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Rethinking Javanese Islam. Towards new descriptions of Javanese traditions

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6. Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje: Sufism as a defence of Javanese Islam

6.1. A Heathen in Muslim garb

As we saw in the previous chapters, the concepts 'Javanese Islam' and 'Javanism' carried with them the connotation that the Javanese were not truly Muslim. One typical expression of this idea is the claim that for the Javanese Islam is only an exteriority, while internally he is still a Hindu or a Heathen. A more colourful expression is the image of Islam as a garb with holes in it through which the original, animist religion peers out. Another classic expression is that for the Javanese Islam is but a thin layer of veneer. Platitudes such as these are bountiful in the literature on Java and its religion and in the 19th and 20th century obtained a certain mantra-esque quality. As we saw, post-colonial scholars have associated this kind of evaluation of Javanese Islam with the orientalist scholarship from the second half of the 19th century onwards. Consequently, it seems to have become part of the post-colonial agenda to rectify that situation by affirming the truly Islamic character of Javanese Islam by calling it a local or native Islam, i.e. a local expression of Islam. In this affirmation Sufism plays a pivotal role. Firstly, it is considered one of the main vehicles of Java's conversion to Islam. Secondly, Sufism is believed to be the actual source of many of the typical characteristics of Javanese Islam (e.g. Woodward 1989).

As argued in the previous chapters, the characterisation of Javanese Islam as a syncretist religion in fact owes much more to the presence of a Christian theological framework than to orientalist inventiveness. Moreover, it is an interesting case of irony that the first scholar to argue that Javanese Islam is actually truly Islamic and to put the importance of Sufism for Javanese Islam on the academic agenda was Christiaan

Snouck Hurgronje -arguably the epitome of Dutch orientalist scholarship⁶⁶.

6.2. Snouck Hurgronje: orientalist scholar and orientalist advisor

Snouck Hurgronje's influence on the study of Islam can hardly be overstated. He is regarded as one of the founders of modern Islamic studies. According to Drewes (1957:4) he raised three important issues that influenced Islam studies fundamentally: 1) How did the system of Islam come into being? 2) What is the meaning of Islam to its confessors? 3) How to govern the Muslims so as to let them collaborate in the realisation of the ideal of a universal civilisation? This third question reveals his orientalist objective: the establishment of effective colonial rule over the Indonesian archipelago. Such colonial rule would actually be of benefit to the Indonesian population, according to Snouck Hurgronje, as it was still underdeveloped and in need of guidance. Moreover, Snouck Hurgronje also subscribed to the idea that all of mankind needs to pass through the same evolutionary stages. The second question is relevant to Snouck Hurgronje's understanding of Javanese Islam, as it is his point of departure in discussing it. And, the answer to the first question has it that indigenous cultural elements become incorporated into Islam each time Islam spreads to new areas. Thus, an essential commonality between, say, Egyptian and Javanese Islam is that both have incorporated cultural elements typical for their respective regions. Another important contribution of Snouck Hurgronje is his emphasis on the fact that the holy science of Islam consists of three elements that are equally important: the duties, the law and mysticism (*plichtenleer, geloofsleer, mystiek*) (ibid.: 13). This brought Islamic mysticism, i.e. Sufism, as a genuine research topic into the scholarly scope. His historical perspective on Islam was new at the time. As was his combination of philological expertise with anthropology. That is to say, he studied Islam not only from a theoretical perspective, but also as it was practised in daily life. His approach was truly groundbreaking and his influence is felt to this day.

⁶⁶ In order to avoid confusion it is important to point out that Snouck Hurgronje does not speak about Javanese Islam. He speaks simply about Islam in Indonesia and in Java. It is however clear from the way he describes it that he is often referring to the same entity as I have discussed under the heading 'Javanese Islam' so far.

Besides an eminent scholar, Snouck Hurgronje was also an eminent advisor to colonial policy makers. He is without a doubt the perfect example of the orientalist whose knowledge and knowledge production directly served the consolidation and perpetuation of colonial hegemony. W.F. Wertheim, for example, criticised him for subordinating his ethical principles to the imperialistic motives of Dutch colonial policy (Graf 1980: 808-9). Through his close contacts with the Islamic elite in Mecca, Sumatra and Java he was able to gather valuable information⁶⁷. Snouck Hurgronje's advice of how to root out the Acehnese resistance and apply 'pacification' by rule through an Acehnese sultanate originated directly from his thorough understanding of Islam and his scholarly research in Aceh itself. His 1893-94 two-volumed study *De Atjehers* (The Acehnese) is a direct result of the research commissioned by the Dutch government and is an apt testimony to orientalist knowledge in service of colonial rule. His recommendations to keep a close eye on Javanese *hajji's* who returned to Java; to allow freedom of religion; to keep a neutral state; to promote an Islam free of politics through modern, i.e. Western type, education were all based on his scholarly research, both textual and in the field.

Snouck Hurgronje was neither the first nor the only colonial advisor to emphasise the thoroughly Islamic character of the Indonesians. Another such colonial advisor, K. F. Holle (1829-1896), had already done so with regard to the Sundanese and successors such as G.A.J. Hazeu (1870-1929) continued to hold and propagate this same stance (Steenbrink 1993: 76-98; Van den Berge 1998). Simple facts such as these are important corrections to the all too common suggestion that the depiction of Indonesian and Javanese Islam as an impure, superficial Islam is an orientalist concoction. However, we will leave the post-colonial critique on

⁶⁷ Snouck Hurgronje is said to have converted to Islam in order to obtain permission to enter Mecca. He adopted an Arabic alias, Abdul Ghaffar, and became accepted as a Muslim amongst Muslims. Notable amongst these relations was his friendship with Raden Abu Bakar Djajadin-ingrat who furnished Snouck Hurgronje with a lot of data concerning the daily life in Mecca and supported him connecting with the *Jawi* communities in Mecca (i.e. *hajji's* from the Malay archipelago). Moreover, the relations he struck in Mecca aided him greatly in his later researches in both Aceh and Java. Additionally, his letters of recommendation from Meccan Islamic teachers and his credentials as a great Muslim scholar served him well in establishing ties of trust with informants both in Aceh and Java. Van Heutsz would refer to this as "Snouck's oriental method" (*Snouck's Oosterse methode*) (Van Koningsveld 1988: 70-71, 91).

orientalist scholarship for what it is and shall now focus on Snouck Hurgronje's insights into Javanese Islam.

6.3. A timeline of textual knowledge and participatory observation

The combination of a very thorough scriptural knowledge of Islam with participatory observation in Mecca and Aceh is certainly central to Snouck Hurgronje's authoritative insights into Islam, and into Indonesian and Javanese Islam in particular. A brief, punctuated, overview of his main publications and fieldwork puts this claim into perspective.

Snouck Hurgronje's first major work was his dissertation, published in 1880 as *Het Mekkaansche feest* (The Meccan feast) which contains a discussion of the ritual central to the *Hajj*. Due to its novel central thesis -the origins of this Islamic feast are Heathen and not Judaic- and Snouck Hurgronje's mastery of scriptural sources made a deep impression on the arabist public (Drewes 1957; Pedersen 1957).

During the years 1884 and 1885 Snouck Hurgronje spent about 6 months in Jeddah and 6 months in Mecca under the alias of Abdul Ghaffar, which allowed him to engage in participatory observation. This trip sowed the seeds of his second major work, *Mekka* (Mecca), which appeared in 1888. The two-volumed book combines a textual discussion of Mecca and its importance for Islam and the Muslim world with insights drawn from Snouck Hurgronje's observations of the daily life in Mecca outside of the festival season. He describes and analyses the rituals and habits of the Muslims of Mecca. Amongst other things, it shows that even in Islam's holiest of cities, the behaviour and practices of the Muslims do not live up to the ideal that one finds in the scriptures (*Qur'an* and *Hadith*). This, however, does not affect their status as Muslim. Snouck Hurgronje also describes the "Djawi" (*Jawi*) community in Mecca, that is the community of *hajjis* from the Malay archipelago, mostly from Sumatra and Java. Many of these *hajjis* would stay for longer periods and would be initiated into *tariqas* or *tarekat*, i.e. Sufi mystical brotherhoods. Here, they would receive thorough Islamic education and upon return in their motherland, they would spread this acquired knowledge. Therefore, the *tarekat* were arguably the most important routes via which Islam reached Java, bringing both the mystical and legalist aspects

of Islam (e.g. Van Bruinessen 1994a; 1994b; Azra 2004). Snouck Hurgronje, who was advisor for indigenous affairs from 1889 to 1905, warned against the dangers of political Islam so often associated with the more fanatic *tarekat*. A well-known example is the Naqshbandi order, thought to be at the root of many social upheavals and whom Snouck Hurgronje had become quite familiar with since his time in Mecca (see Van Bruinessen 1990: 165 fn. 48). And although his general advice, based on his researches and experiences, was to interfere as little as possible in matters of religion, he recommended strict suppression of any form of political Islam.

From 1889 to 1906 Snouck Hurgronje moved to the Netherlands Indies with hopes of reforming colonial policy. He lived mainly in Buitenzorg (Bogor), in the Western, i.e. Sundanese, part of Java, where he researched Islamic education and taught Arabic at the Gymnasium Willem III in Batavia. During this period he was married twice -in both cases with Sundanese women from high-placed families (Van Koningsveld 1988: 130-41). His experience of the daily life of the Javanese must have been very limited as he seems to have socialised almost exclusively with members of the Sundanese religious elite. There was of course a trip of about 6 months through West and Central Java in 1889, during which he visited several *pesantran* (Islamic boarding school) where he collected religious writings (ibid.: 144, 169). This, however, hardly counts as participatory observation amongst the Javanese. In 1891 he was allowed to enter into Aceh for the first time, where at the time the Dutch government was fighting a tough and long war. Again under his Meccan alias Hajji Abdul Ghaffar, and using his connections from his time in Mecca, he researched the situation in the field. His advice to the military governor of Aceh, Van Heutsz, was essential to the eventual victory of the Dutch. In 1893-1894 the two volumed *De Atjehers* (The Acehnese) appeared, bearing a structure similar to his 1888 *Mekka*: the first volume is more textually oriented, while the second volume deals with observations from the field. In this second volume we find a lot of information, not only on Islam in Aceh, but also on Java. It discusses, amongst other things, the practice of the reverence of saints (such as the *Wali Sanga*) and the place of *ngelmu* in Javanese Islam. After Aceh, Snouck returned to Batavia where he continued his teaching and advisory occupations. In 1906, after Van Heutsz had decided to no longer follow his advice, Snouck Hurgronje returned to the Netherlands, leaving behind and breaking all

ties with his two Javanese families⁶⁸. He became professor of Arabic at Leiden University.

6.4. Snouck Hurgronje's yardstick: making Javanese Islam truly Islamic

As pointed out above, Snouck Hurgronje strongly opposed the idea that Javanese Islam is only superficially Islamic. As early as 1883 he had already developed his argument as how to understand (and how not to understand) the Islam of the Javanese (Snouck Hurgronje 1884). Much of his argument is directed specifically against the representation of Javanese Islam as a garb with holes, through which the half-Hinduised, Polynesian Heathen still peaks through (e.g. *ibid.*: 100, 103). This view, championed by authors such as Poensen and Brumund, he argues, betrays an utter lack of knowledge of Islam. It measures Javanese Islam, i.e. Islam as it is practiced by the Javanese, by standards derived from the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* (*ibid.*: 100-1). However, by applying this theoretical yardstick one will not find any Muslims in Java. In fact, Snouck Hurgronje argues, we would not find any Muslims anywhere. This is the frustration of the *faqih*s (the experts of Islamic law): virtually none of the Muslims follow the law to the letter. Even in Egypt, one of the major centres of Muslim science, the laws of purity (*reinheidswetten*) are violated, the five daily prayers are not respected, and the *zakat* (religious tax) is not upheld. Thus, by applying this theoretical yardstick neither the Javanese nor the Egyptians would qualify as Muslim, and therefore it is obvious that this is not an appropriate tool.

The practical yardstick, as applied by the Javanese themselves, will not do either. By only evaluating certain exterior characteristics, as do the Javanese, one cannot decide to what religious group someone belongs. In the eyes of the masses, having received the "sign of union" (*bondsteeken*, here probably meant as circumcision), dressing as Muslims do, abstaining from pork and wine, and hating *kajirs*, seems sufficient to consider someone a Muslim (*ibid.*: 102). Having learned their religion not from books, but by rudimentary education, it is understandable that the Javanese employ such standards. However, Snouck Hurgronje argues, while the theoretical yardstick is too strict, the practical is too lax.

⁶⁸ He did leave a 5000 guilders heritage to each of his children (Van Koningsveld 1988: 137).

Snouck Hurgronje uses a comparative method instead: he evaluates the disposition (*gezindheid*) of the Javanese and compares it with the situation in other Muslim countries. Snouck Hurgronje takes the adherence of the Javanese to *tawhid*, the doctrine of the unity of Allah (i.e. Allah is the only god and Mohammed is his prophet) as his starting point. As many authors had claimed, even though the Javanese attest to the unity of Allah, they do not respect it in practice. After all, they also worship other deities and spirits, dedicate *slametans* to guardian spirits, visit the holy graves of saints, offer incense at holy trees and in their religious incantations they appeal to spirits (*djins*) and the like. However, according to Snouck Hurgronje, this does not mean that the Javanese are only Muslim outwardly and still Heathen in their heart. After all, similar practices occur in all of the Islamic countries. In fact, we can even discern such a detachment from the theoretical norm in Christian countries. Even in the time of Mohammed, Islam had to make concessions: was not the Meccan feast in origin a Heathen feast which had been Islamised and came to be at the heart of this religion? This, then, is what has happened to all these Javanese 'Heathen' beliefs and practices as well: they have been Islamised. These practices and beliefs belong to the popular belief (*volksgeleef*) of the gullible and illiterate masses, and is something educated, literate Muslims of course frown upon. However, this popular belief or "character of the people" cannot be simply rooted out, it has to be accommodated, that is Islamised. Consequently, through the intervention of *faqih*s -most of whom also share these popular superstitions- these practices and beliefs have been "smuggled" inside the official doctrines and dogmas. The *faqih*s arranged these alien additions in such a fashion that the greatness of Allah would not be degraded (ibid.: 103-6).

The reverence of the *Wali Sanga*: Islamised popular religion

Snouck Hurgronje illustrates his point with the common Javanese practice of the reverence of the saints credited with spreading Islam over Java (*Wali Sanga*). The Javanese worship the *Wali* with the purpose of attaining prosperity and averting diseases or adversity. Similar objectives motivate the worship of village guardian spirits, ancestors, banyan trees, and certain stones or statues. Snouck Hurgronje agrees that, since such practices enjoy the same status as a prayer directed to Allah, they are completely inconsistent with the principle of the unity of Allah. However, the Javanese are still true Muslims because these practices have been Islamised. An illustration is how the reverence of the *Wali Sanga* has been sanctified. As these saints are said to stand close to Allah, asking for their intervention is actually, albeit indirectly, asking Allah's intervention. Hence, the reverence of these *Wali Sanga* becomes indirect reverence of Allah. Similarly, ancient Javanese mythologies have been Islamised too, because, as Snouck Hurgronje claims, the beginning and ending of the world in such stories are mostly Muslim (ibid.: 103-6). Furthermore, the mythological heroes of yore get an Islamic tinge. E.g. *Batara Guru* now goes to Arabia to receive teaching from the Prophet. Similarly, Muslim prophets and *Wali* meet up with creatures from the old-Javanese stories. Other stories tell how some Javanese, lured by an evil *Kyai*, obtain great wealth but after death are summoned by the devil. Likewise, the prayers for invoking the *dhanyang desa* (village guardian spirit) also include Muslim prayers besides the traditional formulas. Snouck Hurgronje even posits that the same Islamisation is also apparent in *ngelmu*, the unintelligible formulas designed to obtain power over nature (ibid.: 107). To Snouck Hurgronje, the belief in and practice of *ngelmu* falls in the sphere of magic. And magic exists as much in Java as it does in the Arab countries. Islam distinguishes magic in line with and permitted by Islam from magic that is not in line and thus not permitted. Therefore, Snouck Hurgronje argues, the fact as such that the Javanese practise *ngelmu* cannot imply that the Javanese are not Muslim. However, certain *ngelmu* should be considered as a kind of false science, a superstition, whereas true knowledge is the one that is taught at the Javanese *pesantren*. Snouck Hurgronje admits that the lack of knowledge of Arabic prevents most *murids* (a *tarekat* initiate) and *santris* from understanding the true meaning of the *kalam* (the orthodox doctrines). Neither do they see the division between popular superstitions and the true knowledge

they learn at the *pesantren*. Nevertheless, those Javanese who seriously desire a true religious education can find it in Java. The religious textbooks with Javanese translations between the Arabic lines testify to that Javanese desire to achieve true knowledge.

In summary, Snouck Hurgronje does admit that the gap between the disposition (*gezindheid*) of the Javanese and the teachings of *Qur'an* and *Hadith* is deep and wide indeed. The Javanese do not fulfil (not even most of) their religious duties (ibid. 110-13). However, the gap is not deeper or wider than in other Muslim countries. Since the scriptural ideal has not been (and cannot be) attained in any Muslim country, one should not expect the Javanese to meet higher standards than, for example, the Muslims in Mecca and Medina who were converted to Islam already many centuries before. Thus, the only reasonable conclusion is that the Javanese are as much Muslim as the Egyptians and Saudis. Javanese Islam is simply Islam that has accommodated local popular religion, by Islamising its practices and beliefs.

6.5. Analysis and Critique

The impact of Snouck Hurgronje's argument can be felt to this day. Today the dominant stance about religion in Java echoes his basic point: Javanese Islam is Islam pure and simple. The many Hindu, Buddhist, and animist elements we find in it do not indicate a flaw in the 'Islamness' of the Javanese. No, such elements have just been Islamised and therefore have become nothing more than a testimony to the locality of Javanese Islam. Javanese Islam is simply Islam as it is expressed in Java. An analysis of Snouck Hurgronje's argument will therefore help our understanding of the current debate.

Snouck Hurgronje is usually lauded for his pioneering combination of textual expertise with participatory observation. His impressive, even intimidating, knowledge of Islamic text and history was complemented by his practical experience in the field. It made him an absolute authority regarding Islam and more particularly Islam in Mecca, Aceh and West-Java (The Sundanese part of Java). We would therefore expect the above argument to be rooted in these two sources of his authority. However, the discussed 1884 text where Snouck Hurgronje presents it, was originally delivered in a speech in 1883 -meaning about a year before his trip

to Jeddah and Mecca and about seven years before his stay in the Netherlands Indies. None of the examples of the Javanese religious condition (*ngelmu*, *Wali Sanga*, laxity in religious duties, etc.) are drawn from his own experience, from his fabled participatory observation. Examples regarding Egyptian Muslims are drawn from the accounts of E.W. Lanes' *An account of the manners and customs of the modern Egyptians* published in 1860. Practically all of the examples regarding Javanese Muslims are drawn from the missionary reports of Poensen and Harthoorn⁶⁹. Therefore, it is obvious that Snouck Hurgronje already had his mind made up about Javanese Islam before actually coming to Java. Much similar, then, to the first explorers, missionaries and early orientalist.

In his 1893-1894 *De Atjehers*, that is by the time he already had had some first-hand experiences in Mecca, Aceh and Java, Snouck Hurgronje repeats the same argument and the same examples. We might of course consider that his experiences in Java simply corroborated his earlier stance. It is however doubtful that he did indeed personally experience the exact same phenomena Harthoorn and Poensen had described in

⁶⁹ Snouck Hurgronje refers to Brumund on how the graves of the *Wali* apparently used to be Heathen places of worship (Brumund 1868: 178 ff.; cf. Snouck Hurgronje 1884: 104); refers to Poensen with regard to a story that depicts people sentenced to (Islamic) hell (Poensen 1864: 237 ff.; cf. Snouck Hurgronje 1884: 106), with regard to how a Javanese appeals to the *dhanyang* ends with an Islamic prayer (Poensen 1864: 230, 232; cf. Snouck Hurgronje 1884: 106), with regard to *ngelmu paseq* and mystical Javanese whose ideas have an Islamic taint (Poensen 1873: 227 ff. and Poensen 1869: 183; cf. Snouck Hurgronje 1884: 108), with regard to how the Javanese worship both Allah and other entities as "Good Muslims" (Poensen 1864: 231-32; cf. Snouck Hurgronje 1884: 109); refers to Harthoorn and Poensen with regard to the definition of *ngelmu* (Harthoorn 1860, 130 ff.; 213 ff.; Poensen 1864: 247 ff.; cf. Snouck Hurgronje 1884: 107) and with regard to *ngelmu* and mysticism (Harthoorn 1860: 216 ff.; Poensen 1864: 218 ff.; cf. Snouck Hurgronje 1884: 107-8); refers to Hoetzoo with regard to prophetic writings (Hoetzoo 1869: 307 ff.; cf. Snouck Hurgronje 1884: 122).

their reports⁷⁰. Therefore, in the following paragraphs I will focus solely on the argument Snouck Hurgronje formulated. We will weigh his argument on the basis of two questions. Firstly, is it conclusive in deciding whether the Javanese are either truly Muslim or in fact Heathens in Muslim garb? Secondly, does Snouck Hurgronje's argument help us to solve the logical inconsistency we are led into by conceiving of Javanese religion as syncretist?

6.5.1. Theological or scientific argument?

The crux of Snouck Hurgronje's argument is the comparison between Egyptian and Javanese Muslims. His point seems to be that, since nobody would question the Islamic persuasion or faith of the Egyptians, even though their behaviour is so far removed from the Islamic ideal, there is no good reason to doubt the Islamic persuasion of the Javanese. This argument is predicated on two propositions that Snouck Hurgronje seems to be taking as self-evidently true.

Firstly, the behaviour of the Javanese Muslims is identical to the behaviour of the Egyptian Muslims. Besides the fact that both the Javanese and Egyptians are lax in upholding their religious duties, they also adhere to practices and beliefs that are in fact alien to Islam. Snouck lists a

⁷⁰ In his time Snouck Hurgronje was indeed a pioneer: his approach of combining textual expertise with participatory observation was groundbreaking to say the least. However, his experiences in Mecca, Aceh and Java are very limited. Van Koningsveld demonstrates how most of the data (and even the most important data) regarding the daily life of Muslims in Mecca and especially of the *Jawi* community was actually gathered by Snouck Hurgronje's close associate Raden Abu Bakar Djajadiningrat (Van Koningsveld 1988: 111-19). Snouck Hurgronje's experiences during his 7 months stay in Aceh in 1891 are limited to the area of the cities of Kotaradja and Olehleh, which were within the Dutch battle lines (ibid.: 77-78, 210). This did not prevent him from extrapolating these experiences to the whole of Aceh. In Java, Snouck Hurgronje spent virtually all of his time in the Sundanese part of Java, in Buitenzorg and Batavia, with the exception of a six month journey through West and Central Java (ibid.: 144, 169). As far as I can tell he never even visited East-Java where Harthoorn and Poensen had been missionaries. Furthermore, in Java Snouck Hurgronje only fraternised with the Islamic elite. After all, his Sundanese wives were daughters of high Islamic officials. According to Zoetmulder, when in Yogyakarta Snouck Hurgronje had only mingled with people from the Muhammadiyah, that is with reformist, orthodox Muslims (Zoetmulder 1967: 13-14). We should therefore not overestimate the role of Snouck Hurgronje's first-hand experiences with regard to his argument about Javanese Islam.

number of Javanese examples such as the worship the *Wali Sanga*, the practice of *slametan*, and *ngelmu*. Even though Snouck Hurgronje does not list any Egyptian counterparts for the practices, it is obvious that he claims that this kind of behaviour is to be found in Egypt as well. What makes such practices and beliefs (both in Java and in Egypt) instances of the same phenomenon is that they are all remnants of pre-Islamic Heathenism and of the popular culture of those nations that, and this is crucial, have been Islamised. However, this is in fact a debatable point. After all, on what basis can it be said that e.g. a specific instance of reverence of ancestors or saints is an Islamic practice and not a Heathen one? The only 'yardstick' Snouck Hurgronje offers is the claim that such practices have been brought in line with Islamic teachings. Such a solution only begs the question from what point on we can say a 'Heathen' belief or practice has become in line with Islamic teachings? Are we then simply to take Snouck Hurgronje's word that *ngelmu*, *slametan* and the reverence of the *Wali Sanga* are instances of Islamised Javanese lore? Or should we rather take the word of Brumund, Poensen and Harthoorn that such practices are essentially un-Islamic? Although the matter remains unresolved, Snouck Hurgronje's position is clear. Consequently, at this point Snouck Hurgronje's argument becomes circular. After all, the proof that Egyptian and Javanese Islam are truly Islamic is the 'fact' that certain practices have been Islamised. However, this 'fact' is not self-evident and is actually the thing that needs to be proven. Therefore, in this instance Snouck Hurgronje commits the fallacy of *petitio principii*, i.e. accepting a proposition as proof, which actually needs proving.

The second proposition that Snouck Hurgronje takes for true is that the Egyptians are Muslims, even though their behaviour deviates from the Islamic (textual) norm. Based on this proposition Snouck Hurgronje makes his comparison between the Egyptian and the Javanese situation and deduces that the Javanese too must be truly Muslim. Although Snouck Hurgronje treats this proposition as self-evidently true, as a piece of common sense knowledge, it actually harbours an argument or reasoning that is Islamic theological in nature⁷¹. We can spell that argument out as follows:

⁷¹ In order to avoid confusion, I would like to stress that Snouck Hurgronje does not provide this argument, or any kind of argument to this effect. It is my claim that this proposition can be taken for true only if it is founded on such an argument.

A. One becomes a Muslim by means of a single earnest recitation of the *Shahada* in the presence of another Muslim

According to Islamic faith, after a satisfactory recitation -i.e. after meeting the criteria (usually nine) set up by Muslim scholars to ensure a recitation with conviction- one has become Muslim beyond doubt.

B. Egyptians Muslims have satisfactorily recited the *Shahada*

In the context of Snouck Hurgronje's argument the Egyptian Muslims are staged as Muslims beyond doubt. That is to say, no contemporary of Snouck Hurgronje would question whether the Egyptians are truly Muslim. Therefore, in this context it must be the case that the Egyptian Muslims have satisfactorily recited the *Shahada*.

C. Therefore, the Egyptians are Muslims

Only if we go through steps A. and B. does it make sense to claim that the Egyptians are Muslim. It is important to note that the *Shahada* is a criterion set out within Islamic religious thought. In other words, according and thus within Islamic belief, the Egyptians are Muslim.

D. Within Islamic faith, even if a Muslim does not follow the official creed, he is still Muslim

The first part of the *Shahada* is the declaration of the belief in the oneness of God (*tawhid*). *Shirk*, i.e. the deification or worship of an entity other than Allah, is the violation of this doctrine of *tawhid* and, in the absence of repentance, it is an unforgivable sin. Thus, we would expect that in order to be a 'good' or 'true' Muslim, one has to stick to this essential doctrine of *tawhid*. However, in the Islamic faith, a Muslim cannot be excommunicated (*takfir*, i.e. to be called a *kafir* or unbeliever) as long as he/she maintains that he/she is a Muslim. Therefore, in this sense, even if a Muslim commits *shirk*, he/she is still truly Muslim.

E. (Most) Egyptian Muslims do not follow their official creed

For the sake of argument, we will take Snouck Hurgronje's word on this.

F. Therefore, within Islamic faith, even though the Egyptians do not follow their official creed, they are still Muslim

It seems to me that only on such a basis can Snouck Hurgronje's second proposition be considered true. After all, his focus is on the religious disposition (*gezindheid*) of the Javanese. Is not the recitation of the *Shahada* the foremost indication of one's inclination towards Islam? The above argument, then, makes explicit that this proposition entails a lot more than just a common-sensical fact. It actually contains an Islamic theological stance which Snouck Hurgronje does not explicitly acknowledge. There are other indications that Snouck Hurgronje slips Islamic theological stances into his (scientific) account of Javanese Islam. For example, Snouck Hurgronje observes that the Javanese dub certain knowledge as heretical knowledge -this is how he translates *ngelmu paseq* -to which he ties the conclusion that we as scientists should then know how to judge it, *viz.* as heretical (Snouck Hurgronje 1884: 108). This is an obvious instance where Snouck Hurgronje equates a theological standpoint -after all, whether something is a heresy is a matter of theology- with a scientific one. Finally, Snouck Hurgronje's representation of *ngelmu* as magic (besides the representation as false knowledge) is another example of how he takes Islamic theological standpoints for scientific facts. After all, here he explicitly states that within Islam *ngelmu* is regarded as magic. However, this is not sufficient reason to accept that this is what *ngelmu* actually is. As I shall suggest in the following chapters, there is also an alternative way to make sense of *ngelmu*, i.e. in terms of practical knowledge. Therefore, I would suggest that Snouck Hurgronje's second proposition is actually Islamic theological in nature. That is to say, it is articulated within Islamic faith and thus it is predicated on the belief in Allah. The question then becomes, whether it is acceptable to use these theological stances as scientific facts? It seems to me it cannot, for two reasons. Firstly, regardless of our personal religious beliefs, we cannot predicate a scientific argument on a religious belief. The existence (or non-existence) of Allah cannot be the pre-requisite to formulate a scientific argument about the Islamic nature of Muslim believers. Such an argument would become a theological argument. Secondly, even within Islamic thought there is disagreement on the above issues, and the different standpoints are equally based on theological arguments. What

counts as acceptable for one group of Muslims might not be so for another group of Muslims. An obvious example would be the burning of incense on the graves of ancestors: while this is acceptable Islamic behaviour for one group of Javanese Muslims (e.g. the traditionalists), it is seen as un-Islamic by another (e.g. the modernists). Both argue their standpoints on theological grounds. That is, even if one is inclined to accept the above theological propositions in a scientific account, they are all but conclusive.

Summarising, Snouck Hurgronje takes a theological stance for a scientific fact. This undermines his rendition of Javanese Islam. Moreover, it makes his argument inconclusive. Who is and who is not truly Muslim is in the end a religious question and can be dealt with only within Islamic theology. In other words, it is outside the scope of a scholarly account. Consequently, the scholarly debate whether or not Javanese Islam is truly Islamic cannot be solved. This, I would suggest, at least partially explains the longevity of this particular debate within the discourse of Javanese Islam.

6.5.2. The Javanese Muslims: heretic instead of syncretist?

Snouck Hurgronje's research also focused on the route and vehicle via which Islam had reached the Netherlands Indies, and Java in particular. He had come to the conclusion that Javanese Islam had originally come from the coast of South India, Coromandel and Malabar and had via (Northern) Sumatra reached Java. Over this route, Sufism and the Sufi *tarekat* was the vehicle with which Islam had travelled to Java. In South India this Islam had been Hinduised, meaning that the mystical element in it had been strengthened. According to Snouck Hurgronje, this mystically tinged Islam appealed to the Javanese who, supposedly, preferred religious speculation to upholding the daily requirements of the Islamic law. Snouck Hurgronje explains this inclination towards mysticism by the fact that at that time Java was still a Hindu state (e.g. Snouck Hurgronje 1913: 7-8; 35-43).

A *tarekat* teaches mystical exercises designed to attain unity with Allah. The resulting mystical insight, orthodox or heretical, is the kind of knowledge that falls within the category of *ngelmu*. Quite a number of these Sufi brotherhoods promoted a pantheism that has often been con-

sidered heretical. The claim that Allah is all and that all is Allah, has lead certain (Sufi) mystics to the (heretical) claim that they themselves are Allah. From his research into Indonesian and Javanese religious literature, Snouck Hurgronje concluded that Java knows of a strong and popular tradition of these heretical mystical brotherhoods that spread a heretical *ngelmu*. About their writings Snouck Hurgronje says that:

“In general one can say that the heretical-mystical writings constitute the *most original part* of the religious literature of the Netherlands Indies Mohammedans” (Snouck Hurgronje 1913: 39; italics mine)⁷²

Claiming that heretical pantheistic mysticism is the most original element of the local Islam in the Netherlands Indies or rather in Java (after all most of his examples pertain to Java) is making the claim that this heretical tendency is typically Javanese. Now, what is so typically or originally Javanese about these texts? Not the parts and fragments dealing with Islamic law and doctrines. These, after all, can be traced back to their Arabic original. It is the many “abstruse combinations and comparisons” that, intellectually considered, are “the most ridiculous incongruities”. Snouck even calls this form of mystical thinking a “delusion” (*droombeeld*) and maintains that through such texts the teaching of the highest truth has been degraded to “an amulet for all purposes” (*ibid.*: 40). The Javanese treat the catechisms and main teachings of a *tarekat* as sanctifying formula. They either learn these formula by heart or are content with the possession of the piece of paper on which it is written (*ibid.*: 39-41).

Snouck Hurgronje’s characterisation of these heretical elements is reminiscent of the descriptions of the ‘syncretisms’ in Javanese Islam by authors such as Brumund, Poensen and Harthoorn. While to the latter this syncretism is typical for the Javanese religious condition, for the first it is heretical mysticism. In both cases, though, Javanese religious beliefs are depicted equally inconsistent and irrational. Consequently, through the door syncretism was dismissed, heresy has entered. To say that Snouck Hurgronje offers a derogatory description of Javanese Islam is an understatement. More recent research that re-evaluates the role and

⁷² My translation of: “In het algemeen kan men zeggen, dat de kettersch-mystieke geschriften het meest origineele gedeelte der godsdienstige letterkunde van de Indische Mohammedanen vormen.”

importance of Sufism and *tariqa* for Indonesian Islam is correcting this misrepresentation (e.g. Laffan 2011: 1-66). It has been shown that Sufism has not only been the vehicle of (heretical) mysticism, but also of orthodoxy and reformism (Azra 2004). Especially the research by Martin van Bruinessen offers valuable insight into the influence of Sufism on Islam in Indonesia and Java (e.g. 1990; 1994a; 1994b; 1999, 2007).

6.5.3. Logical inconsistency solved?

As I pointed out repeatedly in the course of this dissertation, speaking of a syncretist Javanese Islam leads us into logical inconsistency. This inconsistency in turn is problematic for several reasons, the main one being that it entails a characterisation of the Javanese people themselves as inconsistent, and consequently as either hypocrites (they claim to be Muslim, but in reality they are not) or as mentally inferior (they do not know what it means to be Muslim). Neither one of these consequences is acceptable, as has been argued. Such misrepresentation have been rightfully attacked by scholars such as Nancy Florida, Laura Sears⁷³, Mark Woodward, Ann Kumar, Soebardi and so forth. These scholars alternatively tend to characterise Javanese Islam as a local expression of Islam, and consequently the Javanese Muslims as true Muslims. They stress the Sufi origins of Javanese Islam and argue that the pre-Islamic elements in Javanese Islam have been thoroughly Islamised. In short, their characterisation of Javanese Islam is virtually identical to that of the orientalist Snouck Hurgronje, apart from the latter's negative evaluation of Islam in Java as borderline or plain heretical. The question whether or not Snouck Hurgronje's argument actually solves the original inconsistency is therefore also relevant for contemporary, post-colonial scholarship.

As we saw, Snouck Hurgronje argued that the process of Islamisation was executed by Muslim scholars who developed theological arguments so as to incorporate and order certain pre-Islamic beliefs and practices into Islam in order to guarantee the greatness of Allah (Snouck Hurgronje 1884: 105). It is thus obvious that this Islamisation only happens

⁷³ Sears argues that in the colonial analysis and representation of Javanese literary traditions, the Islamic component was downplayed and the essence of Javanese literature was located in Java's Hindu past. In this sense her research partly reproduces the post-colonial critique on syncretist Javanese Islam on the level of Java's literary traditions (Cf. Sears 1996: 75-78; 85-89).

‘after the facts’. That is to say, only when the Javanese were already practising Islamic and pre-Islamic rituals together and indiscriminately, was there a need for said Muslim scholars to execute the mentioned Islamisation. As Snouck Hurgronje pointed out, despite the fact that Islam spreads and gains stronghold in new territories, certain cultural or ‘Heathen’ practices and beliefs turn out to be ineradicable. From this the need arises to bring them in line, or assimilate them, with Islamic teachings. Therefore, the characterisation of Javanese Islam as an Islam that has assimilated or Islamised certain pre-Islamic beliefs and practices is not an alternative for syncretist Javanese Islam. After all, it is an Islamisation *ex post facto*: the Islamisation only comes after the factual ‘syncretic’ practices and beliefs have already been taking place. As a result, Snouck Hurgronje’s argument obscures rather than solves the inconsistency.

In the end, then, it seems likely that syncretist Javanese Islam and local Javanese Islam are actually two different phenomena, or perhaps two different stages in the historical evolution of Islam in Java. After all, the former predates the latter in the historical process of conversion⁷⁴. Consequently, in this light, the dispute about the nature of Javanese Islam -is it syncretist or truly Islamic- becomes a non-discussion. Moreover, as pointed out above, the question whether Javanese Islam is truly Islam is actually a theological question that requires a theological answer. How then, can this scholarly debate be productive?

6.6. Context and concepts. Snouck Hurgronje: crypto-theologian?

The question whether missionaries on the one hand and a scientist like Snouck Hurgronje on the other could share the same conceptual framework seems a legitimate one. After all, their characterisations of Javanese religion, either as syncretist or as heretical, strongly resemble each other.

⁷⁴ Unfortunately, a discussion of the theories on syncretism in religious studies is outside the ambit of this dissertation. It is however relevant to point out that many scholars consider religious syncretism to be a phase in the way religions spread. Very briefly put, the syncretist phase marks “horizontal” conversion, while a reformative phase marks “vertical” conversion or conversion in depth. The former phase brings new converts or new cultural regions within the ambit of the religion in question. The second phase, which is historically considered to be later, either brings beliefs and practices in line with the official doctrines or sifts out those that are considered unorthodox (e.g. Leopold 2004: 88ff).

Moreover, Snouck Hurgronje has no trouble accepting the data furnished by the missionaries; both the scientist and the missionaries focus on the beliefs of the Javanese and see great inconsistencies in it; and only by describing the religious condition of the Javanese in terms of beliefs, is it possible for Snouck Hurgronje to consider certain teachings as heretical.

There is also great agreement on the course of human history and the places different cultures occupy in it. Snouck Hurgronje was an adamant defender of the ethical policy and association theory (Kuitenbrouwer 2001: 73-74). He believed that the Dutch had a responsibility towards the Javanese in terms of education and civilisation: the Javanese needed to be uplifted and it was up to the Dutch, or the West in general, to do that. The way to achieve this was through association: the civilisation and education of the coloniser was thought to somehow rub off on the indigenous population, in the first instance on the elite, if only it remained close to and under the wings of the colonial overlords (Snouck Hurgronje 1911: 83). We have already come across such an obviously paternalistic and racist attitude towards the Javanese in the preceding chapters -both the early orientalists and the missionaries were prone to it. As we saw, this stance depended on the conviction that different civilisations occupy different rungs on the evolutionary ladder and that the different stages in civilisation correspond with different religions. Within this framework the persistence of the above described superstitions and heretical beliefs is simply the result of the naivety and a lack of education of the Javanese. Snouck Hurgronje clearly endorsed this view on the evolution of mankind, when he claimed that Islam is well fitted to accustom barbarians to discipline and order, but incompatible with "modern" civilisation (Snouck Hurgronje 1884: 100). Would it at all be possible that the conceptual framework of a scientist like Snouck Hurgronje is identical to the explicitly theological one of the missionaries?

Van Koningsveld describes Snouck Hurgronje's outlook on the world as liberal-protestant (*vrijzinnig protestants*) -a conclusion he reaches after scrutinising Snouck Hurgronje's familial background and education (1988: 95-99). Snouck Hurgronje was raised in a Protestant family, and his father actually was a preacher. He was involved as a volunteer in the *Zendinghuis* where Protestant missionaries received their education before heading to the Netherlands Indies. His desire to become a preacher

made Snouck Hurgronje enrol in theology in Leiden. After a couple of years, however, his vocation seems to have changed direction, towards the study of Semitic languages. During his undergraduate years (*propaedeutise*) he was trained in Modern Theology -the theological conviction S.E. Harthoorn was partial too as well. Van Koningsveld typifies this Modern Theology as, on the one hand, based on 'naturalism' and, on the other hand, on the idea of an historical evolution of religions inspired by Darwin. The first element, naturalism, conveys the idea that religion is in fact man-made. That is to say, man has the natural capacity to religion. This capacity is an ethical consciousness (*zedelijk bewustzijn*) which expresses itself in the form of religion and results in revelations such as penned down in the Bible or the Qur'an. This naturalism implies the denial of a supernatural entity as the source of religion. Alternatively, the source of religion is thus considered a natural faculty installed in each man. Jesus, then, is not the son of God, but merely an historical figure, a master who taught neighbourly love in ancient Palestine. Consequently, historical critique is the proper method to study religions and its founders -a method which Snouck Hurgronje indeed applied to Islam. The second element, the idea that there is an evolution in the history of religions conveys the idea that this ethical consciousness is differently (more or less) evolved in different cultures. The West's supposed cultural superiority depended on the superiority of its ethical consciousness, which in turn was said to have a civilising effect on its society. Islam, of course, was deemed to be a degeneration compared to Christianity, its ethical consciousness and concomitant civilising effect much lower as well.

It is not difficult to recognise that Snouck Hurgronje's outlook on Javanese culture and religion is very much in line with Modern Theology: his view on Islam as barely suitable for bringing discipline to barbarians, his conviction that Indonesians needed to be educated by the West, the conviction that the Indonesian (and thus Javanese) level of civilisation equalled that of Antiquity or the Middle Ages (Snouck Hurgronje 1911: 61). Furthermore, he saw no bones in building upon the data provided by the missionaries, whose explicitly theological framework, as we have seen, had determined how they made sense of phenomena such as *slametan* and *ngelmu*. All these elements taken together indicate that his conceptual framework is the same as it had been for centuries: all nations have a religion, religions can be ranked in an hierarchy, (protestant) Christianity is located higher than Islam, a religious practise is the ex-

pression of a religious belief, and superstition is, if not a false belief, then at least a very unintelligent one. Thus, Snouck Hurgronje is firmly embedded in that same Western tradition of describing, categorising and discussing the religion of the Javanese. And although he is thought of as pertaining to the scientific, i.e. secular, discipline of religious studies, it turns out he shares a framework identical to his theological counterparts.

6.7. A history of Islamisation: *Tarekat* and *Wali Sanga*

In his capacity as professor at Leiden University, Snouck Hurgronje put his stamp on the research of an entire generation of scholars, often by guiding them through their doctoral research. His vision on Islam in Indonesia was so compelling and the material he had gathered over the years so vast that it is no exaggeration to speak of a research programme. His ideas, arguments and research focal points recur time and again in the works of his pupils.

Tarekat

One of those focal points is the mentioned mystical side of Javanese Islam (Sufism), which has since become an important thread in the textbook story on Javanese Islam. The central claim is that it was Sufism that had first reached and spread in Java. This mystical Islam, bent on inducing an experience of unison with the Almighty, arrived in Java via the Indian shores of Coromandel and Malabar, where it already had been Hinduised. This Hinduised character, together with the Sufi practice of *dhikr* (an incantation to facilitate ecstatic experiences) is held to have facilitated the conversion of the Javanese to Islam.

This discovery of the region of origin of Javanese Islam was made on the basis of texts. Through comparison of religious texts, orientalist philologists had established that the Islamic texts prevalent in the archipelago, and in Sumatra and Java in particular, had derived from India. For example, as early as 1861 George Niemann discusses the Sufism of the Javanese on the basis of texts that explain the teachings of Al-Ghazali and Hamzah Fansuri. The former he describes as more orthodox and the second as more pantheistic and thus regarded as heretical by con-

temporaries (Niemann 1861: 348-59). Moreover, he discusses the dissemination of Islamic texts, both in Arabic and in Javanese (ibid.: 359-60). The same Niemann also shows how the Hamzanama⁷⁵, although originally Persian, knows of consecutive Hindustani and Malay editions (Niemann 1870: 26). It was on the basis of such scriptural facts, that Snouck Hurgronje ventured the thesis that we should:

“... consider as land of origin of these novels in both languages (Malay and Acehnese) the same part of South India, where also the popular mysticism and popular religious legends of the Mohammedan people of this archipelago point to.” (Snouck Hurgronje 1894: 127)⁷⁶

Despite these early mentions of Sufism, it is really Snouck Hurgronje who initiated the scientific research into the Sufi brotherhoods and Islam in Java (Van Bruinessen 1998: 195-97). His approach was based on his background in Islamic studies, his fieldwork in Mecca and Aceh, and of course his textual expertise. G.W.J. Drewes, who had Snouck Hurgronje as his doctoral supervisor, succinctly formulates Snouck Hurgronje's programme with regard to the mystical thread in Javanese Islam:

“So mysticism, orthodox as well as heretical, had spread everywhere and in its most popular form had become a receptacle where degraded remnants of authentic mystical conceptions mingled with scraps of preislamic (sic) lore and ancient magic. *This situation is clearly reflected by many of the manuscripts gathered by Snouck Hurgronje in Java and Sumatra.* Being mostly of the type of notebooks wherein pupils of religious teachers set down everything that had interested them in the course of the lessons received, they represent faithfully what kind of instruction was given and which subjects were commonly treated. Moreover, many a page of these manuscripts is filled with the customary tarīqa-matter of litanies, prayers and dhikr formulas as passed down to their pupils by teachers authorized to transmit the doc-

⁷⁵ The Hamzanama is a novel relating the adventures of Amir Hamza, the uncle of the prophet Mohammed.

⁷⁶ My translation of: "...als het stamland van (...) romans in beide talen (Maleisch en Atjehs) hetzelfde deel van Zuid-Indië beschouwen, waarheen ook de populaire mystiek en de populaire godsdienstige legenden der Mohammedaansche volkeren van dezen Archipel wijzen.”

trines and the practices of the various fraternities which flourished in Indonesia.” (Drewes 1961: 424; italics mine)

Many scholars in the wake of Snouck Hurgronje delivered a doctoral dissertation in which they translated and discussed a Javanese religious text. In true orientalist tradition, the underlying idea is that Javanese religious texts give insight into the hearts and minds, and thus into the religious convictions of the Javanese. The translated text usually confirmed one or more of the theses set out by Snouck Hurgronje. A case in point is Van Ronkel’s doctoral thesis. Essentially it is an attempt to critically assess Snouck Hurgronje’s mentioned thesis on the origin of Muslim legends in the Archipelago (Snouck Hurgronje 1884: 98-99). Van Ronkel examines whether or not the originally Persian Hamzanama, as it is known in Aceh and Java, had reached these parts via South India or not. Van Ronkel concludes that it is via North and not via South India, thereby partially affirming Snouck Hurgronje’s thesis (Van Ronkel 1895: 3, 249-50). Other studies examine (and confirm) the idea that the Islam that had reached Java was originally the mystical Islam of the *tarekat*. For example, Rinkes’ study of the mystic Abdoerraof of Singkel discusses his impact on Javanese and Sumatran mysticism. It deals with the Shattariya order (or *tarekat*) and its pantheism (Rinkes 1909). Rinkes was the first of a number of students who delved into Snouck Hurgronje’s collection of manuscripts for a subject for their doctoral dissertation (Drewes 1961: 423). Another fine example is Drewes’ study of the teachings of three Javanese Gurus through the analysis of their *primbon* (collection of things worth knowing). It is telling how Drewes copies Snouck Hurgronje explanation as to why the Javanese are lax in their practise of daily *salat*: the initial propagators of Islam in Java, valued the thought over action: spiritual exercises were more important than physical ones (Drewes 1925: 96 ff.). Yet another instance is Hendrik Kraemer’s translation and discussion of a 16th century *primbon*, placing it firmly in the mystical tradition that Snouck Hurgronje had lined out (Kraemer 1921). Although not one of Snouck Hurgronje’s pupils, Zoetmulder’s dissertation on pantheism and monism in Javanese *suluk* is another case in point (Zoetmulder 1935). These scholars all follow the course set out by Snouck Hurgronje: they focus on Javanese Islamic mystical texts from which they draw conclusions about the Javanese religious condition. As Van Bruinessen (1998) points out, even after 1950

research in this domain continued in this paradigm and built upon the research results of Snouck Hurgronje and his protégés.

In the centuries after the initial conversion Javanese and Sumatran hajjis joined Sufi brotherhoods in Mecca. They continued to bring Sufi Islam, both in its pantheistic (often dubbed heretic) and more orthodox variants to Java. The mystic connection between Mecca and the Indonesian archipelago is often attested to in the *silsila* (i.e. lineage of Sheiks) of the *tarekat* in question. Again the orientalist scholars discussed this connection on the basis of texts: in the Javanese religious literature of the *suluk* and *primbon* there are often references to renowned Sufist scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Al-Arabi, Al-Raniri, Abdurrauf of Sinkil, Hamzah Fansuri, *et al.* Such references are regarded as proof not only of the origin of Javanese or Indonesian Islam, but also of its mystical character, and of its truly Islamic nature. Still today a work on Islamic mysticism in Indonesia or on the origins of Islamic reformism in the form of Neo-Sufism (i.e. achievement of harmony between *tassawuf* and *sharia*) makes use of the same textual sources and points to the same networks of the *tarekat* (see respectively Steenbrink 1994; Azra 2004)

Wali Sanga

The above sketched focus on *tarekat* is complemented by the study of the *Wali Sanga*, the nine saints who are said to have brought that mystical Islam to Java. These saints, or rather Sufi mystics, have been attributed with founding Islam in Java. Most of the knowledge about these *Wali Sanga* again stems from Javanese texts, such as the *Babad Tanah Jawi*. In these stories explanations are found for certain aspects of Javanese Islam. For example, one of the *Wali*, Sunan Kalijaga, is commonly attributed with inventing certain key characteristics of Javanese Islam. After all, he is said to have introduced *wayang kulit* and *gamelang* as means to spread the message of Islam. Other famous stories about the *Wali Sanga* deal with Sunan Siti Jenar, a *Wali* whose teachings are often dubbed heretic and was put to death by his fellow *Wali*. This fascinating figure pops up time and again in scholarly discussions about the nature of Javanese Islam. Moreover, the graves of the *Wali Sanga* are places of reverence and many Javanese undertake pilgrimages to them. As we saw, Snouck Hurgronje devotes a lot of attention to the veneration of these saints in

his discussion of Javanese Islam -arguing that it is an integral part of Islam to revere saints. Unsurprisingly, scholars working within his framework studied the subject accordingly. The above mentioned Rinkes discussed the *Wali Sanga* in a series of articles from 1910-1913 (Rinkes 1996). Schrieke's *Het boek van Bonang* (The book of Bonang) is a translation and discussion of a 16th century Javanese *primbon* attributed to Sunan Bonang, another prominent *Wali*. Schrieke presents it as a typical *primbon* -eclectic and mystical- and proof of Snouck Hurgronje's thesis that „The early pioneers of Islam in the Far East laid great stress on thought, while action occupied a much lower place in their scheme of life." (Schrieke 1916: 67). That is to say this early *primbon* supposedly proves the inclination in Javanese Islam towards mystical speculation to the detriment of fulfilling daily duties as set out by the law.

Working within Snouck Hurgronje's academic vision, the works of these scholars have attributed to the format through which we have come to understand Islam in Java (See e.g. Drewes 1961: 419-24). Mostly, through the translation and discussion of Javanese religious texts the idea that the origin and essence of Javanese Islam is Sufism became solidified.

6.8. Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed Snouck Hurgronje's stance on the nature of Javanese Islam. He argued that, even though Javanese Islam carries many practices and beliefs from pre-Islamic religion, it actually still is a truly Islamic religion. His argument was directed against his contemporaries who held that Javanese Islam was not really Islam, but an indigenous animism with a thin layer of Islamic veneer. As we saw, more recent, post-colonial critique has targeted that same misrepresentation. Moreover, both the orientalist Snouck Hurgronje and these post-colonial scholars proffer an identical alternative to syncretist Javanese Islam: Javanese Islam is Islam that has assimilated Javanese cultural and religious elements. Assimilation refers to the process by which these elements have been brought in line with the teaching of Islam. It is thus to be set aside from syncretism which points out an incongruity, i.e. such elements are considered not in line with Islamic teachings. An analysis of Snouck Hurgronje's argument helped us to assess the post-colonial argument.

Firstly, we have observed that Snouck Hurgronje's description of Javanese Islam stayed within the same Christian theological confines as those of his predecessors. In fact, the evidence we scrutinised (such as his formation in Modern Theology), suggests that Snouck Hurgronje's depiction of Javanese religion is an instance of secularised theology. That is to say, even though Snouck Hurgronje does not condone Protestant theology, it is still the implicit conceptual background against which his own understanding of Javanese Islam makes sense. In other words, the secular, humanist (*vrijzinnig*) Snouck Hurgronje resorts to the same conceptual reservoir as his explicitly Christian predecessors in order to represent Javanese Islam. Consequently, even though Snouck Hurgronje is a monument in the scientific study of Islam, his description of Javanese Islam is constrained by the same set of assumptions and concepts as the descriptions preceding his.

Secondly, I have argued that his argument about the nature of Javanese Islam does not solve the inconsistency described in chapter one. His depiction of Javanese Islam as essentially Islamic (instead of the 'syncretist stance' that holds that it is not) of course no longer holds this inconsistency. After all, it argues that pre-Islamic cultural and religious elements have been brought in line with Islamic teachings. However, the assimilation only happens after Javanese Muslims had already been involved in practices and beliefs that were *not* in line with Islamic teachings. In other words, syncretist Javanese Islam and native or local Islam are simply two different phenomena. This observation helps us to understand why the discussion about the nature of Javanese Islam has been such a confusing one: the different sides are in fact talking about different phenomena as if they were talking about one and the same.

Thirdly, I have argued that Snouck Hurgronje smuggled a piece of Islamic theology into his account of Islam in Java. That is, the basis on which he argues who is (and who is not) a true Muslim, is the same that is used within Islamic theology. However, within Islam there is disagreement on who is and is not truly Muslim. As a consequence, this ambivalence is carried into Snouck Hurgronje's stance as well. More importantly, the question who is and who is not truly Muslim is in the end a theological question that can only be answered with a theological answer. Therefore, this issue simply cannot be settled within a scholarly account

and thus the scientific discussion on the true nature of Javanese Islam is in fact a pseudo discussion.

If today scholars argue, usually in reaction to Geertz' *The religion of Java*, that Javanese Islam is but a local expression of Islam, with its roots in Sufism and the *tariqa*, they in fact repeat the arguments developed by one of the most important orientalist in the history of colonial Java. As such, they run the risk of committing the same fallacies as did Snouck Hurgronje: *petitio principii*, dressing up theological stances as scholarly arguments, and ignoring the historical process of conversion. The theoretical problems surrounding syncretist 'Javanese Islam', therefore are as acute as in the beginning of this dissertation. In the next two chapters I aim to sketch an alternative approach to the issues surrounding syncretist 'Javanese Islam'. I will do so in two steps. Firstly, I will elaborate on the constraints within which this 'Javanese Islam' was conceived. One of the arguments I will make is that these constraints are Western cultural in nature and that these constraints have compelled observers from the West to see religions where actually there are none. Consequently, I will argue that syncretist Javanese Islam is an experiential entity. This implies that Javanese Islam does not exist in reality, but only in the experiential world of the West. Secondly, I will make use of a hypothesis on cultural differences in order to show how this suggestion of the non-existence of Javanese Islam is epistemologically interesting. In other words, if Javanese Islam does not exist, then what have we been describing for all this time? In answering this question, I hope to show that there are alternative approaches that open new fields of research.

