjustly neglected. See Van Bruinessen 1999: 159

<sup>9</sup> Here Benda (1958: 17) cites R.A. Kern from a 1945 publication, but the notion of the 'flaking glaze' of Indonesian religion is originally from Van Leur.

agreeable corruption in tune with local syncretism), and which dwelt on notions of sovereignty and solidarity. As such, Indonesian Islam would appear to be an earlier, bucolic, faith, an indigenous moment of conversion and syncretism, rather than the impending moment of a monotonous 'orthodoxy', flowing in from the coast where faith is predicated only on law and sovereignty vis-à-vis the West.

Ignoring for now his assessment of Snouck, whose promising exemplar Agoes Salim had been 'turned' from the path of collaborative collaboration in Mecca, there is much here to be critical of. Indeed historiography has begun to move very much away from some of Benda's (Dutch-infused), notions. For a start, both Van Bruinessen and Ricklefs have argued that we have very little evidence at best of *pesantrens* existing prior to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. On their own, Van Bruinessen has suggested that the *tariqas* became more important, not less, after the opening of the Suez Canal while Ricklefs has demonstrated most recently the fiction of *abangan* as a category, let alone as one set in eternal opposition to *santri*, before the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> Finally I would add that more attention is being given now to problematizing the 'Indian' contribution as sole source of Islam in the archipelago (Wade forthcoming; Feener and Laffan 2005); though this is not to say that Indians, or yet Persians, should in any way be written out of the story.

Given all this, why start with Benda and Geertz at all? Basically, my reason for citing Benda at length is that his overall narrative remains largely in tact – if not always in the Western academy, then certainly in the press and in the Indonesian one, to which I

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<sup>10</sup> As a foretaste of Ricklefs convincing arguments concerning the *abangan-santri* historical contingency, see Ricklefs 2006.

shall later turn.<sup>11</sup> In essence, Indonesian Islam is still widely believed to be inherently syncretic, mystical and irenic, but now changing under the influence of the outside world of another, combative and monocular Islam, coming from a world in which 'Arab' is the signifier for scripturalist orthodoxy embodied by, if not imagined back in time as, the modern bogey-state of Saudi Arabia.

But while we can draw this line from Benda to these discourses, it is worth noting that he never explicitly said what Indonesian Islam was (or is) in so many words. In fact, nobody ever quite does. Rather, the vast bulk of publications prefer the more neutral 'Islam in Indonesia', or yet 'Islam in Southeast Asia', before sketching a historical

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<sup>11</sup> A recent contribution to the field that repeats this narrative (and enjoys the effusive praise of Hefner, Barton and Azra) is Eliraz's *Islam in Indonesia*. Even when certain dated views are ascribed to 'fundamentalists', they smack of the author's agreement that the bulk of Indonesia's population remains *abangan*, or yet that 'NU's followers are mainly from the rural areas ... and as such they share the Sufi tradition of tolerance, and are also influenced by Javanese Hindu-Buddhist and animist traditions'. See Eliraz 2004: 74 and 86.

For yet another example, there is the executive summary of a recent work on the Japanese army and its role in fostering anti-colonial insurgencies in Southeast Asia. Here the preamble notes that:

A Muslim state flourished in northern Sumatra early in the thirteenth century. Four hundred years later, when the Dutch arrived in what eventually became Indonesia, Islam had taken root in almost all the islands. Indonesian Islam was of a special kind: it had arrived by way of India, not the Middle East, and learned to adapt itself to societies in the archipelago that had already absorbed heavy doses of Hindu culture. ... Islam served as a rallying point for resistance to Christian Westerners, both Portuguese and Dutch. While not all Muslim elements in Indonesia manifested permanent hostility to the Dutch, holy wars of liberation broke out in Java throughout the nineteenth century, and on Sumatra as late as 1908.

Excerpt from Anthony James Joes, *Resisting Rebellion: The History and Politics of Counterinsurgency* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), pp. 132-4. Posted online in *Shingetsu Newsletter* no. 276, See <http://www.shingetsuinstitute.com>.

narrative where Islam is undeniably in the place at certain moments and in varying concentrations, yes, but of the place? It depends who is asking.

One scholar who would argue that Islam is of the place is Anthony Johns. Yet over a lifetime of study of what we might readily call Indonesian Islam, he never – as far as I am aware — opted for this title. For even as he devoted the bulk of his attention to the aspects of Islam so critical to its apparent definition, with his advancing the notion of the conversion of the archipelago by specifically Sufi missionaries, and his concentration on the mystical and interpretive elements of the writings of Hamza Fansuri in the 16<sup>th</sup> century or Ahmad Wahib in the 20<sup>th</sup>, he seems to have eschewed the term, recognizing from his other studies in *tafsir* that Islam is inherently polycentric and accommodative.

Of course, most serious scholars avoid making grand claims about any national Islam, and while the undeniably serious Martin van Bruinessen has used the phrase in passing in his article 'Global and local in Indonesian Islam' (1999), it is only Barry Hooker (perhaps with a push from his publisher?) who has had the courage to title his book *Indonesian Islam*. Even so, with its focus on the production of legal opinions in Indonesia, this work gives a peculiarly legalistic and archaic vision of what Islam is, leaving the sense that religion is about 'law', or disputations about law.

To his credit, Hooker acknowledges that 'intellectual and social variation and variability is the norm and has always been the norm throughout Islamic history' and refers to the ways in which the study of knowing in *fatwas* can allow observers to 'know Islam in Indonesia' (Hooker 2003: 47). But, that said, *Indonesian Islam* struggles to deliver a vision of the elusive creature it names; a task that might have been better tackled, I suspect, by concentrating on the requests for *fatwas* rather than the opinions

themselves. And while Hooker critiques the categories used for defining Islam broadly, he certainly needs them as much as anyone; including a brief treatment of 'Indigenous Islam', derived in part from an earlier essay on law texts (Hooker 2003: 9-12).

But while Hooker asserts that these 17<sup>th</sup> century 'hybrid texts' form the primary local element of dynamic (royal) interpretations of Islam in the archipelago – a dynamism only 'halted' by the arrival of the Dutch 'from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards' – he also refers to the continuing role of the 'Arabic text inheritance,' by which he means the translated inheritance of 'tassawuf (sic) literature' in Malay (and Javanese) where, once again, the story is of Malay philosophy and Hindu-Buddhist Javanese mysticism blending with Islam. In the case of Hamza Fansuri, Hooker implies that the concept of gnosis to be twinned with the rules based Islam of 'Arabic scholarship' is a Malay invention more than what it really was: a glossing of a universal Islamic concept of inner spirituality that was widely spread and accepted.

Hooker also draws on the work of Ellen in agreement about the multiplicity of Islamic practices and identity in the 'Malay-Indonesian World', accepting that 'compromise, syncretism and even local sophistries are the norm for Indonesian Muslim societies', yet the very same statement could be made for almost any Muslim society. In the end, Hooker's brief treatment of 'indigenous Islam' (the real Indonesian Islam?) still alludes to an Islam of the past; an Islam of diversity and local genius now being papered over by the debates and images of a Muslim world that is increasingly invariable and normalizing.

Rather than continuing to pursue other studies of Indonesian Islam in the mode of Snouck or Drewes, though one is certainly tempted to follow up on Hefner's

conspiratorial accounts of neo-Wahhabi plots to unseat democrats like Gus Dur, or Barton's defence of the true 'soul of Islam' against the same Salafi onslaught,<sup>12</sup> I hope that my general point has been made. That is: for some outside writers, both historians and anthropologists, the further back in time we go, the truer, more authentically 'Indonesian', the Islam is assumed to be. But here is a problem. The further back in time we go, the more Indonesia itself fades from view, and the less it is recognizably Islamic at all, being replaced by our scholarly regional conception of Southeast Asia with its inherently polycentric and variegated mandalas; a zone of spices and princes, the fertile meeting point of Chinese, Indian and Arab traders alike. So what did they see or hear of what would be Indonesia one day?

*Arabs and others? Looking for a Jawi Islam*

'There is no difference between an Arab and a non-Arab, other than through piety'<sup>13</sup>

Even as Indonesian Islam is (or, perhaps better said, was) at times imputed to be the smiling and accommodating face of a world religion to be juxtaposed with intolerance voiced from the centre, if not the Arab World in general, it was striking in the Princeton course how *similar* the experiences were in relation to the colonial and post-colonial Maghrib. This was especially the case in terms of colonial and national discourses of history, whether concerning the valorising of a semi-Islamic Berber or a mildly-Muslim Javanese as a victim of the narrow-minded Arab raider and trader, or in terms of the appropriation of Islam as a signifier of nativeness somehow divorced from neighbouring

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<sup>12</sup> See his *Indonesia's Struggle: Jemaah Islamiyah and the soul of Islam* (University of New South Wales Press, 2004)

<sup>13</sup> Saying attributed to Muhammad by Bukhari and Ahmad bin Hanbal in his 'farewell sermon' of 632.

Islams (i.e. Algerian and Moroccan, Indonesian and Malaysian). Then there were the comparative resonances of the appeals voiced to embrace the causes and diction of the Mashriq and the Hijaz (such as Sufism and Salafism) that each stress the indivisibility of the Umma in very different ways, and the fictional nature of national boundaries to be relearned by Maghribi and Southeast Asian alike.

Of course the juxtaposition of periphery to centre is in operation everywhere, as is differentiation among peers of different colonial experiences. Still, I would argue that all these modern operations assume one thing, namely that the centre has *always* conceived of the other in *ethnic* terms ineradicable by conversion, and essentialized *religious backwardness* as a function of that ethnicity. Likewise, too, it assumes that the periphery should be aware of its relation to the centre.

For either imagining to take effect though, whether centre out or periphery in, there has to be a shared conception of the world. But rather than simply mapping this idea onto the old concept of the Umma, and thereby essentializing once more the notion of one historical Islam ascendant from Mauretania to the Moluccas, I think it is important to recognize the important variegating shifts in consciousness that were taking place in the age of steam travel. Certainly Snouck sketched a Southeast Asian community in Mecca that was increasingly conscious of its seeming inferiority to the Islam of the Holy Places and the Ottoman Empire in the 1880s, though at the same time he pondered their existence as a discrete community of Muslims (Snouck Hurgronje 1931). On the other hand, the Dutch missionary Poensen wrote around the same time that the returned Haji felt that he had transcended his national community, and that 'by means of the pilgrimage,' Islam had 'turned him into a citizen of the world!' (Ricklefs 2006: 47).

Of course the truth was neither the absolute, *ummatic*, Islamic identity asserted by Poensen, nor the self-effacing *national* inferiority presented by Snouck. The notion of global – but still Muslim – citizenship was doubtless contemplated by many Javanese, Malays, Moroccans, Tunisians, West Africans and Circassians for that matter, as was their state in the wider world; but they need not all have returned home disheartened, even if some were increasingly attuned to what other Muslims might have to write about them.

In this respect it was particularly interesting during one week of our Jakarta and Rabat course to see how the writings of Muhammad `Abduh (1849-1905), Rashid Rida (1865-1935) and Amir Shakib Arslan (1869-1946) could impact upon reformers from the Atlas Mountains to the statelets of Borneo. However, while Rida and Arslan in particular could paint the battered state of various Muslim lands of their day, point to the poor state of Islamic practice (and thus unity) among the peripheral and the colonised, and to invoke the need to return to an age of glorious (imperial) singularity that had never existed, it was very clear that they were drawing on a vision that had only recently taken note of the details of Southeast Asia in particular.

This was due, as I have mentioned, to the relatively recent explosion of the numbers of Jawi pilgrims, and also to their appearance further afield, seeding ongoing linkages between people like Basyuni Imran in Borneo and Rashid Rida in Cairo. Yet it was also a vision that depended heavily on works of colonial scholarship and the writings of Hadrami migrants to the archipelago (Laffan, forthcoming). As such it also reflected very different vocabulary of region now moving from a once all-encompassing *Jawa*, to the more modern *Malayu*, *Malayziya* and *Indunisiya*, though as far as Arslan was



concerned, the last term in particular was an egregious national fiction invented by colonial plotters like Snouck to break the bonds of global Islamic unity.

While both this transition to national framings of Muslim communities and the affirmation of a centrifugal discourse of authority would seem natural to us, as I mentioned above, I would argue that the seemingly timeless notion of central superiority was in fact changing to an important degree. For even if Jawa (and thus Jawi actors), rather than Malaysians and Indonesians, may have been mentioned in Arabic sources since at least the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the notion implied by Rida and Arslan that Jawi Muslims were Muslims of a *particular*, and *inherently weak*, form was in fact new. Let me explain by looking back a little further in time.

As I noted above, much of Southeast Asia had previously been known in Arabic as Jawa, and hence, its inhabitants – or at least those people connected to the region – were known as Jawis. Much of the early evidence we have of these peoples in Arabic documents come in the form of references to Jawi scholars in the Hijaz, or when written requests would arrive sent on behalf of their rulers for the elucidation of certain matters.

In this respect, aside from being the locus of and self-conscious successor to the first Muslim sultanate in Indonesia, that of Pasai, the (wholly Islamic) history of Aceh and its relations with West Asia is conventionally phrased as emblematic of an Indonesian struggle between local and antinomian Sufi heterodoxy and globalising Sharia-centric orthodoxy. There are known references to requests for *fatwas* sent from 'Ashi' to Shihr in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Serjeant 1963: 168), to Mecca in the 17<sup>th</sup> century concerning whether a queen might rule over a Muslim population, and numerous other questions sent to Medina where the great mystic Ibrahim al-Kurani (d.1690) taught (Azra

2004: 41-43). We might also mention here the famous clashes between local proponents of Wujudi Sufism such as Shams al-Din al-Samatra'i (d. 1630) and the rigorous Indian-born, but still 'Arab', interloper Nur al-Din al-Raniri (d. 1658), who briefly led a form of inquisition against the latter grouping under the patronage of Iskandar Thani.

As noted above, it is in such instances of a periphery in contact with the Arab centre, or yet the clashes between local and Arab claimants to centrality in the Muslim imagination, the putatively errant peoples of the area – even the proud Acehnese themselves – were referred to as Jawis. In one previously undocumented example of such a contact, it is exactly this adjectival term that was used in a text questioning the creed of a recently deceased Kamal al-Din al-Jawi, whose beliefs were apparently supported by a Sayf al-Din al-Azhari and condemned by a (yes, most likely the) Nur al-Din (see Princeton, Garrett Littmann ms 476L).

Based on what we know from other sources, summarised by Azra (2004: 59-61), I would suggest that Kamal al-Din was more than likely the teacher known to the local Dutch factor Peter Sourij as 'Maldin', who had been exiled to a place unknown by Iskandar Thani soon after the arrival of al-Raniri in May of 1637. By the same token, Sayf al-Din must surely be identified with Sayf al-Rijal, the Minangkabau student of Maldin, who supplanted him with his return, apparently from studies in Gujarat, in August of 1643. Such an identification is proven, I believe, by the fact that a phrase attributed to Sayf al-Din in the Princeton ms is identical to that alleged by al-Raniri as being the utterance of Sayf al-Rijal.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Namely in relation to his belief, stating that 'indeed, my belief and my approach is that of all the saints of Mecca and Medina' (*na`m hadha huwa i`tiqadi wa madhhabi` ind kull al-awliya` fi makka wa`l-madina*, ms Garrett 476L, f.2r; Azra 2004: 61).

While Sourij claimed Sayf al-Rijal had returned from Gujarat (or perhaps just on a Gujarati pepper ship?) it would also appear from his sobriquet of 'Azhari' that Sayf al-Din had in fact traveled to Cairo's premier teaching mosque to gain legitimacy from the centre in his struggle against the Indian-born Nur al-Din, and that perhaps he had even followed his master to Mecca beforehand. My reason for the latter suggestion is that the source of the text on which the Princeton ms is based (it not being the original by virtue of the inclusion of a Malay interlinear translation), represents a discussion taking place in Arabic in the Middle East among 'the ulama of the day'.<sup>15</sup> Arguably it was only in a Middle Eastern or West Asian locus that the *nisba* 'Jawi' had meaning; and it is noteworthy that a coda to the manuscript written by its Malay translator referred to the same *wujudi* mystic as 'Abd al-Kamal 'Ashi', and linked him to Sayf al-Din and Shams al-Din and Hamza Fansuri as mystical scholars of 'Aceh Dar al-Salam' to be defended against narrow-minded detractors.<sup>16</sup>

That said, and while the Jawi *nisba* had salience beyond the lands of the Jawa, much as the sobriquet Azhari was a claim to superior knowledge, there is no equivocal evidence in the present literature prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century that Jawiness was of itself seen as constituting a specific form of Islam, or yet that the Jawis favoured specific *local* heresies. Nowhere is mention made of 'Jawi Islam' (*al-islam al-jawi*), or yet 'Jawi

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<sup>15</sup> *Sa'ala ba'd al-'ulama / Telah bertanya daripada segala ulama yang pada masa ini ...* ms Garrett 476L, f.1v.

<sup>16</sup> See ms Garrett 476L, f. 13v-14r. In this regard too one might consider the 'dual' identities of scholars like Abd al-Samad of Palembang (1704-1789). When in the Middle East he was Abd al-Samad al-Jawi, but in Southeast Asia he was Abd al-Samad (al-)Falimbani. As such it is somewhat misleading to declare that his full name was Abd al-Samad al-Falimbani al-Jawi, much as many of the names of Jawi ulama have been reconstructed by Riddell (2001) or Azra (2004) in their ventures into the past of the 'Malay-Indonesian' world.

innovation' (*al-bida` al-jawiyya*). Rather their Islam was simply recognised as Islam by fellow Muslims.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, the forms of heresy allegedly afflicting the courts of Aceh or Palembang in later centuries were usually described in universal terms of conflict between either Islam and a known sort of unbelief or yet between one known form of heterodoxy and orthodoxy. In the case of Kamal al-Din al-Jawi, mentioned above, he is implied in the anonymous Princeton ms to have been an excessive partisan of Wujudi mysticism as propagated by (the Andalusian) Ibn [al-] Arabi (1165-1240) rather than a victim of some sort of Indic pantheism. For this reason, part of the Princeton ms mentioned above, consisting of the views ascribed to Shihab al-Din ibn Hajar al-Haytami, dwells on a comparison between the Wujudiyya and excessive Christian veneration of Mary as the vessel of the Holy Spirit. Neither Jawa, or yet the peoples of Hind, are in view.<sup>18</sup>

That said, while Jawis continued to exist on the fringes of the Muslim World and to manifest in the Holy Places in ever greater numbers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, greater European scrutiny of such connections and theorising of the Indianized roots of Southeast

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<sup>17</sup> For reasons such as these it is in fact hard to determine if a Jawi mentioned in Arabic works is in fact from Southeast Asia; as opposed to somebody with trading or intellectual connections with the archipelago. Certainly this is the problem regarding one Mas`ud al-Jawi known in the hagiographical literature of Yemen from a 14<sup>th</sup> century source. Indeed he is mentioned consistently as a scholar of Yemen, whose Jawiness constitutes a marker of interest that can be related to ideas of Southeast Asian aromatics, but little more. See Feener and Laffan 2005.

<sup>18</sup> It should be noted too that while earlier Arabic treatises had, prior to the conversion of parts of the archipelago, subsumed *jawa* or the *bilad al-jawa* under the rubric of Hind, much as Southeast Asia can be seen as joined to the Subcontinent in webs of Sanskritic learning and political expressions (Pollock 1998), there is evidence from later Muslim Indian sources that Southeast Asia – and Aceh in particular – were not regarded as part of the Indian world. See Alam and Subrahmanyam 2005.

Asian religion seems to have had an effect on the way that the Jawa were presented in Arabic, and most especially in the writings of the Hadrami diaspora. Evidence of this form of view crossing over can be found, for example, in the writings of Sayyid `Uthman of Batavia who was in constant contact with colonial scholars and officials – including Snouck. I suspect that this contact had an impact on his view of the Muslims he worked among, and in one of his critiques of the local Sufi orders in West Java in the 1880s, he implied that local Islamic deviation was influenced by various causes, the first of which being 'the learning of some of the Hindu people of former times who brought their religion to the land of Java.'<sup>19</sup>

Far more explicit presentations of essentially benighted, if not Indianized, Jawis are to be found in the letters of Hadramis sent to the presses of the *Mashriq* in the 1890s. Here though India becomes ever more clearly a signifier for non-Muslim, and the Arabs alone are attributed primary agency in having converting the Jawa – now said to be in habitual darkness and ignorance – a state said to be zealously maintained by the Dutch (Laffan, forthcoming).

By contrast though the English are implicitly praised for their tolerance and the Malays (increasingly separated from Jawa) are painted as more diligent. As Mona Abaza has indicated, such patternings began to crystallise in the letters sent to *al-Manar* in the 1910s, with increasing references to active Malays and passive Javanese (Abaza 1998: 99). Certainly this was the conclusion formed of the respective groups of aspirant Azharites in 1925, when an *ad hoc* committee formed to examine the woeful pass rate of Southeast Asian scholars determined that (on the basis of testing three students!) they

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<sup>19</sup> See `Uthman 1890: 15. Of course the cure for this situation was at hand in the works of Arab, Javanese and Malay teachers who had ministering to Java 'for centuries'. See `Uthman 1890: 23.

'fell into two groups. One was of the Javanese who are afraid of humiliation in the exams. The second was of the Malays who have progressed ...'<sup>20</sup>

In time the laden comprador categories of (diligent) Malaysian and (poorly-prepared) Indonesian would overwrite these classifications of Malayu and Jawi in places like Cairo, even if they have been accented in different ways. Today Indonesia, but not Malaysia, is imagined by some in Cairo and Mecca as much as a mission field as a zone of Islamic fraternity, although it should be said that the leftist Muslim intellectual Hasan Hanafi, who has many Indonesian admirers, has a somewhat different sense of difference in his own theorizations of the ways in which Islam is played out the further one travels from the centre of the Muslim World; with Islam becoming ever more bound up with identity the further east one goes.

On the other hand again, the present mufti of the Republic of Egypt, a real favourite among Malays and Indonesians alike, has somewhat reluctantly expressed the opinion that while there was no difference between Muslims of any nation, his Malaysian students were more organized than their Indonesian kin – though this was attributed to the comparative benefits of British rather than Dutch colonialism (Laffan 2004: 19).

*Islam in Indonesia or Islam of Indonesia?*

While Indonesians and Malaysians today share spaces and forums in Cairo and Mecca, it is increasingly clear that they too conceive of themselves as being different from each other – whether in the books they read, the teachers they favour, and not least in the ways that they have even got to the Middle East (via *pesantren* and family savings

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<sup>20</sup> 'Lajnat ta'lim al-sharq al-islami bi misr', *al-Wifaq* vol. 2 no. 13, 6 Shawwal 1343 / 30 April 1925, pp. 4-5.

or state school and generous stipend). In part though this differentiation must be seen in terms of the changing dynamics of the community there, with the relatively recent influx of students aligned with NU, who seem to be subverting the city's image as a (Malay-centric) bastion of modernism.

Even here though we need to backdate the pattern of NU-modernist rivalry to problematize the rather dominant vision of 'Indonesian' Islam being best exemplified by the (NU) tradition of rural pesantrens, *kyais* and *tariqas*. Indeed there is much evidence to hand to suggest that Javanese Islam (for want of a better term), on which most writing about Indonesian Islam is predicated, was highly contested in the past, and most particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when incursions of reformist sufi orders – orders that relied in part on stronger connections with Mecca and printed texts to disseminate their message – not only laid down the bedrock upon which NU would be built in Java, but instigated a sharp period of contestation in Javanese society, arguably engendering the striking divisions of *abangan* and *putihan* first observed by missionaries like Hoetzoo and Harthoorn in the 1860s (see Ricklefs 2006). For much as the *abangan* were never to be fully identified as non-Muslims, or nominal Muslims whose practices were infused with 'Indian' traditions, the work of Woodward and others have shown that there is much of the *abangan* way that reflects an earlier (often mystical but not necessarily *tariqa*) interpretation of Islam; and one originally paraphrased in Indic vocabulary but not in any sense fused with it (Jacques forthcoming).

In the end though it was the NU pattern that largely triumphed as the majoritist form of *santri* Islam in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and which, largely due to the major political changes affecting the old Ottoman Empire, and the Hijaz in particular, I suggest became

increasingly identifiable with the inherently tolerant and mystical local Islam. Obviously there is some irony here if it was indeed the Islamization activities of the NU forefathers that acted as the intolerant foreign Islam of the *putihan* in the 1860s. Certainly this would problematize the linking of intolerance solely to the first outbreak of a movement naming itself of 'the white ones' in the archipelago; that of the pseudo- (or semi-) Wahhabi Padri movement in Sumatra in the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In any event, with the Wahhabi ascendancy over the Hijaz and the Sufi diaspora of the 1930s, still Jawi Islam became phrased as either a derivative discourse in global reformist discourse, or else reasserted locally as true Islam by NU and its leaders – leaders who also stepped forward in the 1940s to press their claims to represent a new, post-colonial, Indonesian Islam.

But I simplify here. We might ask the question, and rightly so, was the phrase 'Indonesian Islam' ever invoked in a way that went beyond the more readily found 'Islam in Indonesia'? For an answer to this question, which I do not yet have, we will need to cast our eye more carefully over the period of the 1950s and to keep in mind the state of world affairs. Surely, as Jim Rush and Jeff Hadler will most likely argue, we will need to focus on the literature of the period, and most especially the writings of Hamka, who most certainly wrote concentrically of a modern global community, a Muslim world, and a proud Indonesia.<sup>21</sup>

And when Soekarno later declared himself a Muslim in equal parts to a Marxist, did he have in mind the Islam as explained to him by the arch-reformist Ahmad Hassan, who is said to have written to him during his first internal exile on the island of Flores?

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<sup>21</sup> Certainly I was struck in reading Hamka's *Ajahku* by the way that he casts his father's experience in Mecca as that of a sometimes respected, and sometimes disregarded, 'Jawi' in company of either sympathetic or arrogant Arabs. See Hamka 1958: 50-52.



Or are we to look at the interpretation of his colleague Agoes Salim, whose Islam was certainly not that of NU, and whose perspective was perhaps shaped in equal parts by his regular pilgrimages between 1906 and 1910, and the lectures of Snouck Hurgronje, which he read and appreciated?

Yet another moment worthy of examination is the early New Order, for perhaps it is here that we will note the evidence of the phrase 'Islam Indonesia,' though I suspect that if it was ever uttered by an OrBa functionary, it was as a glossing of some form of propaganda issued more to endear the regime to Western observers (or patrons) rather than reflecting a genuine internal idea of specificity.

In fact, even a cursory web-search conducted at the very basic lexical level of 'Islam Indonesia' is a non-starter, and one should seek instead to contextualize such formulations as *Umat Islam Indonesia*, or *Wacana Islam Indonesia*, to find what ends up back in English as something more akin to Islam *in* Indonesia; though 'Indonesia' here can serve as a qualifier for Islam as much as *umat* or *wacana* ...

I also suspect that if such language were ever used by the New Order to appeal to an internal *umat* that was self-consciously expanding, it was largely to justify the historical continuities linking Indonesia to Majapahit after its conversion at the hands of the forces of Demak and the Wali Songo. For while they may not have been declared national heroes in the way that disparate Islamic rebels against Dutch authority such as Imam Bonjol and Diponegoro have been by governments 'guided' or 'new', the Wali Songo are a key element in the NU conception of an Indonesian (rather than a parochially Javanese) past.

In this sense then, Geertz was on the mark when he appropriated the story of one of the Wali Songo, for it, as with all the Wali stories, is becoming arguably more Indonesian as time goes on. Seen from this angle, Islamic history is not some dormant counter-narrative to the official narrative shaped by Nugroho Notosusanto, as has recently been suggested by Michael Wood (2005), but it coexisted happily with it, given that the teleology of nation was implicit and never challenged.

I think it is fair to say that Indonesia is increasingly being imagined by its Muslim majority as a Muslim space, and proudly so. As such the *umat* is becoming identical with the Indonesian *bangsa*. To some degree it would appear that another voice of the OrBa period, the late Nurcholish Madjid, has played a decisive part in this, given that he posited 'Indonesianness' (*keindonesiaan*) as a core part of the 'renewal' movement he instigated in the 1970s alongside Islam and modernity (see Van Bruinessen 1999). Yet while Van Bruinessen once asserted that 'few modernists' would assent to the notion of such a nationally-distinct Islam, it would seem to my mind that this statement needs qualification, for earlier modernists like Hamka were most definitely partisans of Indonesian Islamic nationhood (even as they asserted the oneness of Islam) just as many other modernists of Muhammadiyah continue to act within the framework of an Indonesian nation, and write academically about the Islamic history of Indonesia — including its Sufi 'past' — and reject their frequent conflation with the Salafiyya.

In fact one need only look to the once modernist strongholds of the State Institutes for Islamic Studies (IAIN) to see an extremely active and self-conscious project of thinking about what, for want of a better term, we can say *is becoming* more and more Indonesian Islam, rather than seeing the reverse process of a once true form of belief

being eroded or elided into a monolithic structure in civilizational opposition to the West. Here one may point to the journals long produced by such IAIN (now UIN) as Syarif Hidayatullah in Jakarta or that of (yes) Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta, wherein the still English term 'Indonesian Islam' can increasingly be found.<sup>22</sup> In recent days the IAIN of Sunan Ampel, Surabaya, has even announced the forthcoming appearance of its own journal, to be titled 'The Journal of Indonesian Islam,' and will welcome papers on an extremely broad range of topics.<sup>23</sup>

Part of this affirmation is doubtless due to the recent appearance of highly emotive counter discourses of Islam in the tumultuous months that led to and went beyond Soeharto's unseating. Here Islamic symbols and claims to the leadership of Islam in Indonesia were invoked by many new factions, and even some old ones. Perhaps the most prominent before the Bali Bombing was Ja'far Umar Thalib's Laskar Jihad paramilitary, a body formed from a cadre of once politically-quietist Salafis who denied the possibility of alternative interpretations of Islam and the authority of any nation state. It was thus somewhat of a paradox that they rushed to war to defend their own nation and the lives of fellow nationals/believers whose interpretations of Islam doubtless differed from their own. In short they assert belief in Islam absolutely, and Indonesia reluctantly, but an Indonesian Islam remains beyond their imaginations.

Even more striking than the events of Maluku in feeding into a notion of an Indonesian Islam to be defended and studied have been the actions of JI, whose first major success against a western target led some Indonesians to aver that only Arabs could

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<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Maarif 2000.

<sup>23</sup> See [www.sunan-ampel.ac.id/submission.html](http://www.sunan-ampel.ac.id/submission.html)

have done it. Of course Amrozi proudly rejected the charge, as he became the new smiling face of Indonesian Islam; to be questioned as much at home as abroad.

### *Conclusion*

Of course Indonesians (though probably not the oft-quoted statistical 90% of the population) are actively debating the meaning of Islam and its valence as a source of identity (to whatever measurable degree). The process can only continue, but I want to suggest in closing that it is not only a conversation about present practice, but about the shared, and perhaps too-little questioned, past that is pushed ever back as 'Indonesia' much as the modern nation-state stumbles forward.

Reflecting my own disciplinary bias, I would argue that Indonesian Islam remains less a specific genus than a historically-contingent *narrative* formed in conversation between the inhabitants and occupants of the colonial state, the citizens of the current nation-state, and Muslims and non-Muslim scholars of other states. As such it is not surprising that the moments making the narrative of Indonesian Islam show a great deal of commonality with other Islams, whether Malaysian, Algerian, or Caucasian. But while they may have had broadly similar experiences — of conversion, colonialism and the quest for national definition — Indonesians can also produce the narrative of their specific national Islam, a narrative that will name Sultan Malik al-Salih of Samudra and Iskandar Muda of Aceh, the coming of the Walis to Java and Sulawesi in *tariqa*-garb, and the resistance struggles of the (Islamic) *pahlawan nasional* like Imam Bonjol and Diponegoro, but will circle ever more around the lode-stone of Java without realising

how inflected it has been by outside scholarship.<sup>24</sup> It is this history that I will be seeking to explore in my current project.

This is not to say that, assuming the long-term survival of this nation, rather than its disintegration and retrospective casting as an inherently unstable archipelagic 'empire',<sup>25</sup> there will one day be a discretely Indonesian Islam that also consciously (and evenly) links the Wali Songo to a national *madhhab* as was perhaps advocated by Hazairin (either with or without the *tariqas*), and which inducts Cak Noer into the national pantheon. But only time, and Indonesians, will tell.

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<sup>24</sup> It is my intention in a forthcoming monograph to explore this process in more detail. Indeed after first presenting this paper I turned to read a recent book on Sufism in Indonesian history and was faced by exactly the narrative sketched above. See Suwarta 2002.

<sup>25</sup> This notion of failed multi-ethnic 'nations' being retrospectively cast as empires is being developed by my colleague Steve Kotkin, who kindly showed me a recent piece he is working on.

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