



The Acceptance of New Religions on Java in the Nineteenth Century and the Emergence of Various Muslim and Christian Currents

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Abstract

My Ph.D.- dissertation analyzes the work of six Dutch missionaries on Java in the period of 1850 until 1920. Besides analyzing their proselytizing strategies, I researched on the missionaries' reflections on their work and the reformed strategies that followed those reflections and their views on the religious context they worked in as well as how they perceived the process of admission of new religions. My focus is not only on the arrival and acceptance of Christianity, but also the Islamization process of Java, since the missionaries tried to elucidate that process in order to benefit from it. As part of my dissertation, this paper will focus on the formation of various Muslim and Christian currents in the second half of the nineteenth century in order to elucidate the process of religious adaptation on Java.

Keywords: Muslim Currents, Christian Currents, Religious Adaptation, Missionaries, Islamization

A. Introduction

Java is often described as a melting pot of religions. Merle Calvin Ricklefs' famous book 'Mystic Synthesis in Java' describes how the Javanese accepted Islam in their existing religious tradition; a tradition that already consisted of elements of animism, Buddhism and Hinduism.² Most literature emphasizes the syncretistic character of Javanese religions and as a consequence the idea that the Javanese easily allow elements from new religions into their belief system is strengthened. My Ph.D.- dissertation analyzes the work of six Dutch missionaries on Java in the period 1850 until 1920. Besides analyzing their proselytizing strategies, I researched on the missionaries' reflections on their work and the reformed strategies that

followed those reflections and their views on the religious context they worked in as well as how they perceived the process of admission of new religions. My focus is not only on the arrival and acceptance of Christianity, but also the Islamization process of Java, since the missionaries tried to elucidate that process in order to benefit from it.

In contrast to the large body of literature on religious fluidity on Java, the writings of these six missionaries do not tell the story of a conflict-free inclusion of new religious beliefs and rituals. The missionary writings show a rich history of the conversion to Islam and Christianity which was very diverse and often problematic. The writings show that the attempts at conversion in the second half of the nineteenth century were almost completely fruitless as the majority of the Javanese showed no sign of interest in Christianity. Furthermore, it shows that the Christian proselytizers were divided among themselves. After the arrival of the Dutch two rivaling Christian currents emerged, first in Central and, then, East Java. One was led by Dutch missionaries, which was more 'orthodox' and 'modern' of character. The other was led by indigenous Christian gurus (teachers), which may be described as 'traditional' and 'syncretistic' as a Javanese Christian current.

Remarkably, the missionary writings show a similar division between a 'modern-orthodox' Muslim current and a 'traditional-syncretistic' Muslim current on Java in the nineteenth century. Such currents contradict the idea that new religious beliefs and ideas were included in the Javanese religious tradition without difficulties. This paper will focus on the formation of various Muslim and Christian currents in the second half of the nineteenth century in order to elucidate the process of religious adaptation on Java.

B. Islamization and Islamic *Ngelmu*

For centuries the spread of the Islamic faith went rather slow, however in the seventeenth and eighteenth century the process suddenly accelerated. Nevertheless, sources on this acceleration process are meagre and the literature on this subject is therefore necessarily speculative. Especially, the coastal towns witnessed a quick increase of the number of converts in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, where multiple Islamic communities were formed. Beliefs and practices were exchanged between various religious communities and in several places. New religious currents came into being. Javanese legends that tell the story of the Islamization of Java are full of mystical insights and powers. Famous are the stories of the so-called Wali Sanga, the nine saints, known as Muslim mystics who came to Java to spread Islamic faith.

Mysticism has always been at the core of Sundanese and Javanese traditions. Sufism, the inner mystical dimension of Islam which was then dominant in many parts of the Muslim world, attracted the inhabitants of Java because it connected well to the already existing Javanese traditions. As a result, the dominant current of Islam on Java was strongly impacted by Sufism well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As such, it is still present today in Indonesia.³

Conversion to Islam often took place in close association with mystic movements that showed a remarkable capability to connect local religiosity to the Islamic call. Islamic beliefs were sometimes assimilated with Sundanese, Javanese, Hindu and Buddhist beliefs and practices and together formed new religious currents which were bracketed together as 'Kebatinan', 'Kejawen' or in English: 'Javanism', in the nineteenth century.⁴ Conversion to Islam was a slow process as there was usually not a clear break between one's old and new faith. The incorporation of new beliefs and practices differed from region to region. At the same time, people were not fully aware of religious and cultural boundaries. For most Javanese animistic traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam were not exclusive belief systems.⁵ People adopted elements from each belief system into their personal religious life. It took several centuries before Islam spread in the interior and the majority of the population of Java confessed to Islam. Many observed Muslim rituals, yet they held on to their faith in indigenous, spiritual forces.

In the nineteenth century two processes occurred side by side; further Islamization in the sense of the further spread of Islam and a process which recently has been named 'Santrification'.⁶ By the mid-nineteenth century Java had become nearly fully Islamic; virtually all Javanese and Sundanese would identify themselves as Muslims. Notwithstanding most may have tried to obey core rituals of Islam, the acceptance of the reality of local spiritual forces was still common in every layer of society and the majority continued with the worship of ancestors.⁷

The second process was a reform within Javanese Islam. Under Dutch ruling Javanese religions became static, which changed their characters severely. This was due to numerous processes of which I will give three examples. First, the Dutch spread literacy and literacy changes decisively the way in which religious beliefs are held. In non-literate societies the past is the servant of the present; elements of the past are forgotten and myth is constructed to justify temporary arrangements. However, in literate societies religion often acquires a more rigid base. Religion becomes a system of rules and people develop a sense of universal orthodoxy of

doctrine.⁸ Second, Dutch policymakers and scholars tried to capture, categorize and preserve all native, religious traditions. They classified people into several religious currents, even though previously there were no clear boundaries between religions in the archipelago.⁹ Most people incorporated beliefs and rituals from various doctrines into their personal religion. However, the colonial government enforced more definite boundaries between religious currents. Third, the Dutch authorities attempted to compile handbooks of *adat* law, customary law, to use in the courts. Consequently, this changed *adat* into a fixed, rigid system, while before it was fluid and ever changing. Moreover, this codification made it possible to study contradictions between *adat* and Shari'a law more precisely and as a result *adat* and Shari'a became competitive systems.¹⁰

From the 1850's onward, better means of transport and communication made the ties between Java and other Muslim regions, stronger.¹¹ Before that Islam was brought to the archipelago by Muslims from India, Malaysia and Southern China. However, the Javanese were now increasingly in direct contact with the Arabian Peninsula. From then on, the Islamization process was steered by the increasing number of groups of returning *hajjis* (people who have undertaken pilgrimage to Mecca). The number of *hajjis* increased tremendously in the second half of the century, and especially during the 1880's because the years 1880, 1885 and 1888 were the years of the '*hajj akbar*' (grand hajj), the most prestigious years to perform the pilgrimage.¹² Most pilgrims tended to reject local forms of Islam after their return in favor of a supposedly 'purer' form of Islam as they had encountered in Arabia. *Hajjis* were therefore regarded as being 'more pious Muslims', and were supposed to know more about Islamic law and rituals compared to other Javanese Muslims. Ideas and practices from Arabia were considered superior and 'more orthodox'. Many of them opened Qur'an schools (*pesantrens*) which led to more educated students of religion, who were called 'Santri'.¹³ Consequently, a reform took place in Javanese Islam, which is now known as 'Santrification', and a substantial part of the Muslim people started to adhere a more modern, scripture based form of Islam.

Modern ideas about Islam arrived on Java and the emphasis in religion began to shift slowly from practice to content. The focus on meaning and scripture came to exist side by side, instead of a focus on text at the expense of ritual. Additionally, knowledge of Islam was no longer exclusively for *hajjis* and religion students at the *pesantrens*.¹⁴ Due to the advent of the printing press and to the decreasing level of illiteracy, a much larger group had access to the Qur'an and other scriptures. Moreover,

newspapers and magazines began to appear in the local languages and these often included segments of Islamic theology and law.¹⁵

A significant number of the population of Java, however, resisted this Islamic intensification by returning to their local practices; they re-accepted beliefs and rituals from traditional Javanese religions. As a result, a gap arose between modern and traditional Javanese Muslims and it widened on both sides. These 'nominal' Muslims were more inclined to follow the local system of beliefs and laws, the *adat*, and the modernist Muslims sought to follow 'pure' Shari'a. In the second half of the nineteenth century, an increasing number of modern, activist Muslims challenged the 'Islamicness' of those Javanese Muslims who were now considered to be 'nominal' Muslims. These 'more pious' Muslims distanced themselves from the 'unbelievers' by calling themselves '*Putihan*', the white people, and the supposedly nominal Muslims '*Abangan*', the red or brown people.¹⁶ The distinction between the two groups was first seen in predominantly Islamic areas, where the differences were most pronounced.

The oldest reports on the differentiation between these two groups are from missionaries from the *Nederlandsche Zendelinggenootschap* (NZG, Dutch Missionary Society), who were situated in East-Java. In 1855, Wessel Hoozee called the *Abangan* people 'secular', because he was of the opinion that they did not observe the Islamic laws.¹⁷ In 1856, Samuel Eliza Harthoorn of the NZG pointed out that there was a difference noticeable between followers of the Islamic knowledge (*Ilmu Santrian*) and heretical non-muslim knowledge (*Ilmu Pasedjian*) in East Java.¹⁸ However, Harthoorn pointed out that 'since no one understands the meaning and intent of one of these two, the real uncorrupted *Ilmu Santrian* is denigrated with *Pasedj* heresy in spite of itself, and the *Ilmu Pasedj* is unintentionally permeated with *Santri* ideas.'¹⁹ Harthoorn clearly wrote about two different religious currents in this report in 1856, but it was not until 1858 that he used the terms 'white people' and 'red people' to indicate the two currents.²⁰ Carel Poensen, another missionary of the NZG, first mentioned the distinction between the *Putihan* and *Abangan* in the 1860's. However, he did not write extensively about the subject until the 1880's. This indicates that the distinction between the two currents were still evolving and possibly not yet visible in every region. Poensen's book 'Letters on Islam from the interior of Java' was, and still is, one of the most important sources on this process of differentiation.²¹ Towards the close of the nineteenth century, the delineation between the two groups had become clearly noticeable all over Java.²² When the famous anthropologist Clifford Geertz arrived on Java to do his research in the 1950's the distinction appeared to be final and

commonly accepted on the island to the extent that he thought it had been that way for centuries.²³ However, the separation could be traced back to a merely fifty years in some areas.²⁴

'Traditional' Javanese Muslims, the *Abangan*, were predominant in the interior of Java, the areas in which the missionary societies were most active. The Dutch missionaries soon noticed that the *Abangan*, similar to the Chinese on Java, were easier to convert than the supposedly 'more pious' *Putihan*. Some missionaries did not even consider the *Abangan* people as 'real Muslims' because many of them never visited a mosque, never prayed, nor read the Qur'an. Eventually, many of them put all their efforts in converting only the *Abangan* and the Chinese and ignored the more modern, on scripture focused Muslims.²⁵

Abangan Islam was, in the view of many observers, including Dutch and reformist Muslims, not really Islamic. A well-known expression is that Islam was nothing more than 'a thin veneer' on Javanese religion. Critics stated that 'traditional' Javanese Islam differed in essential respects from 'orthodox' Middle Eastern Islam. However, although *Abangan* Islam varied much with scriptural Islam, it did not vary that much with other living practices. In fact, research shows that practices that previously had been regarded as typical 'Javanese' were also found in other parts of the Muslim world.²⁶ These practices came to the archipelago as part of Muslim civilization, although they did not belong to the core of Islamic faith.²⁷ Islam was practiced differently in every world region, and it was -and still is- impossible to designate a place where 'orthodox' Islam was practiced.

C. Java's First Encounters with Christianity

The coming of Christianity to the region was, just as Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam in previous centuries, initially merely a side effect of the growing trade network, this time by the burgeoning European colonial powers. The first Catholic missionaries arriving in the context of the Portuguese colonial expansion in the sixteenth century received full state support and constituted an integral part of the colonial effort. The Dutch trading company the *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC, Dutch East India Company) arrived in Java in the seventeenth century and founded Batavia as their main trading post. The growing Dutch presence in the archipelago caused a major setback to the Catholic enterprise because all priests were banned from areas that came under Dutch control.²⁸ However, within the colonial context the Dutch showed a general disinclination towards propagation of any church. Conversion was not nearly as important as maximizing the profits for the VOC and the board deliberately

discouraged proselytizing, mainly because it may cause unrest that could hamper local trade. The VOC experienced a severe commercial setback in the eighteenth century and even went bankrupt in 1799. The possessions of the company in the Indies were taken over by the Dutch state.

This bankruptcy marked the beginning of Dutch state interference in the archipelago. The state based their policy on religious affairs on the principle of 'neutrality' in order to maintain *Rust en Orde* (tranquillity and order). The colonial state continued the restrictions on organized mission. It was only in the mid-nineteenth century that the Dutch colonial government abolished the general prohibition on missionary work on Java. 1848, a year which is known in Dutch history as the 'revolution year', a new constitution was adopted in the Netherlands, which, as a byproduct, resulted in more religious liberty in the colonies. That same year the first missionary with a formal permission to evangelize arrived on Java.²⁹ From then on, the missionaries were able to apply for a 'special permit' to proselytize in the Dutch East Indies.

D. The Founding of Indigenous Churches

Because both the VOC as the Dutch colonial government had attempted to minimize Christian propagation on Java for centuries, the Christian community had barely increased in the period between the departure of the Portuguese and the middle of the nineteenth century. The Christian community on Java mainly consisted of Europeans and Indo-Europeans. However, when the first missionaries of the NZG arrived in 1848, they reported the existence of a few, very small local proselytizing Christian movements in the interiors of Java. In response to restrictions imposed by the state, people, who wished to do something for the conversion of the Javanese, sought subversive ways to carry out 'mission work'. Native and Indo-European evangelists were not as closely monitored by the Dutch colonial state and, as a result, both proselytizing groups had made an effort to spread Christianity since the second decade of the nineteenth century. Indo-European lay people, mostly women, sought to convert the Javanese who worked on their plantations and in their houses. *Guru ngelmu*, native religious teachers, combined their knowledge of Sundanese and Javanese spiritualism, Islam and Christianity, traveled around the island to educate interested people in Christianity. I focus on these indigenous *guru ngelmu*, not on the Indo-European evangelists, in this research paper.

Guru Ngelmu

The most successful type of proselytizing movements on Java was led by native *guru ngelmu*, who employed Javanese concepts in their understanding of the Christian faith. The source material on these gurus and their work was rather limited, because they continued the tradition of oral transmission of religious knowledge. Therefore, the only available sources were secondary and mostly written by missionaries and Dutch officials. The missionaries had a problematic relation with the native gurus; on the one hand these gurus shared the same goal, but on the other hand they considered these gurus their competitors. The Dutch officials were also suspicious of these gurus, because some of them had many followers and the Dutch were afraid these men would use their influence for political purposes. As a consequence, these particular sources have to be read in a careful and critical manner.

Java has a long tradition of influential gurus, who travelled through the country teaching people their *ngelmu* (wisdom, knowledge).³⁰ Such a guru taught spiritual knowledge to his followers. It was thought that anyone who could control *ngelmu* perfectly could master over nature and evil spirits. Therefore, a *guru ngelmu* was also often asked to help people to solve all sorts of problems they encountered in life. Someone who possessed *ngelmu* was believed to be able to manipulate spiritual forces and to influence people's lives through fortune or misfortune with his divine powers. A guru usually charged for his services, and some managed to become very wealthy and influential. Originally, the concept of *ngelmu* was inseparably connected to 'Javanism'. However, from the 1820's on there were also a few Christian gurus active in the interior of Java and they were by far the most important Christian proselytizers throughout the nineteenth century on the island, because they converted far larger numbers of people than the Dutch. It was not too difficult to link Christianity to *ngelmu*, since Jesus fulfilled all the qualifications of a *guru ngelmu*. He was triumphant over evil spirits, diseases, and nature and taught people his mystical knowledge.

The Christian guru Tunggul Wulung, also known as Kjai Ibrahim, was seen by his people as a *guru ngelmu* and he regularly challenged evil spiritual powers, which the Javanese believed to be dominating their lives. The only difference with other gurus was, however, that he exorcised the spirits in the name of Jesus Christ.³¹ He created, among other prayers, the following short prayer, which shows the deep consciousness of evil spirits on Java:

<i>'Bapa Allah, Putra Allah, Roh Suci Allah,</i>	<i>Father God, Son of God, Holy Spirit of God,</i>
<i>Telu-telune tunggal dadi sawiji.</i>	<i>The three are one in essence.</i>
<i>Lemah sangar, kayu angker, upas racun</i>	<i>Dangerous places, evil infested woods, all poisons</i>
<i>Pada tawa.</i>	<i>Become harmless.</i>
<i>Idi Gusti manggih slamet salaminya.'</i>	<i>May God grant us safety forever.³²</i>

Tunggul Wulung undoubtedly had a stronger appeal among the Javanese people than the missionaries. In less than thirty years, he had gathered as much as 1058 converts in his three villages.³³

The native Christian communities were not as well defined as the communities led by missionaries, therefore there are different sources that indicate varying numbers and are thus not very reliable.³⁴ However, they all show that the number of Christians rose substantially more in areas where native gurus were active in contrast to mission areas. The Javanese guru Sadrach supposedly converted 2500 people in the short time span from 1870 to 1873. The Dutch missionary Carel Poensen wrote in 1883 that 4400 Javanese were already converted to Christianity, of which 3500 lived in Bagelen, the region where Sadrach was active.³⁵ Even when the Dutch societies entered the stage around 1850, and started the institutionalized phase of the Christian mission, the indigenous gurus continued their work. For more than fifty years the indigenous churches and Dutch churches existed side by side, usually without much contact between them. An exception was Modjo Warno, a Christian *desa* (village) that was led by the Dutch missionary Jellesma and a native guru Paulus Tosari. After Jellesma died, Tosari led the *desa* by himself for a few years and this *desa* was the only community which formed a bridge between the Dutch and the Javanese Christian communities.

These indigenous proselytizers had several advantages. Their first advantage was that they were brought up with the Javanese traditions and they were accustomed to the local culture and were able to mix Christianity with elements of the Javanese culture. Secondly, they were native and thus their relationship with the Javanese was not colored by suspicion or hampered by racial hierarchical boundaries. Thirdly, being native also meant that these gurus mastered the local languages to perfection and were therefore better able to communicate with the people than the Dutch missionaries, even after years of studying.

E. The Mission and Christian *Ngelmu*

The Dutch missionaries were desperate to find ways to convert the Javanese people. However, most Javanese were determined to hold on to their ancestral traditions that had defined the Javanese culture long before Christianity arrived. In addition, Christianity was seen as a 'Dutch' religion, hence the religion of the suppressor.³⁶ The social landscape on Java was very hierarchical as there were strict hierarchical boundaries between different classes and also between different ethnic groups. Different groups were not supposed to interfere with each other's affairs as a consequence there were different hospitals, schools, courts et cetera. It was therefore very difficult for the Dutch missionaries to cross these boundaries. At this point they faced severe competition of native Christian gurus, who did not have this disadvantage. In most cases the Dutch missionaries opposed the Javanese, Christian gurus and their followers. The missionaries considered all forms of creating a native theology syncretistic and therefore unacceptable. For example, Conrad Laurens Coolen, a well-known Christian guru of mixed descent, preached a version of Christianity which was very respectful towards ancient Javanese traditions and to Islam. He even introduced a 'Christian Shahada' in his *desa* Ngoro: '*La ilaha illa Allah, Yesus Kristus iyo roh Allah*', which means 'There is no God but Allah, Jesus is the spirit of Allah'.³⁷ In this sentence Coolen tried to capture the essence of the concept of the Holy Trinity and make it sound as the Muslim Shahada, so the people would easily familiarize with it. However, the missionaries did not consider this to be 'respectful' towards Javanese traditions; instead they called it syncretistic; hence heretical.

Nevertheless, presenting Christianity as a new form of *ngelmu* proved to be the most successful method for the establishment of Christianity in Java, at a time when the Dutch approach was failing. As a consequence of the attitude of the Dutch missionaries the two Christian currents existed side by side with barely any contact between the two groups for quite some time. The missionary discourse shows it was common among the missionaries to talk about 'their' and 'our' Christians. For example, Sadrach's followers remained independent of the *Indische kerk* and of the churches led by the missionary societies until 1933. They referred to themselves as: '*Golongane wong Kristen kang mardika*'; the group of free Christians. The only exception was Modjo Warno, this *desa* was lead by the Javanese Paulus Tosari and the Dutch missionary Jellesma. Tosari was not subordinate to Jellesma, rather it was the other way around. Jellesma focused on the youth of Modjo Warno and did not interfere too much with the everyday leadership of the congregation.³⁸

Through time, there were several confrontations between the two groups. On one side were the Europeanized Christians, who were converted by Dutch proselytizers, such as Johannes Emde in Surabaya. They fully adopted a western lifestyle after they were 'reborn' through baptism; they dressed like Europeans, renamed themselves with European names and abandoned most of their Javanese traditions. Some missionaries insisted their followers to cut their hair short and to stay away from *gamelan* music, *wayang* performances and *slametan* ceremonies. Traditions as reading Javanese poetry and the decoration of family graves were also banned. The Jesuit missionary Petrus Hoevenaars wrote, for example, about *gamelan* music; '...last year there was the *wayang* play, but if we would want to see heathendom, we can just as well visit the bars...'³⁹

The NZG missionary Wessel Hoezoo was one of the first who wrote about these emerging separate Christian currents in 1882. He wrote that the Europeanized group was called the '*Kristin Londo*' (Dutch Christians) and that the Christians who were converted by Javanese gurus, were called '*Kristen Jowo*' (Javanese Christians).⁴⁰ This group considered their Christian faith as one of many elements in an inclusive Javanese spirituality.⁴¹ They accepted some elements of Christianity into their belief system, but rejected others, such as Coolen's refusal of the baptism of his followers. This group held on to the Javanese culture and traditions and did not alter their lifestyle. Sunday morning services in the Sadrach church, for instance, were rather different from European services. Sadrach led the services in the Javanese language, in such an easy manner that the people, who had never before heard of Jesus Christ, could understand his message. The church itself was called a '*mesjid*' (mosque) instead of '*gereja*' (church), and the ceremony started with a drum beat, during which Sadrach entered the building. He involved the Javanese *gamelan* and *wayang* in the ceremony and the people sat cross-legged on the floor, women and men separated; both with the intention to stay close to Javanese and Muslim traditions. The men were dressed in Javanese clothes, and the women usually wore headscarves in church.⁴² After the sermon, the Christians held a traditional feast; a *slametan*.⁴³ Javanese and Muslim customs, such as circumcision and harvest festivals were still prevailing in Sadrach's community as well; he only changed the prayers into Christian prayers. Because the differences between Muslims and Christians were so small in this region, the Christians were not excluded at all from the predominant Muslim communities. Muslims considered Sadrach's teachings to be a new current of *ngelmu*, influenced slightly by Christianity.⁴⁴ Sadrach's *ngelmu* was a combination between

traditional spiritual knowledge, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Christian beliefs.

Another difference between the two currents was that the *Kristen Londo* community was more structured around the church: the church was an institution, and the missionary was the leader of the church. In *Kristen Jowo* communities, the guru was not only the leader of the church; often he was the worldly leader of the *desa* too. There was no distinction between a worldly and spiritual community, as was common in other, non-Christian, *desas* on Java.⁴⁵ A well-known example of such a Christian guru is Conrad Laurens Coolen. In 1820 Coolen moved to Ngoro, by then an abandoned piece of land south of Majagung. There he worked the land and built a church. Soon the land proved to be fruitful, which attracted other people to Ngoro, and in 1844 the number of habitants had already risen to 986.⁴⁶ The *desa* was well known in the area for accepting poor, sick and even convicted people. Coolen governed the village in a strict manner and did not tolerate any form of indecent or criminal behaviour. He did not require conversion to Christianity before allowing Javanese to move to Ngoro, in fact he even installed an *imam* to serve the Muslim community. However, he managed to convert a large number of people, partly due to his status as a *guru ngelmu*; having supernatural powers.⁴⁷ He owed this status to several events. In 1848, the volcano Kelut, near Ngoro, erupted. Coolen called everyone inside the church and the community prayed together that Ngoro would stay unharmed. The stream of lava passed by the village and left it undamaged. In addition, when a famine struck the area in 1852, the fields of Ngoro were the only ones that continued to enjoy abundance. Moreover, Coolen always took side of his tenants in conflicts with the colonial government and was therefore deeply respected by the people. Consequently, Coolen was known in the region as a wise and spiritual teacher with extraordinary powers.⁴⁸

Even though the indigenous gurus converted larger numbers than the European missionaries, their results were in general less definite. Most gurus travelled around from village to village, and the converted Christians formed some sort of diaspora. In areas without a strong Christian leadership, or after the death of a Christian guru, converts sometimes fell back into old habits after some time and changed their religion back to Javanism. Nevertheless some indigenous Christian communities managed to endure after the death of their leader; for example the Christian community of Tunggul Wulung.⁴⁹ A survey from five years after his death indicates that the number remained more or less the same.⁵⁰ This proves

that his followers were not just idolizing him as a *guru ngelmu*, but that they were truly dedicated to their new religion.

The process of conversion, that is leaving one religious system and community to enter another, was often not absolute. It was not uncommon that converted Christians converted back after some time, sometimes because of the social pressure and sometimes because they considered Christian life too demanding. The changing of religions was not exceptional in the Javanese society. Some people also shifted between the *Abangan* and the *Putihan* current, sometimes even a few times during one lifetime.⁵¹ Religious fluidity was quite common in Javanese society. New converts needed the support of a strong Christian community and the guidance of a Christian leader to hold on to their faith. The missionaries were bound to a district and could not travel around to spread the 'Word', which enabled them to build a more stable Christian community in their districts.

F. Similarities between Christian and Islamic *Ngelmu*

The differences between Muslims and Christians in the Javanese *desas* were not as clear-cut as the missionaries wished them to be. There were some striking similarities between Islam and Christianity as they occurred in Java. Both religions had two currents on Java; the 'more orthodox' currents, namely the *Putihan* and the *Kristin Londo* and a 'Javanized' version of each religion: the *Abangan* and the *Kristin Jowo*. However, these 'Javanized' currents included beliefs and traditions with roots in various religions. When indigenous Christian communities began to form they included these Javanese traditions, which also consisted of Muslim customs. Consequently, some native Christian communities accepted traditions that were originally derived from Muslim traditions, such as praying at fixed times, like Paulus Tosari did in Modjo Warno. The *Abangan* and the *Kristin Jowo* communities especially focused on the mystical aspects of their faiths. Some Javanese Christians would have prayer meetings during the week, during which the partakers performed rituals, or 'mystical exercises' to reach '*slamet*'; peace of mind. As mentioned above, Sadrach's followers repeated the Christian Shahada until the participants reached a sort of trance. These rituals strongly resembled Islamic *dhikir*.⁵²

In contrast, the more orthodox currents became more and more institutionalized and dogmatic. They put more emphasis on meanings in their faith and focused on text, rather than ritual. Fixed scripture became more important than oral religious traditions. On the contrary, the *Abangan* and *Kristin Jowo* currents were not institutionalized and usually did not have

clear leadership. In addition, they did not have strict doctrines, and rituals remained more important than texts in the practice of their religion.⁵³ Generally, the non-orthodox Islamic and Christian currents attracted far more believers than the orthodox currents. Most Javanese, especially in the rural areas, aimed to hold on to their Javanese traditions and therefore inclined to the non-orthodox currents. Nevertheless, in the early twentieth century the European character of Christianity was one of the very reasons for the missionary success in the urban areas. The missionaries provided western style education, which was considered most important in order to succeed in the colonial society. The new urban elite sought to Europeanize; they saw this as a sign of modernity and wealth, and therefore became more interested in Christianity.⁵⁴

G. Conclusion

Although the process of accepting new beliefs and practices went slowly, it was peaceful in general. This is probably the reason the process of accepting new religions has often been indicated as unproblematic in the Javanese context. Except for a few incidents, there was no organized resistance against the Christian mission. To the contrary, the missionary writings show that they often felt ignored and would even prefer uprisings. A missionary of the *Nederlandsche Zendingsvereeniging* (NZV, Dutch Mission Association) wrote: 'Anger and mockery is even preferable for the missionary, because anger is a sign of being affected and mockery is 'a cry of anguish of the conscience', but that calm and languid silence breaks the heart, extinguishes all energy, and is thus worse than hatred and enmity'.

The missionary writings prove that the adaption of a new faith on Java was not without difficulty in the case of Islam and Christianity. The prominent idea that the Javanese easily accept new religious beliefs is not true. In both cases large numbers of people resisted new beliefs and traditions. The process of Islamization took centuries, and towards the end of the nineteenth century the majority of the Javanese had still only partly accepted Islamic beliefs and traditions into their belief system. In the second half of the nineteenth century, this resulted in a schism in Javanese Islam. The *Putihan* maintained stronger ties with the Middle East and aimed at becoming more modern and 'orthodox' by focusing on scripture. The *Abangan* held on to their Javanese mystical traditions which had been influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism for centuries. They focused on ritual and oral traditions. As a result this group remained more traditional than the *Putihan*.

The same process can be indicated since the arrival of Christianity in the region. There was also a partition in Javanese Christianity, which strongly resembled the *Putihan-Abangan* distinction. There were the *Kristen Jowo*, the Javanese Christians; these communities were founded by native Christian gurus. The missionaries often did not approve of the 'syncretistic' and 'heretical' beliefs and practices of the *Kristen Jowo* and led their own communities of *Kristen Londo* in isolation from these indigenous Christians. Nevertheless, the number of converts in the indigenous Christian communities was higher than that in the Dutch missionary communities. The main reason for this is that the Javanese gurus were better able to connect Christianity to Javanese traditions.

The missionary writings prove that the acceptance of Islam and Christianity were long and difficult processes which both resulted in the emergence of various religious currents. However, the missionary writings do not indicate reasons for these outcomes. Perhaps the Javanese context experienced so many changes under the influence of Dutch imperialism that many people tried to strengthen their Javanese identity, which resulted in 'traditional' religious currents such as the *Abangan* and *Kristen Jowo*. Perhaps the acceptance of Islam and Christianity proved more difficult because both religions insisted on an exclusive religious identity, where various Eastern religions had a distinct concept of religion which acknowledges the possibility of a multiple religious belonging. Perhaps the process of accepting Buddhism and Hinduism in earlier centuries showed the same difficulties, but such a process has simply not been well-researched in this way. It is clear that the limited scope of this research paper leaves room for further research. I believe that the issue of accepting new religious beliefs and rituals in the Javanese context merit further examination.

Endnotes:

¹ Maryse Kruithof is a member of the cap-group 'Non-Western History' at the ESHCC of the Erasmus University of Rotterdam.

² Merle Calvin Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Norwalk:EastBridge, 2006).

³ Merle Calvin Ricklefs, *Polarizing Javanese Society, Islamic and other Visions (c. 1830-1930)* (Leiden:NUS Press, 2007), p.3.

⁴ Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java*.

⁵ Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java*.

⁶ The term 'Santrification' derives from the word *santri* (student at a pesantren; Qur'an schools), a term coined by Geertz in his study of religion in Java from 1960. It refers to Indonesian Muslims who are more concerned with 'Islamic doctrine and most especially the moral and social interpretation of it' as opposed to Abangan Muslims who engage more with 'ritual detail' and combine elements of Javanese customs with Islam. Thus, santrification refers to an increase in Islamic piety and stricter adherence to Islamic practices. This process led to a dissolving of boundaries between Santri (or Putihán, as this group was still commonly called in the nineteenth century) and Abangan, as more and more Indonesians appear to fit the more 'pious' Santricategory. In: Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, p.126-130.

⁷ The 'Five pillars of Islam' refer to the five obligations that every Muslim has to satisfy. These are the *Shahada*, the *Salah*, the *Sawm*, the *Zakat* and the *Hajj*. In: John L. Esposito, *The Oxford History of Islam* (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁸J.D.Y Peel, "Syncretism and Religious Change", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, No. 10 (1968), p. 121-141.

⁹ King, "Imagining religions in India; Colonialism and the Mapping of South Asian History and Culture" in *Secularism and Religion-Making*, edited by M. Dressler and A.S. Mandair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.37-61.

¹⁰Martin van Bruinessen, "Global and local in Indonesian Islam", *Southeast Asian Studies* 37, No. 2 (1999), p.46-63.

¹¹ T. Sumartana, *Mission at the Crossroads, Indigenous Churches, European Missionaries, Islamic Association and Socio-religious Change in Java 1812-1936* (Leiderdorp: De ZijlBedrijven, 1991), p.32.

¹² If the ninth day of the Hajj, the day when the pilgrims spend the afternoon on the plain of Arafat, is on a Friday, then many describe it as *Hajj Akbar* (Big Hajj). To go on the pilgrimage in such a year is regarded more prestigiously by Muslims. Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java*.

¹³ Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java*.

¹⁴ Islamic boarding schools.

¹⁵ Azumardi Azra, Kees van Dijk, Nico Kaptein, *Varieties of Religious Authority; Changes and Challenges in Twentieth Century Indonesian Islam* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2010), p.54-57.

¹⁶ The term 'Putihan' was already used to indicate the professionally religious in the first half of the nineteenth century. According to Ricklefs, Geertz called this current the 'Santris' by mistake. The term 'Santris' only indicated religious students and not the entire 'orthodox' current in the nineteenth century. However, Geertz's work was so influential that since the 1950's the group is commonly addressed as the Santri. Although the term 'Putihan' was already commonly used during the first half of the nineteenth century, the term Abangan was not used until the mid-nineteenth century to indicate a social or religious category. Ricklefs, *Polarizing Javanese Society*, p.84-85.

¹⁷ Merle Calvin Ricklefs, "The Birth of the Abangan", *Bijdragen tot de taal, land- en volkenkunde* 162, No.1 (2006), p.35-55.

¹⁸ Ilmu Pasedjian means non-Islamic mystical knowledge. Sometimes this knowledge is addressed as 'Ilmu gunung', which literally means 'mountain knowledge', because most spiritual guru's lived in the mountains. Ricklefs, *Polarizing Javanese Society*.

¹⁹ 'Daar men echter van geenbeide den zin en de bedoelingverstaat is de echteonvervalschte leer der ilmoesantrijjanhaarsondanks met heel watpasedjketterijbeklad; en evenzo is de leer der pasedj dies onbewust met santrischedenkbeeldendoortrokken.' Samuel Eliza Harthoorn, *Annual Report 1856*, (Personal Archives, Raadvoor de Zending, Utrechts Archief).

²⁰ Samuel Eliza Harthoorn, *Annual Report 1858*, (Personal Archives, Raad voor de Zending, Utrechts Archief).

²¹ Carel Poensen, *Brieven over de Islam uit de binnenlanden van Java* (Leiden: Brill, 1886).

²² Ricklefs, *Polarizing Javanese Society*, p.12-16.

²³ Geertz, Clifford, *The Religion of Java*. Chicago: University Press Books, 1976.

²⁴ Ricklefs, *The Birth of the Abangan*, p.35-55.

²⁵ Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism and Indonesian Islam*.

²⁶ For examples of 'Abangan beliefs and practices' with Middle Eastern origins see: Mark Woodward, *Islam in Java: Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989).

²⁷ Martin Van Bruinessen, *Global and Local in Indonesian Islam*, p.46-63.

²⁸ Steenbrink, *Catholics in Indonesia*, p.XVI.

²⁹ Wouter Smit, *De islambinnen de horizon*, p.12.

³⁰ 'Ngelmu' arrives from the Arabic word 'ilm' which means 'knowledge' and usually refers to knowledge of Islam.

³¹ Ricklefs, *Polarizing Javanese Society*, p.112.

³² Lawrence Yoder, *The Introduction and Expression of Islam and Christianity in the Cultural Context of North Central Java* (Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary Pasadena, 1987), p.339.

³³ In comparison: the missionary Jansz only converted 150 people in the same period in the same area. F. Van Lith, *Kjahi Sadrach, eene les vooronsuit the Protestantsezending van midden Java* (Jesuit Archives, Semarang).

³⁴ There are no clear records of what happened to these communities after the gurus left or passed away. It is imaginable that in many cases the people fell back into old habits in the absence of a strong, Christian leader.

³⁵ Ricklefs, *Polarizing Javanese Society*, p.116.

³⁶ Sumartana, *Mission at the Crossroads*, p.22.

³⁷ Sutarman Sudiman Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community and its Contextual Roots, a Nineteenth Century Javanese Expression of Christianity* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), p.135.

³⁸ Philip Van Akkeren, *Sri and Christ. A study of the Indigenous Church in East Java* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1970), p.100.

³⁹ Petrus Hoevenaars, *Letter to Monseigneur Hellings*, (23 September 1900, Mendut) (Available on microfiche at the Universiteit Utrecht).

⁴⁰ Franciscus van Lith, *Kjahi Sadrach*.

⁴¹ Madinier, *The Catholic Politics of Inclusiveness*.

⁴² Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community and its Contextual Roots*, p.130-135.

⁴³ The *slametan* is a communal feast on Java to ask the local spirits for peace and safety.

⁴⁴ Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community and its Contextual Roots*, p.111.

⁴⁵ Van Akkeren, *Sri and Christ*, p.149.

⁴⁶ Ricklefs, *Polarizing Javanese Society*, p.110.

⁴⁷ Madinier, *The Catholic Politics of Inclusiveness*.

⁴⁸ Van Akkeren, *Sri and Christ*, p.56.

⁴⁹ Van Lith, *Kjahi Sadrach*.

⁵⁰ The congregation of Tunggul Wulung consisted of 1058 people on the day he passed away (29 February 1885). Five years later the congregation consisted of 1427 Kristen Jowo. Van Akkeren, *Sri and Christ*, p.156.

⁵¹ Kartawidjaja, *Van Koran tot Bijbel* (Rotterdam: D. van Sijn & Zonen, 1915).

⁵² Van Akkeren, *Sri and Christ*, p.96.

⁵³ In both modern Christianity and modern Islam a development has taken place from a more ritual oriented tradition to more emphasis on texts. This process is one of the main differences between Catholics and Protestants and it became clear visible during the Christian Reformation.

⁵⁴Sumartana, *Mission at the Crossroads*, p.100-103.

⁵⁴H.J. Rooseboom, *Na vijftig Jaren: Gedenkboek van de Nederlandsche Zendingsvereniging, 1868-1908* (Rotterdam: D. van Sijn& Zonen, 1908), p. 142.

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