

Islam and *Traweh* Prayers in Java

Unity, Diversity, and Cultural Smoothness¹

by

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Abstract

This article has as its main focus the supererogatory nightly prayers, the traweh prayers, as they are performed in the world's largest Muslim nation, Indonesia. These prayers are of immense importance to the Javanese Muslim community, and are often regarded as constituting an obligatory part of the Islamic religion. In the article, the author describes how these prayers are performed in both modernist and traditionalist settings in Central Java, and argues that different ideas of how they should be performed not necessarily plague the Javanese umat, but rather only colors it. This, it is argued, is due to the cultural smoothness of the Javanese.

Javanese Muslims orient their daily lives around the five obligatory daily prayers (i. *sholat*),² and their year around the fasting month of Ramadan.³ It is the performance of these rituals with their various sub-rituals that makes people Muslims in Java. As such, the self-ascribed Muslim identity of the Javanese cannot easily be detached from the execution of the prayers and the Ramadan fast. Muslim identity is thus far more concerned with ritual practice than with theological or philosophical speculation. This relationship between practice and faith is not peculiar to Islam in Java; rather, it can be said to be the norm outside Christian Protestant circles. Tord Olsson has argued that there has been an unfounded conviction among scholars of religion that religion is first and foremost about questions pertaining to faith and belief, and only secondarily to rituals. Olsson assigns this misperception to the intellectual and (conscious or unconscious) Protestant background of most western scholars who have studied religion, and to the fact that these same

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² I., J., and A. in this text refer to Indonesian, Javanese, and Arabic respectively.

³ This article is based on a three-year sojourn in Java between 1999 and 2002, and a two-month visit in connection with Ramadan in 2003.

scholars have preferred to study texts that have been marked by a similar intellectualism and concern for the (correct) faith. As a result, the academic understanding of religion has come to be that entity with which scholars of religion deal, and this has predominantly been questions concerning faith and belief (Olsson 2000: 27f. cf. Bell 1997: 191 and Smith 1979: 13ff.).

Taking into consideration that scholars of Islam as well as historians of religion have had this focus in their research, and that generally, anthropologists working in Muslim areas have been more concerned with 'folk beliefs' and 'unorthodoxy' (or with not Islam, as I have argued elsewhere (Möller 2005)) than with normative Islam,⁴ we do not overstate the issue when maintaining that Islamic regular rituals have been – and still are – a neglected area of study. Some scholars have devoted themselves to the study of Islamic rituals e.g. Buitelaar's study of Ramadan in Morocco (1993), Bowen's studies of Islamic prayer in Indonesia (1989, 2000), Nelson's on Koran recitation in Egypt (2001), and my own study of Ramadan in Java (Möller 2005). Compared to studies of, for example, political Islam, there are far fewer studies of Islamic rituals which confirm the view that Islamic rituals are unworthy of serious study. To this state of affairs we may add the general and unfortunate tendency in recent scholarship that has contributed (deliberately or otherwise) to viewing Islam as politically potent, and ignoring its religious and spiritual aspects. In this period of accusations of terrorism, there is an urgent need for alternative pictures of Islam.

To counterbalance these scholarly trends, this article focuses on a well-attended ritual in Java, namely the *traweh* prayers performed during Ramadan evenings. In recent times the documentary role of the anthropologist or historian of religion has been relegated to the sideline for more 'sophisticated' (and allegedly 'more academic') discussions of a theoretical or philosophical level. This is regrettable, as new documentary research which is not pure ethnography is very much needed and, it seems, sought after. I will hence describe the sequences of the *traweh* prayers rather lengthily below, the purpose of which is to re-activate the role of the anthropologist of religion as a recorder of social realities, as well as to show that the performance of these prayers in Java can differ from mosque to mosque. This is intended to open the eyes of those who still believe that standard and normative Islamic rituals are performed unvaryingly and uniformly around the world. (I am confident that this latter idea is yet another reason why Islamic rituals have been insufficiently studied thus far.) We will see with *traweh* prayers that the Muslim community in Java is both united and divided and that Javanese Muslims nowadays are able to overcome their ritual differences largely due to their cultural 'smoothness'. By scrutinising the Javanese's relationship to these prayers, we are able to refute recent negative labels of Islam in Java.

⁴ In the words of Bowen (2000: 23): '... familiarity with Islamic ritual has been unusually underdeveloped within the anthropology community'.

Islam in Java

There is probably not one single study on the religious or cultural life of the Javanese published after 1960 that does not comment and build upon Clifford Geertz's now classic book, *The religion of Java* (1960).⁵ Based on ethnographic fieldwork in East Java in the 1950s, this work has had huge influence on subsequent research, and continues to be cited to this day. Nevertheless, its main idea has been under steady criticism in the past two decades, and many contemporary scholars (including this author) would not apply Geertz's understanding of Javanese Islam to their own material. Geertz proposed a triadic view of the Javanese religious life, and suggested that we understand it in terms of *abangan*, *santri*, and *priyayi* (J.) forms of religiosity. Geertz regarded the *abangan* variant to be that of the true (syncretic, unorthodox, etc.) religion of the Javanese. He viewed the more 'orthodox' Muslims (*santri*) as a minority in Java. The religion of Java was perceived by Geertz as not really Islam though this idea was not new at the time. To van Leur (1955: 169), for example, Islam in Indonesia constituted only a 'thin, easily flaking glaze on the massive body of indigenous civilization'. The prevailing view following colonial scholarship was that to be a 'real Javanese' was quite different from being a 'real Muslim' (Woodward 1996: 33). Much of the criticism directed towards Geertz and his analysis was built upon the fact that he appeared to have been heavily influenced by his modernist informants, who, with their 'puritan' interpretation of Islam, sought to rid Javanese Islam of its allegedly non-, pre- or extra-Islamic beliefs and practices. Geertz thus let modernists define 'Islam' and 'Muslim' and consequently came to regard many Javanese institutions as belonging more to indigenous tradition, or perhaps to a Hindu-Buddhist past, than to Islam. In other words, much of that labelled *abangan* by Geertz would be interpreted in an Islamic frame of reference by many Sufi, neo-modernist, and traditionalist Javanese Muslims and *The religion of Java* should perhaps be read as the apologist text of a modernist. This state of affairs has been aptly referred to as a 'modernist prejudice' (Barton 1997: 37), which has haunted the Western – and, to some extent, even Javanese – understanding of Islam in Java.

As mentioned, a new perspective with regard to Islam in Java has taken form since the 1980s. Largely critical of Geertz and his supporters, scholars active in the formation of this view have accentuated the Islamic aspects of Javanese religious life, and questioned the legitimacy of previous scholarly suppositions.⁶ Roff (1985: 7) argued that there so far had been a seemingly 'extraordinary desire [...] to diminish, conceptually, the place and role of the religion and culture of Islam, now and in the past, in Southeast Asian societies'. A decade later, Hefner (1997: 5) similarly noted that 'Islam's influence on Southeast Asian society has been severely underestimated', and elaborated upon the 'dual marginalization' that had subjected Islam in Southeast Asia. On the one hand, he

⁵ For a discussion of Geertz's other works, see King and Wilder (2003: 78ff.).

⁶ Note that there were similar attempts pioneered by Drewes and Johns in the 1960s. However, their influence was overshadowed by that of Geertz's.

argued, scholars of Islam had first and foremost directed their attention to the ‘classical’ Islamic civilisations of the Arabic- and Persian-speaking areas of the world, and – at the expense of everyday Muslim life – focused on the high culture of Islam. In this field, there had been a strong textual emphasis with a legalistic understanding of Islam, which was not highly regarded in contemporary anthropological or sociological understanding of Islam. On the other hand, Islam has also been marginalised in Southeast Asian studies, where it was regarded as anathema to the ‘real’ Southeast Asia. This latter phenomenon was, in fact, largely a continuation of colonial attitudes and scholarship (Hefner 1997: 8–18).

Mark Woodward’s monograph *Islam in Java: Normative piety and mysticism in the sultanate of Yogyakarta* (1989) seriously questioned Geertz’s framework.⁷ Instead of examining Javanese religiosity in terms of orthodox Islam versus syncretism, Woodward suggests that we understand the different Javanese approaches to religion as one influenced to various degrees by legalist vs mystical interpretations of Islam. He consequently introduces the ‘variants’ of normative Islam (or normative piety) and the mystically inclined Islam Jawa (Javanese Islam), and argues in a general tone that ‘Islam is the predominant force in the religious beliefs and rites of central Javanese,’ and that it as such ‘shapes the character of social interaction and daily life in all segments of Javanese society’ (Woodward 1989: 3). The question is thus not if, but rather how, the Javanese are Muslims. Some Javanese Muslims comply with the standard requirements of *sharīah*-centred Islam, and thus perform ritual prayer, fast during Ramadan, pay the tithe, and simultaneously refrain from more popular forms of devotion. Those, according to Woodward, are the upholders of normative Islam in Java. The others, the more mystically inclined Javanese Muslims, only participate in certain aspects of the normative requirements of Islam, and argue that their spiritual development is not dependent upon the performance of normative rituals. Representing this mode of Muslim devotion are the court nobility and certain layers of the village population, who, however, are dependent upon *santri* performances of normative Islam. Islam in Java thus reveals a schism that other Muslim societies to a large degree also host, i.e., a schism between legally oriented Muslims on the one hand, and their mystically-oriented brothers and sisters on the other. As such, it is a schism between Sufism and *sharīah*-centred Islam. It would be a mistake, according to Woodward (1989: 63), to assume that the latter represents orthodoxy: ‘there is little support for the position that the *sharīah* represents the “true” or “original” Islam’. Both Sufism and more normative Islam are thus purely ‘Islamic’ traditions – it is their respective ways to participate in Islam that differ.

Interestingly, this new approach has been welcomed by Javanese scholars, who have gladly participated in efforts to define the Javanese religion in Islamic terms (see for example Hilmy 1998;

⁷ This version is derived from his PhD thesis, ‘The Shari’ah and the secret doctrine: Muslim law and mystical doctrine in Central Java’ (University of Illinois, 1985).

Madjid 1994; Muhaimin 1996; Mujani 2003; and Saleh 2001). Large surveys of the Indonesian religious landscape conducted by the Centre for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM, Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat) in 2001 and 2002, confirmed the Woodwardian standpoint, and emphasised the inapplicability of the Geertzian scheme in contemporary Indonesia (Republika 2002; cf. Mulkhan 2002; Burhanuddin 2002). This national survey, which to a large extent is the basis of Saiful Mujani's interesting doctoral dissertation (2003), showed that more than 80% of Indonesian Muslims could be called *santri* (in that they performed ritual prayer, fasted during Ramadan, and performed other prescribed Islamic rituals), whereas less than 5% fitted Geertz's category of *abangan* with its specific rituals. The remaining 15% of the population were shown to be – though regarding themselves as Muslims – unengaged in *santri* or *abangan* rituals. The overall point to be made was that Indonesian Muslims are growing more and more *santri*, and that Indonesian contemporary Islam cannot be accurately studied in terms of a dichotomy of *santri* and *abangan*, since only a small sector of the population adheres to the latter tradition.⁸ In the words of Hefner (1987: 547): '[t]he children of many "abangan" are becoming good Muslims'. Or, as stated by Mujani (2003: 126), the 'older abangan thesis of 1950s anthropology is not verified by the results of today's surveys'.⁹

More recently, Woodward (2001) has proposed five 'basic religious orientations' in Java, that is, various forms of indigenised Islam, traditionalism, modernism, Islamism and neo-modernism. Peter Riddell (2002) has four types: modernism, traditionalism, radical Islamism, and neo-modernism. I was initially persuaded by these recent categories of Islam in Java but soon realised that they did not dovetail neatly with Javanese reality. Liberal (neo-modernism) and radical (Islamism) variants of Islam in Java are less widespread and influential than suggested by recent journalistic and academic commentary. These phenomena are generally limited to a few major urban centres, and even there their influence has been exaggerated. In minor cities and towns in Java, people still define their religiosity in terms of either traditionalist Islam or modernist Islam. More precisely, common people are likely to be either *wong NU* or *wong Muhammadiyah*, that is, either affiliated with the traditionalist Muslim organisation Nahdlatul Ulama or the modernist Muhammadiyah.¹⁰

Earlier research has tended to depict the relationship between modernists and traditionalists in Indonesia as one plagued by constant conflicts. Thus, Cederroth (1995: 238) characterised it, for example, as one in which 'much slandering' takes place, and Federspiel (2001: 27) has similarly noted the 'nasty overtones' in the polemics between the two groups. The 'extremely bitter' feuds between modernists and traditionalists have also been observed (Woodward 2001: 33), as has the

⁸ Interestingly, the survey stuck to the terms *santri* and *abangan*.

⁹ Indeed, the survey's outcomes 'tend to reject Geertz's claim' (Mujani 2003: 104).

¹⁰ To have a modernist (Muhammadiyah) or a traditionalist (NU) inclination in Java does not necessarily mean that one is a member of one of these organisations.

'bitter mutual criticism' (Fuad 2002: 143) between them. We will have reasons to return to these characterisations below.

Ramadan and *traweh* in Java

Fasting during the ninth Islamic month of Ramadan is obligatory for healthy Muslims,¹¹ as laid down in the Koran:

O you who have attained to the faith! Fasting is ordained to you as it was ordained for those before you, so that you might remain conscious of God (Koran 2: 183).¹²

Only a handful of other Koranic verses refer to fasting during Ramadan (Koran 2: 184–87) in stark contrast, for example, to the number of verses commenting on daily prayers or the obligatory tithe (A. *zakāh*). Nevertheless, all members of the Islamic community are clear that abstention from food, drink, and sexual relations during Ramadan constitutes a pious and obligatory ritual act. The abundant *hadīth* literature which contains records of the prophet Muhammad's sayings and activities, is quick to strengthen this conviction, and it is here that the idea of the Ramadan fast as one of Islam's so-called five pillars (A. *arkānu l-islām*) is to be found.¹³

During Ramadan, pious deeds are thought to be rewarded according to a special Ramadan scale, and one often hear people say that their good deeds will receive divine rewards (A. *ajr*, I. *pahala*) up to 70 times more than outside of the fasting month. It is also a common saying that to recite one Koranic verse during Ramadan may equate (in relation to divine rewards) the complete recitation of the text in other months. In addition, it is often pronounced that the performance of supererogatory (A. *sunnah*) rituals will be rewarded as if they were obligatory. Unsurprisingly, during Ramadan Muslims increase quantitatively and qualitatively, their participation in Islamic rituals and strengthen their adherence to perceived Islamic moral principles. This change in religious attitudes is of such magnitude during Ramadan that we may speak of an annual Islamisation of Java (and Indonesia).¹⁴

The *traweh* (J., I. *tarawih*, A. *tarāwīḥ*) prayers are not mentioned in the Koran, and it is not obligatory to perform them according to Islamic jurists. Nevertheless, mosques and prayers houses in Java are never as crowded as during the performance of these supererogatory evening prayers.

¹¹ In fact, a variety of reasons (such as pregnancy and travel) may validate the decision not to participate in the fast. See for example al-Jaziri 1995: 94ff; al-Zuhayly 1995: 208ff; and Möller (2005).

¹² Translation by Asad (1980).

¹³ These pillars are: uttering of the confession of faith (A. *shahādah*), performance of the daily prayers (A. *ṣalāh*), paying of the tithe (A. *zakāh*), fasting during Ramadan (A. *ṣawm*), and undertaking a pilgrimage to Mecca (A. *ḥajj*).

¹⁴ For a short discussion of how Indonesian TV-shows and commercials are Islamised during Ramadan, see Möller 2004.

The young and the old, men and women¹⁵ turn up in throngs when summoned to the mosque by the muezzin, and latecomers often have to settle for a place in the car park next to the mosque.¹⁶ Ramadan without *traweh*, I was repeatedly told, is just not Ramadan. (*Traweh* prayers may not be performed outside Ramadan.) It can thus be argued that these *traweh* prayers are considered close to obligatory by Javanese Muslims – the paradoxical result of which is that Javanese mosques are at their fullest when a non-obligatory ritual is to be performed.

Many people willingly spend about an hour at the mosque to follow these prayers lead by an imam. This is at a time when the day's fast has just broken, as *traweh* prayers are performed some time between the evening prayers and dawn. A majority of those performing them do so at their local mosques just after the evening prayers. Most Javanese consider it foolish to lose a great opportunity for extra *pahala* by not participating and many have also regretted the Ramadan nights when they missed *traweh*, since they 'may not live to see the next Ramadan'.

It is commonly acknowledged that the prophet Muhammad performed evening prayers (A. *qiyāmu l-layl*; the word *tarāwīḥ* was not used in the prophet's lifetime) during Ramadan. The precise nature of these prayers is a disputed topic in Java. It is reported that Muhammad initially performed his Ramadan evening prayers in the mosque with other members of the small Muslim community. But when he saw the immense emphasis fellow Muslims laid on these *tarāwīḥ* prayers, he stopped performing them in the mosque, and instead completed them in solitude at home. This was because he did not want the Muslim community to regard these prayers as obligatory as they would have been too heavy a burden for its members. Exactly how many prayer cycles (A. *rak'ah*, pl. *raka'āt*) the prophet performed is disputed, but there is a saying from one of his wives that he never performed more than eight prayer cycles during Ramadan evenings.

After Muhammad's death, when 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb became the second caliph of the community (after Abu Bakr), the *tarāwīḥ* scene changed. 'Umar was allegedly disturbed by the sight of Muslims performing the *tarāwīḥ* prayers alone, scattered in the mosque or at home. He thus arranged that the prayers were again performed as a congregation and set the number of prayer cycles at 23. (There is no recorded disagreement on the decision for that period.)

Described below are the actual performances of the *traweh* prayers in two different locations in Java: a modernist mosque in Yogyakarta, and a traditionalist prayer house in Blora, central Java.

¹⁵ It is rather unusual elsewhere in the Muslim world that women perform these prayers in the mosques together with the men. In Java, however, this is the norm.

¹⁶ Some people place their prayer rugs in the mosque in the afternoon so as to ensure a good spot for prayers in the evening.

***Traweh* in the An-Nur modernist mosque**

Modernist attitudes and practices in relation to the *traweh* prayers are fairly homogenous. The description below of my local mosque Masjid An-Nur can be considered as typical of modernist mosques in Java.

As the muezzin announces the call to prayer for the obligatory *isyā* (evening prayers performed around 7pm), people in the neighborhood begin to get ready. They are in no hurry as they know the *imam* (I., prayer leader, A. *imām*) and the muezzin will allow a longer than usual time to lapse between the *adzan* (I., call to prayer, A. *adhān*) and the actual prayer session. The muezzin or a mosque official may recite – or rather, sing – some *salawat* (I., praise of Muhammad, A. *salawāt*) to fill the time.¹⁷ At the start of Ramadan the mosque is crowded and additional straw mats are needed in the car park to provide space for all worshippers. By the middle to the end of the month the mosque is half full at best. A one-metre wide green cloth separates the mosque into two almost equal parts: one at the front and the other at the back. The front, the male domain, is generally slightly larger but the area is adjustable should circumstances require it. The back is for women. The cloth is only a symbolic barrier as it does not prevent one group from viewing the other. But it is regarded as necessary by both men and women to maintain the two spheres during *traweh* prayers. This token cloth barrier is only used during Ramadan.

As the local Muslims drop in, they generally perform two *raka'at* (I., prayer cycles) of *sholat tahiyatul masjid* (I., A. *aṣ-ṣalātu taḥiyātu l-masjid*), the non-obligatory but highly recommended prayers to be performed as one enters a mosque. This done, everyone sits down and either engages in some small talk with whoever they are next to or recite quietly parts of the Koran. This is also a time that may be used for private supplications, or declarations of thanksgiving (I. *syukur*) for being able to fast for the entire day that has just ended. When the muezzin feels that he has waited sufficiently he announces through the microphone a sort of condensed *adzan*, the *iqomah* (I., A. *iqāmah*), that the *isyā* (evening) prayers are to begin. The *isyā* prayers during Ramadan are no different from the rest of the year as they consist of four *raka'at*. Each *raka'at*, as always, consists of the recital of *Al-Fatihah* (the first chapter of the Koran), the bending of the upper part of the body (I. *rukū'*, A. *rukū'*), the complete prostration (I. *sujud*, A. *sujūd*), and a variety of more subtle practices, which can be studied in any regular *sholat* manual.¹⁸ Added to this is the *niat* (I., A. *nīyah*), the intent, which precedes the prayer. As the *salam* (I., greeting in Arabic) concludes the *isyā* prayers, the

¹⁷ In many other modernist mosques, including the large Masjid Al-Fath in Blora, there is no *salawat*, as many Javanese Muslims feel that the practice is part of traditionalist Islam.

¹⁸ See for example Rifa'i 1976, Al Sawwaf 1999 and Zuhri 1956 for a discussion of the *sholat* from an Indonesian perspective.

congregation may rest for a while before a *kultum* (short Islamic lecture) is presented.¹⁹ Some may use this time to perform two additional and individual *raka'at*.

In Masjid An-Nur the Ramadan committee ensures that such lectures are offered by invited guests each night in connection with the *traweh* prayers. The subject of these sermons is often related to fasting during Ramadan or some other aspect of Islamic worship. There was one occasion when the *kultum* was offered by a local policeman who spoke on the work of the police in eliminating narcotics in Yogyakarta. Often the *khatib* (i., deliverer of the sermon) is a local religious authority and the topic chosen is explicitly related to Islamic ritual practices or basic theology. For those who have fasted the entire day and only recently consumed a substantial meal, this *kultum* offers a welcome break. It is a breathing space in all senses of the word.²⁰ For children, this is play time. Javanese children do run around inside and outside the mosque before, during, and after the *kultum*. Many try to follow the prayers, but most are restless after a few *raka'at* and spend the rest of the time having fun with their friends. Except for Ramadan, Javanese children rarely play outside the house after *maghrib* (sunset) prayers.²¹

When the *kultum* ends the muezzin raises his voice again to say *aṣ-ṣalāta sunnata t-tarāwīḥi jāmi'atan raḥimakumullāh* (A.), which means approximately 'Let us perform the non-obligatory *traweh* prayers in congregation, in hope that God will extend His Grace on you all.' Some, but not all, reply by saying *lā ilāha illā llāh muḥammadun rasūlullāh* (A., there is no god but God, Muhammad is the Prophet of God). This is the sign that the *traweh* prayers are about to begin and the entire congregation rises and starts to murmur individually the prescribed intent for this: *uṣallī sunnata t-tarāwīḥi lilāhi ta'ālā* (A.), i.e., 'I intend to perform the non-obligatory *traweh* prayers for God, the Exalted.'²² Most Javanese can say this in Arabic, but some state theirs in Javanese. This done, the imam raises his two hands and utters *Allāhu akbar* (A., God is greater), and commences the first *raka'at* by reading aloud *Al Fatihah* and an additional Koranic chapter. The difference between these *traweh* prayers from their obligatory equivalent is that there is no break between the second and the third *raka'at* as the imam and the congregation immediately proceed to the third and the fourth prayer cycles. As the fourth *raka'at* is over and the *salam*-greeting uttered, the congregation may again rest for a short while. (The word *tarāwīḥ* is linked grammatically to *istirāḥah*, which means

¹⁹ Though rare, it happens that this *kultum* is presented after eight *raka'at* of *traweh* prayers, but before the *sholat witir*.

²⁰ Surprisingly, most Javanese mosques are poorly ventilated. I once discussed this with a Javanese architect who revealed that he had trouble concentrating on his prayers as he was distracted by thoughts on how to improve the air circulation in the mosque. When mosques are crowded as they are at Ramadan and during Friday prayer, the inadequate ventilation is a strain. A place in the car park may be quite appealing.

²¹ The liminal character of Ramadan in Java is elaborated in Mo'ller (2005). Cf. Buitelaar 1993.

²² This is a condensed intention as there are other extensive versions stating amongst other things the number of *raka'at* to be performed.

'relaxation' or 'rest.'). It is not a complete rest, however, since the congregation is expected to repeat line by line after the muezzin:

astaghfiru llāhu l-'azīm
astaghfiru llāhu l-'azīm
astaghfiru llāhu l-'azīm
allāhu lā ilāha illā llah huwa l-ḥayyu l-qayyūm
rabbānā fi d-dunyā ḥasanah
wa fi l-ākhirati ḥasanah
wa qinā 'adhāba n-nār
allāhumma ṣalli 'alā sayyidinā muḥammad

This could be translated as:

1. I ask God the Mighty for forgiveness
2. I ask God the Mighty for forgiveness
3. I ask God the Mighty for forgiveness
4. God – there is no deity save Him, the Ever Living, the Self-Subsistent Fount of all Being
5. O, our Sustainer! Grant us good in this world
6. and good in the life to come,
7. and keep us safe from suffering through the fire.
8. O, God, bless our leader, Muhammad

Lines four to seven are Koranic injunctions.²³

The break ends when the muezzin repeats the words *say aṣ-ṣalāta sunnata t-tarāwīḥi jāmi'atan raḥimakumullāh* (see above). The congregation then rises again and performs four more cycles of *traweh* prayers, following the imam. The subsequent rest follows the above-mentioned procedure and then the *traweh* prayers are over. Before dispersing the congregation, the imam performs three additional *raka'at* of *witir* (I., A. *witr*) prayers. The performance of *sholat witir* has the status of *sunnah* within Islamic law, but many *ulama* regard it as close to an obligatory ritual act (Al Sawwaf, 1999: 199). Before the muezzin declares the commencement of these prayers (A. *say aṣ-ṣalāta sunnata l-witri jāmi'atan raḥimakumullāh*), some members of the congregation leave the mosque. There are two possible explanations for this exit depending on whether they are traditionalists or modernists. The traditionalists who feel that the *traweh* prayers have yet to end since there should be 20 cycles (see below) intend to perform an additional 12 at home before concluding with the

²³ Koran 2: 255 and 2: 201 respectively. Note that the Koranic quotes are taken from Asad (1980) which explains the difference in style in this translated passage.

witir. And the modernists who agree with the imam that the Ramadan prayers should only consist of eight *raka'at* return home for more supererogatory but non-*traweh* prayers before they conclude that day's prayers with the *witir*. In Masjid An-Nur the *witir* prayers consist of one session of three *raka'at*, that is, without *salam* after two cycles. Immediately after the third *raka'at* the imam or muezzin declares in Indonesian that the time has come to state the intent (I. *niat*) for the next day's fast, and invites the congregation to do this collectively by the repeating in Arabic after him:

Nawaytu ṣawma ghadin 'an adā'i farḍi l-shahri ramadāna hādīhi l-sanati farḍān lillāhi ta'ālā
(I intend to fast tomorrow due to the religious duty of Ramadan this year, for God the Exalted.)

For children this closing session is also the culmination of the *traweh* prayers when they compete with each other in shouting their intent: *nawaytu ṣawma*, and so on. In the An-Nur mosque, the intent is uttered in Arabic only, and once done, the congregation disperses rapidly for home. (A few Muslims remain to recite the Koran, but this aspect will not be dealt with here.) Including the *isya* prayers this session would have lasted an hour.

***Traweh* in the traditionalist Ar-Rahman prayer house**

In Musholla Ar-Rahman, the traditionalist prayer house in my neighborhood in Blora, the arrangement differs from the above.²⁴ This is a very small *musholla* in a narrow lane adjacent to the house of its owner and regular imam. As it is not a mosque, no Friday sermons are delivered, and the place is generally quite calm when it is not Ramadan. There is room for no more than three rows of seven or eight worshippers. The women have been given an even smaller area to the left of the actual *musholla*, in a room that was originally part of the imam's home. The male and female sections of the *musholla* are separated by a concrete wall with a hole for a tiny window.²⁵ The *adzan* and the *iqomah* are similar to those in the modernist mosque mentioned earlier. But the *salawat*, filling the time between them, is longer and more musically adorned than the Yogyakarta *salawat*. This is due to the beautiful voice of one of the imam's adult sons, Mas Syafi, who recites and sings his *salawat* with great emotional sensitivity. His musical talent when performing *salawat* and reciting the Koran has influenced many Muslims in the neighborhood to memorise long sections of Arabic *salawat* because they enjoy his performances. Consequently, as Mas Syafi vocally enriches

²⁴ Again, one example suffices here, although references are also made to other traditionalist mosques when their practices differ from Musholla Al-Rahman.

²⁵ In Blora, the large (traditionalist) town mosque, Masjid Baiturrahman, is divided into a smaller left wing for the women and a larger right wing for the men during Ramadan. This ensures that women too may perform their prayers in the desirable first *sof* (I., line, A. *ṣaff*) in the mosque. However, some argue (with *ḥadīth* support) that the most desirable place for women in the mosque is the furthest part of their allotted area. There is thus a tendency for women performing the *traweh* prayers to choose this area first.

the Ramadan evenings just prior to the *isya* prayers, men who have already made their way to *Musholla* Ar-Rahman join in the singing.

After Mas Syafi has summoned the local Muslims to the *sholat isya*, the imam stands up and loudly pronounces the intent for the prayers. This is the first clear sign that we are in a traditionalist hamlet since modernists state the intent silently, if they state it at all. The obligatory *isya* prayers are said quickly and there are no additional *sunnah* prayers or sermon in the form of a *kultum*.²⁶ Instead, Mas Syafi in the role of Bilāl (I. Bilal, the muezzin of the prophet) gently recites an extended supplication in Arabic before raising his voice to a high pitch to recite the following lines which are answered by the congregation (I. *jama'ah*):

Bilal: *allāhumma ṣalli 'alā sayyidinā muḥammad*

(O God, bless our leader, Muhammad)

Jama'ah: *allāhumma ṣalli wa sallim 'alayh*

(O God, bless and grant him salvation)

Bilal: *allāhumma ṣalli 'alā sayyidinā wa mawlānā muḥammad*

(O God, bless our leader and master, Muhammad)

Jama'ah: *allāhumma ṣalli wa sallim 'alayh*

(O God, bless and grant him salvation)

Bilal: *allāhumma ṣalli 'alā sayyidinā wa nabiyinā wa ḥabibinā wa shafī'inā wa dhukhrinā wa mawlānā muḥammad*

(O God, bless our leader, our Prophet, our beloved, our intercessor, our saviour, and master, Muhammad)

Jama'ah: *allāhumma ṣalli wa sallim 'alayh*

(O God, bless and grant him salvation)

Bilal: *aṣ-ṣalāta sunnata t-tarāwiḥi jāmi'atan raḥimakumu llāh*

(Let us perform the non-obligatory *traweh* prayers in congregation, in hope that God will extend His Grace on you all)

Jama'ah: *lā ilāha illā llāh muḥammadun rasūlū llāh*

(There is no god but God, Muhammad is the Prophet of God)

While reciting this, the muezzin does not pause between lines for the the *jama'ah* to respond with *allāhumma ṣalli wa sallim 'alayh* and the effect is a din of reponses. This in turn drowns out the voice of the muezzin and the congregation only realises the session is over when it see the imam getting up from his seated position.²⁷

²⁶ In many other traditionalist mosques there is time for both additional *sholat sunnah* and *kultum*. These practices are thus in no way anathema to traditionalist Islam in Java.

²⁷ The situation is not usually this chaotic in traditionalist mosques. In Masjid Baiturrahman, for example, the prayer session is much like its modernist equivalent as described above. But the fast-paced response between Bilal and the *jama'ah* is common in traditionalist mosques.

As the *traweh* begins, the various Koranic chapters are recited at a rapid pace. The words seem to float into each other, and the recital itself is kept at a minimum as only the shortest chapters are recited. The various *sholat* positions are held for brief moments only ensuring that one *raka'at* will be completed quickly. Modernist critics have been known to refer to this accelerated *traweh* as *sholat ayam* (chicken prayers). Watching traditionalists perform these prayers, they say, is like looking at chickens pecking rice grains on the ground. Before long two *raka'at* have been performed and closed by the *salam* greeting. Whereas the modernists perform the *traweh* in two lots of four *raka'at*, the traditionalists utter the *salam* after every two *raka'at*. There is minimal break after the first two *raka'at* with just enough time for the muezzin to raise his voice and state: *aṣ-ṣalātu jāmi'ah* (A. let us pray congregationally). The responses vary. Some say *lā ilāha illā llāh*, some repeat the words of the muezzin, and others are silent. After another two *raka'at*, there is a slightly longer pause when the congregation, following the imam, recites three times the following:

Subhāna llāh, wa l-ḥamdu lillāh, wa lā ilāha illā llāh, wa llāhu akbar

(Glory be to God, and All Praise is due to God, and there is no god but God, and God is greater.)²⁸

Before the next two *raka'at* continues, the imam recites a supplication that is punctuated by frequent and loud *amin* (I., A. *āmīn*, Amen). The *traweh* prayers are performed in these sequels until 20 *raka'at* have been carried out. The table below shows how one sequel of four *raka'at* would proceed:

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1. Bilal: *aṣ-ṣalāta sunnata t-tarāwīḥi jāmi'atan raḥimakum u llāh* (with occasional and different answers)
 2. First *raka'at*: *Al Fatihah* (QS 1) plus additional (variable) Koranic chapter
 3. Second *raka'at*: *Al Fatihah* plus *sūratu l-ikhḷāṣ* (QS 112)
 4. Short pause. Bilal: *aṣ-ṣalātu jāmi'ah* (with occasional answers)
 5. Third *raka'at*: *Al Fatihah* plus additional (variable) Koranic chapter
 6. Fourth *raka'at*: *Al Fatihah* plus *sūratu l-ikhḷāṣ*
 7. A little longer pause: *subhāna llāh, wa l-ḥamdu lillāh, wa lā ilāha illā llāh, wa llāhu akbar* (thrice), plus supplication
-

²⁸ In other traditionalist mosques or musholla this formula may take a different form. In Masjid Baiturrahman, for example, one often hears *ashhadu an lā ilāha illā llāh, astaghfiru llāh, allāhumma inni as'aluka l-jannah, wa a'ūdhubika mina n-nār* (I bear witness that there is no god but God, I ask for forgiveness, O God, I ask for Paradise and protection from the fire.)

After five such sequels (20 *raka'at*) the muezzin announces the conclusion of this evening session with three *witir*.²⁹ Unlike modernist mosques and prayer houses, these are not performed consecutively but are divided into two parts of two and one *witir*. During the last *raka'at* the three last chapters of the Koran are recited (Koran 112, 113, and 114) in addition to *Al Fatihah*. This done, the imam recites yet another extended supplication in Arabic before he invites the congregation to recite some or all of the following phrases repeated either 3, 9, 20 or 'infinite' times:

astaghfiru llāh, li l-mu'minīn wa l-mu'mināt

(God, forgive the believing men and the believing women)

subhāna llāhhu wa biḥamdih

(Glory be to God, and to Him praise)

lā ilāha illā llāh

(There is no god but God)

wa ilāhukum ilāhun wāḥidun, lā ilāha illā huwa r-raḥmānu r-raḥīm

(And your God is the One God, and there is no god but He, the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace)

lā ilāha illā llāhu waḥdahū lā sharīkalah, lahu l-mulku wa lahu l-ḥamdu yuḥyī wa yumītu wa huwa'alā kulli shayin qadīr

(There is no god but God, the One, without any partners, to Him is the kingship and to Him is all praise, He brings life and He brings death, and He has the power over everything)

allāhumma ṣalli 'alā sayyidinā muḥammadin 'abdika wa rasūlika n-nabiyyi l-ummiyyi wa 'alā ālihi wa aṣḥābihi wa sallim

(O God, bless our leader, Muhammad, Your servant and prophet, the illiterate apostle, and grant his family and companions peace)

This *zikir* (I., A. *dhikr*, remembrance) vary in form and length each evening as the iman chooses the subject for recitation and the congregation listens and follows. The choice may be short but complete Koranic chapters or only certain verses. (The quoted lines above are just a few selected examples.) These *zikir* sessions are sometimes referred to in Java as *wirid* (A. *wird*), and the two terms are often used interchangeably. Elsewhere *wird* are usually strongly connected to specific

²⁹ In some traditionalist mosques, this is the time for pronouncing the intent for the next day's fast which would then be announced before the *witir* prayers. Note also that some traditionalists leave the mosque before the performance of the *witir* prayers in order to be able to perform more additional (but non-*traweh*) *sholat* at home before concluding the day with the *witir*. Similarly, some modernists prefer to leave the mosque after eight *raka'at*. In larger traditionalist mosques modernists may leave the congregation after eight *raka'at* have been performed which lends support to Mujani's idea that mosques in Indonesia are inclusive since two Muslim groups disagreeing on rituals still attend the same mosque (2003: 134). My impression, however, is that modernists will go to a modernist mosque and traditionalists to a traditionalist one if there is such a mosque near them.

Sufi masters, and may not be recited without the explicit permission of the relevant *shaykh* (Denny 2002) but such usage is (among 'ordinary Muslims' at least) unknown in Indonesia.

Some mosques in Java have standardised responses for repeating after the *traweh* prayers. Their congregation would be aware of them since the local Ramadan committee would have circulated a short pamphlet containing supplications, *zikir*, and intents to be learned prior to Ramadan. One such pamphlet circulating a neighbouring area in Blora during Ramadan in 2002 suggested the following *traweh* supplication (I. *do'a sholat traweh*):

Subhāna l-māliki l-qudūs

(Glory be to the Sovereign, the Most Holy)

Subhāna l-māliki l-qudūs

(Glory be to the Sovereign, the Most Holy)

Subhāna l-māliki l-qudūs

(Glory be to the Sovereign, the Most Holy)

subbūhun qudusun rabbunā wa rabbu l-malā'ikati wa r-rūh

(Most Glorious and Most Holy, Lord of the angels and the Spirit)

allāhumma innaka 'afuwun karīm, tuhibu l-'afwa fā'fu 'annī

(O God, truly You are the Most Forgiving and Most Noble, You love forgiveness, so forgive me)

allāhumma innā nas'aluka riḍāka wa l-jannata wa na'ūdhu bika min sakhatika wa nār

(O God, we ask for Your favours and Paradise, and we seek Your protection from Your discontent and from the fire).³⁰

When the imam feels that the *zikir*, *wirid*, or *doa* has reached its conclusion, he goes on to invite the congregation to state the intent for the next day's fast, first in Arabic and then in Javanese:

Niat ingsun pasa tutuko sedino sesuk anekani ferdhune wulan romadlon ing sak jerone tahun iki ferdhu kerono

*miturut dhawuhe Allah (J.).*³¹

The imam or muezzin then starts to sing another *salawat* accompanied by the congregation whose members shake hands with each other before going home. This prayer session including the *isya* prayers lasts about an hour. As in the modernist mosques, some Muslims remain in the mosque for the Koran-reading session. School children flock around the imam and the muezzin for their signatures on the Ramadan school books. These will later be scrutinised by their religious teacher; the more signatures, the higher the grade.³²

³⁰ I have also heard this supplication in modernist mosques in Java.

³¹ The meaning is identical to that listed above in connection to the modernist *traweh* prayers.

³² These small books cover a wide range of Ramadan activities that need to be signed and accounted for: fasting, obligatory *sholat*, Friday prayers, *sholat traweh*, *tadarus Al Qur'an* (reciting the Koran), internalisation of Koranic

Unity, diversity, and cultural smoothness

Having shown how *traweh* prayers during Ramadan in Java differ between traditionalists and modernists one might be tempted to consider the discord as a serious dispute. However, in the words of a Javanese friend: 'You should not exaggerate the differences between us, as despite our minor disagreements, we have much in common.' He exemplified his argument by stating that all Javanese Muslims believe in the One God and in the prophethood (I. *kerasulan*) of Muhammad, and that all agree on the major ritual duties as well as on the basic theology. We should give this perspective serious thought.

Almost all Javanese Muslims agree that the *traweh* prayers are of immense importance to practicing Muslims and that they can only be performed during the fasting month. They further agree that these prayers should be performed after the evening prayers but before dawn, and that they can be performed either individually or congregationally. Their primary disagreement is on the number of prayer cycles constituting the *traweh*. Traditionalists argue for 20 *raka'at* whereas the modernists settle for eight.

There is also a large number of differences in other forms of ritual behaviour, for example, the in-between supplications, the *salawat*, the way men and women are segregated in the mosques, and the pronouncement of the intention for the prayers. These differences have led observers to depict the relationship between modernists and traditionalists as one steeped in bitterness, criticism, and constant feuds. It is possible that such observations were valid for the period of their research. However, my own observations in the late 1990s and early 2000s do not confirm these views. Instead, I have observed how smoothly Javanese Muslims handle their differences, and how easily such differences are overcome. Differences of opinion are common, but the way they are handled pre-empt large-scale conflicts in society.

This is because the Javanese (Muslims and non-Muslims) lay great stress on *rukun* (J., harmony) and *slamet* (J., tranquility). Public crying and open conflicts are thus rare incidents in Java and should there be a dispute it is likely that the disagreement is not referred to directly. Woodward has aptly written that '[i]n Java, what is not said, or what is said only by implication, is often at least as important as what is said directly' (1993: 567).

The temptation of conflicts and the role of the writer

I could have chosen to portray Islam in Java as riddled with 'fierce antagonism' between modernists and traditionalists (Möller 2005). I could use the example of a conflict between a modernist student

chapters, internalisation of supplications, dawn lectures, dusk lectures, the payment of *zakatulfetri*, *sholat id*, and *silaturrahmi*. See for example Hariyoto & Budiyo n.d. Children are thus quite busy during Ramadan.

and a traditionalist religious teacher in Blora on the *traweh* prayers. I could discuss the acrimonious dispute and accusations of blasphemy between these two Javanese Muslims leading to the teacher publicly responding to his critic at a special Friday sermon. But I consider this episode as the exception to the rule.

Such a choice leads to discussions on the role of the writer (read: scholar). It seems that we (writers, readers, scholars and non-scholars) prefer discord to concord. A book on Palestinian–Israeli conflicts is likely to attract more readers than one on Palestinian–Israeli agreements. This is of course partly due to the scholar’s desire to understand problems. But the scholar has a moral obligation to give a rounded picture and set information in context. When applied to the *traweh* issue in Java, we could say that it is our duty to draw attention to certain conflicts that have occurred (and still occur) in relation to these prayers. It would be dangerous, however, if we allow these quarrels to characterise the entire Islamic landscape in Java, that is, if we ‘forget’ to write about all those instances when modernists and traditionalists actually have no problem at all with ritual diversity. It is my impression that contemporary Javanese Muslims generally accept that their community is coloured but not plagued by minor ritual differences between various Muslim groups, and this is especially true for younger and/or well-educated Muslims in Java. Among them, there is a tendency to regard such diversity as *rahmat*, as a blessing.

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