

REVISITING THE JAVANESE MUSLIM

SLAMETAN

Islam, Local Tradition, Honor and Symbolic Communication

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Abstract

Slametan, referring to a broad communal prayer, feast, and food-offering to commemorate or celebrate critical life cycles, such as birth, marriage, and death, constitutes an essential ritual for Javanese Muslims. Despite growing Islamization, in which this ritual is often renamed as tablilan, elements of local beliefs in it remain. This study aims to re-examine the Javanese Muslim death ritual tradition and offers a new interpretation. It explores the elements of local belief and its convergence with the universal Islamic teaching and demonstrates that the Javanese norms fit the fundamental Islamic doctrines, rendering this ritual easily acceptable by the Javanese. This study concurs with the previous studies stating that this ritual paves tolerance and social integration and unites Islam and local tradition. However, this study specifically examines the meanings of the death ritual and argues that the idea of honoring predecessors and maintaining an uninterrupted symbolic communication between the alive, namely descendants, and the dead such as late parents and forebears, constitute common Javanese and Islamic values.

[Slametan merupakan salah satu ritus penting bagi muslim Jawa yang berupa doa dan makan bersama serta berbagi makanan untuk memperingati atau merayakan peralihan daur hidup seperti kelahiran, pernikahan dan kematian. Meskipun Islamisasi terus berlanjut, ritus yang sering disebut juga dengan tablilan ini masih menyisakan unsur-unsur kepercayaan lokal.

Dalam artikel ini akan ditinjau kembali ritus tradisi kematian muslim Jawa dan menawarkan sebuah interpretasi baru. Tulisan ini juga mengeksplorasi unsur-unsur lokal yang menemukan titik temu dengan ajaran nilai universal dalam Islam serta menunjukkan kesepahaman norma Jawa dengan doktrin dasar Islam sehingga ritus ini mudah diterima oleh orang Jawa. Tulisan ini juga sependapat dengan kajian-kajian sebelumnya yang menyatakan bahwa ritus ini menguatkan pondasi toleransi, integrasi sosial dan penyatuan Islam dengan tradisi lokal. Meskipun demikian tulisan ini fokus pada pemaknaan ritus kematian dan berpendapat bahwa penghormatan pada leluhur serta menjaga komunikasi simbolik antara yang meninggal dan yang hidup, terutama yang ditinggalkan merupakan hal yang umum dalam nilai-nilai Kejawaan dan Keislaman.]

Keyword: Javanese, *slametan*, *tablilan*, symbolic communication, honor

A. Introduction

When Islam was introduced to Java, some belief systems had already existed such as animism, Buddhism and Hinduism. Instead of total rejection, Muslim preachers sought to adopt some aspects of these faiths and integrate them into Islam, yielding vernacular Islamicate tradition. The best example of this is *slametan*, i.e. communal religious rituals with various offerings of food served to participants and, to some extent, and metaphorically, to the dead and ancestors' spirit, particularly amongst the more traditionally-Javanese values oriented Muslim society. For the more Islamically-oriented Javanese, this ritual is often renamed as *tablilan*, an Arabic loan word of *ha-lla-la*, where ritual participants pronounce *la ilaha illa Allah* (there is no God but Allah). It thus represents a complex interplay between religion, culture and local beliefs. This ritual aims to seek blessing and gain a state of well-being for transitional life cycles, such as birth, marriage and death.

Some argue that *slametan* represents the core of Javanese religious ritual, which is influenced by a set of intertwined belief of animism, Hinduism and Javanese mysticism.¹ Others maintain that this ritual

¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Andrew Beatty, *Varieties of Javanese Religion: An Anthropological Account* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Andrew Beatty, "Adam and Eve and Vishnu:

contains a fundamental element of the Islamic doctrine as it is manifested in the recitation of specific Arabic passages derived mainly from the Qur'an.² Using textual and contextual analyses, one study demonstrates that this ritual is syncretistic containing Hindu-Javanese norms as well as Islamic doctrines.³ One recent study on the *slametan* denied the argument of the syncretism regarding this ritual as previous studies demonstrated. Instead, its investigation on Javanese Islam reveals that "this religion and the role of *slametan* in it were conceived within a Christian theological framework".⁴ All these studies tend to perceive *slametan* as a broad term for ritual practices covering almost the whole ranges of Javanese Muslim communal religious ritual feast. *Slametan*, however, in fact, varies. Each *slametan* has a specific purpose, performance, timing, and ornament indicating distinctiveness, richness and depth-ness of each rite. For example, in Surabaya, East Java, the Javanese Muslims hold a specific *slametan* to mark the beginning of planting paddy.⁵ In Yogyakarta, the people perform a ritual of "full-night awake" (*malam tirakatan*) to commemorate the nation's Independence Day.⁶ Other studies have explored this tradition beyond Java conducted by both Javanese diaspora

Syncretism in the Javanese Slametan", *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1996), pp. 271–88.

² Mark R. Woodward, "The "Slametan": Textual Knowledge and Ritual Performance in Central Javanese Islam", *History of Religions*, vol. 28, no. 1 (1988), pp. 54–89; Mark R. Woodward, *Islam in Java: Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1989); Nur Ahmad, "Response to Javanese Tradition in Kiai Shaleh Darat's Writings", *Teosofia: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Mysticism*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2017), pp. 77–86.

³ Masdar Hilmy, "Islam and Javanese Acculturation: Textual and Contextual Analysis of the Slametan Ritual", Master Thesis (Montreal: McGill University, 1998).

⁴ See Jochem van den Boogert, "The Role of Slametan in the Discourse on Javanese Islam", *Indonesia and the Malay World*, vol. 45, no. 133 (2017), pp. 352–72; Jochem van den Boogert, "Rethinking Javanese Islam. Towards new descriptions of Javanese traditions", Ph.D. Dissertation (Leiden: Leiden University, 2015).

⁵ Sri Handayani, "Agriculture and Ritual: Pola Komunikasi Ritual Slametan Musim Tanam Padi di Ngemplak, Sambikerep, Surabaya", *J-IKA*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2018), pp. 40–50.

⁶ Wildan Imaduddin Muhammad, "Reinforce Nationality Through Religious Local Tradition (Case Study of Malam Tirakatan in Yogyakarta)", *IBDA: Jurnal Kajian Islam dan Budaya*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2016), pp. 157–72.

and local people.⁷ *Slametan* thus marks a nation's extensive communal feast ritual. Not surprisingly, it has become a subject of intense studies.

There is a bunch of study on *slametan*. Each study has a particular approach and purpose, showing a diverse theoretical and methodological sophistication. Several ethnographic studies on *slametan* argue that this ritual reflects the convergence and acculturation of Islam and local tradition⁸ while others point this ritual to the Javanese identity and ideality of norms and ritual.⁹ Other studies show a contrasting image of *slametan*; on the one hand, it has played an important role in fostering social integration and tolerance¹⁰ and has induced potential conflicts on the other hand, especially in the region where traditionalist and modernist

⁷ Sri Wulandari, "Makna Simbolik dalam Tahlilan Masyarakat Gorontalo di Desa Panggulo", *Bahasa dan Sastra*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2019), pp. 81–90; Johansyah, "Islam dan Kearifan Lokal: Tradisi Nyeratus di Masyarakat Melayu Riau", *Nusantara Journal for Southeast Asian Islamic Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2019), pp. 110–6.

⁸ Ryko Adiansyah, "Persimpangan antara Agama dan Budaya: Proses Akulturasi Islam dengan Slametan dalam Budaya Jawa", *Jurnal Intelektualita: Keislaman, Sosial dan Sains*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2017), pp. 295–310; Qurrotul Ainiyah and Ayu Mira Mardani, "Akulturasi Islam dan Budaya Lokal: Studi Kasus Tradisi Sedekah Bumi di Desa Karang Ploso Kecamatan Plandaan Kabupaten Jombang", *Qolamuna: Jurnal Studi Islam*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2019), pp. 231–48; Ahmad Mas'ari and Syamsuatir Syamsuatir, "Tradisi Tahlilan: Potret Akulturasi Agama dan Budaya Khas Islam Nusantara", *Kontekstualita*, vol. 32, no. 01 (2018); Andi Warisno and Z.A. Tabrani, "The Local Wisdom and Purpose of Tahlilan Tradition", *Advanced Science Letters*, vol. 24, no. 10 (2018), pp. 7082–6.

⁹ Ahmad Hakam, "Communal Feast Slametan: Belief System, Ritual and the Ideal of Javanese Society", *Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2017), pp. 97–110; Faqihul Muqaddam and Virgin Suciyantri Maghfiroh, "Syncretism of Slametan Tradition as a Pillar of Islam Nusantara", *Karsa Journal of Social and Islamic Culture*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2019), pp. 75–93, and Debi Setiawati, "Slametan dalam Spiritualitas Orang Jawa masa Lampau dan Sekarang", *Jurnal Pendidikan Sejarah dan Sosiologi*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2019), pp. 78–88.

¹⁰ Rahmi Febriani, Caesarilla Wahyu P, and Mareta Sari Manda, "Slametan Tengger sebagai Mekanisme dalam Menjaga Tradisi dan Membangun Integrasi", *Industrial Research Workshop and National Seminar*, vol. 9 (Bandung: Politeknik Negeri Bandung, 2018); Najmu Tsaqib Akhda, "Tolerance as the Essential Key for Javanese Society in Preserving the Traditional Cultures", *Dinika: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2017), p. 199; Zaky Mubarak, "Tahlilan dan Solidaritas di Ajibarang Wetan", *E-Societas*, vol. 6, no. 4 (2017), pp. 1–12.

Muslims encounter in one village or community.¹¹ An ethnographic-based study from Malang, East Java, argues that Islam has increasingly reshaped the ritual,¹² and in a more urban area of Cirebon, a coastal town of West Java, *slametan* has undergone tremendous change without necessarily losing the ritual's central purpose as a means of seeking blessing and fortune.¹³ In a recent study, furthermore, *slametan* has been understood as the representation of the hybrid identity of Javanese Islam.¹⁴ My present study has for sure benefitted from these studies; it uses vibrant information and data regarding *slametan* in those studies to enrich my data while asking a slightly nuanced question. It specifically examines the death *slametan* tradition and asks about the core of the Islamic and Javanese values lying deep beneath the *slametan*.

This study argues that this ritual is the most sacred and enduring tradition carried out repetitively to recall the deceased. Although this ritual constitutes a controversial issue for modernist and puritan Muslims because they perceive it superstition and innovation unsanctioned by the authoritative Islamic scriptural texts or by the Prophetic tradition, Javanese traditionalist (*santri*) and nominalist Muslims (*abangan*) perform this ritual,¹⁵

¹¹ Akhmad Yusuf Khoiruddin, “Konflik antar Pemuka Agama tentang Tradisi Tahlilan: Studi kasus di Kampung Blunyah Gede Yogyakarta”, Master Thesis (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University, 2002); Ana Riskasari, “Pengaruh Persepsi Tradisi Tahlilan di Kalangan Masyarakat Muhammadiyah terhadap Relasi Sosial di Desa Gulurejo Lendah Kulon Progo Yogyakarta”, *Panangkaran: Jurnal Penelitian Agama dan Masyarakat*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2019), pp. 189–206; Sayidah Aslamah, “Tahlilan Muhammadiyah: Analisis Konflik Sosial Masyarakat Kotagede Yogyakarta”, *Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2017), pp. 175–92.

¹² Edlin Dahniar, “Batara Kala Masa Kini: Transformasi Slametan Ruwatan pada Masyarakat Jawa di Malang Selatan”, *Studi Budaya Nusantara*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2018), pp. 99–109.

¹³ Busro Busro and Husnul Qodim, “Perubahan Budaya dalam Ritual Slametan Kelahiran di Cirebon, Indonesia”, *Jurnal Studi Agama dan Masyarakat*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2018), pp. 127–47.

¹⁴ Masdar Hilmy, “Towards a Religiously Hybrid Identity? The Changing Face of Javanese Islam”, *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2018), pp. 45–68.

¹⁵ Beatty, *Varieties of Javanese Religion*; Eldar Braten, “To Colour, Not Oppose: Spreading Islam in Rural Java”, in *Muslim Diversity: Local Islam in Global Contexts*, ed. by Leif Manger (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 165.

including those living in diaspora.¹⁶ A recent study shows that modernist Muslims in Yogyakarta also perform the *slametan*.¹⁷ Furthermore, the fact that the late President Suharto, who himself was an aristocratic Javanese and a member of Muhammadiyah, the most significant modernist Islamic organization in Indonesia, held the *slametan* when his wife passed away suggests the acceptance of this ritual by Javanese-aristocratic-modernist Muslims. A strict dichotomy of traditionalist-modernist category in respect to *slametan* therefore collapses. What can be said is that the *slametan* unravels the eminent of this ritual amongst Javanese Muslims.

This study thus aims to re-examine the death *slametan* ritual, looking at its meanings for the Javanese and Islamic values and their convergence, and offers a new interpretation. Based on available sources and literature, this study asks what constitutes a fundamental idea of Javanese value and Islamic teaching that converges in the *slametan*? Why do Javanese Muslims, who in many ways have different religious and cultural orientations, attempt to preserve this ritual tradition? Building on Tambiah's theory of ritual as a medium of communication,¹⁸ this study contends that the death *slametan* ritual expresses honor to late parents and forebears and serves a means of symbolic communication between the alive and the dead. In Java, death is not understood as the final phase of human story but rather a transition into another journey, and thus prayer, honor and communication, albeit symbolically to the deceased must not end. The death *slametan* ritual and the sequential mortuary rites associated with it, such as visiting graveyard, embody a tangible emblem of such respect to the deceased parents and ancestors and disclose allegoric conversation beyond the worldly bond.

The first part of this article discusses the history and category of Javanese Islam. It shows that despite critiques, the category of *santri* and *abangan* is still relevant to understand the rise of the formation

¹⁶ Moh Khusen, "Contending Identity In The Islamic Ritual: the Slametan among Surinamese Javanese Muslims in The Netherlands", *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 43, no. 2 (2005), pp. 283–308.

¹⁷ Sangkot Sirait, "Religious Attitudes of Theological Tradisionalist in the Modern Muslim Community: Study on Tahlilan in Kotagede", *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2016), pp. 237–60.

¹⁸ See Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Culture, Thought, and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

of Javanese Islamic religious identity although *abangan* is categorically now less used due to the drastic stream of Islamization that reshapes the category.¹⁹ The next section explores general various Islamic rituals and analyzes their differences and the ways in which the death *slametan* ritual, as one major variant of the Javanese rituals, undergoes discernible changes overtimes. The last part offers an analytically critical assessment to the elements of death ritual and elucidates their meaning as honour and symbolic communication, which both reflect not only Javanese but also Islamic values simultaneously.

B. Javanese Islam: History and Category

In his seminal book, *The Religion of Java*, Geertz introduces three variants of Javanese religion: *abangan*, *priyayi* and *santri*, which spark harsh critics. The critics chiefly maintain that *priyayi* represents a social class rather than a religious category. There can be *priyayi abangan* and *priyayi santri*.²⁰ What makes *priyayi* different from the two other categories lies in social status and class. The term *priyayi* initially refers to indigenous Javanese people who worked in the Dutch administration during the colonial time. They came from feudal and aristocrat families and thus assumed a prestigious social position.²¹ After the colonial period, they entered the government offices and bureaucracy or worked as professionals or other white-collar jobs. Today, with the spirit of openness, democracy

¹⁹ According to Burhani, however, the rise of the *santri* day, inaugurated recently by President Joko Widodo, connotes the relevance of trichotomy of *abangan*, *santri* and *priyayi* as the standard category of Indonesian society. See Ahmad Najib Burhani, “Geertz’s Trichotomy of Abangan, Santri, and Priyayi: Controversy and Continuity”, *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2017), pp. 329–50. For a more detail comparative perspective, see M.C. Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the present* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012).

²⁰ This thesis is proposed by several Indonesian scholars, such as Harsja W. Bahktiar, Zamakhsari Dhofier, and Zaini Muhtarom. See Hilmy, “Islam and Javanese Acculturation”, p. 59. Western scholars such as Woodward and Hefner also criticized Geertz’s approach to Islam in Java. While Woodward inspired by Marshal Hodgson critique accused Geertz of being ignorant to the textual tradition in studying slametan ritual, Hefner attempted to put Islam as a centre of analysis to show a significant rule of Islam, a point that is far less visible in Geertz’s work.

²¹ Howard M. Federspiel, *A Dictionary of Indonesian Islam* (Ohio: Ohio University, 1995), p. 207.

and equality, this Javanese social class is not as important as it used to be. The middle class in contemporary Indonesian society is not merely based on genealogy, but, more importantly, also on administrative access, education and wealth that open to public competition. *Abangan* generally points to the least Islamically-oriented but preserves Javanese traditions and values strictly.²² *Santri* refers to Javanese Muslims who have a strong commitment to observe Islam,²³ such as praying five times a day, fasting in Ramadan, paying spiritual alms (*zakat*) and performing pilgrimage to Mecca.

Not until the middle of the nineteenth century was the term *abangan* employed. The term *abangan* (literally means “reddish”) was commonly used to depict Javanese people who did not practice Islam thoroughly. In contrast, *putihan* (literally means “whitish”) represented practising Javanese Muslims.²⁴ Ricklefs, who rested his data on the Dutch missionaries’ reports in Java, argues that the period of the 1850s recorded the initial use of the *abangan* term to mark the emergence of a distinctive social category of Javanese religiosity in such areas as Semarang, in Central Java, and Kediri, Jombang, and Malang, in East Java. He cited two reports from a Dutch missionary Hoezoo from Semarang and Harthoorn from Jombang, who acknowledged the use of the term *abangan* when they were on duty in these regions. According to the report, the polarization of Javanese religiosity emerged in 1855 in two different groups, between those who observed Islam in a more strict way and those who did not; the first was called *tiang poetian/bangsa putihan*, while the second was termed as *tiang abangan/bangsa abangan*.²⁵ Similarly, Ganswijk reported from Kediri in the same year about this polarization, stating “whoever

²² *Ibid.*; Niels Mulder, “Abangan Javanese Religious: Thought and Practice”, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, vol. 139, no. 2 (1983), pp. 260–7; Clara Brakel-Papenhuijzen, *Islamic Syncretism in Indonesia: From Historical Written Sources to Contemporary Ritual Practice in Java* (Jerusalem: The Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace, The Hebrew University, 1995); Julia Day Howell, “Kebatinan and the Kejawen Traditions”, *Religion and Ritual*, ed. by James J. Fox (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1998), pp. 62–3.

²³ Federspiel, *A Dictionary of Indonesian Islam*, p. 232.

²⁴ M.C. Ricklefs, *Polarizing Javanese Society: Islamic, and other Visions, c. 1830-1930* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2007), p. 84.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

among ordinary Javanese is, for whatever reason, attracted to religion, then takes himself to a school where an aged Javanese teaches reading, praying, singing, etc. in Arabic".²⁶

Similarly, when Geertz introduced three variants of the Javanese religion in the middle of the twentieth century, this does not mean that those variants were something new when he found them in the field. The term *abangan* itself, its essence and practices, had existed before such inventions by Western missionaries and scholars.²⁷ The division of Javanese religiosity results from a long historical process of Islamization of Java by the nine saints (*walisongo*) upon the downfall of the last Hindu Javanese Majapahit Kingdom in the second decade of the fifteenth century. Of these saints, Sunan Kalijaga is believed to have integrated Islam into a local tradition. One salient impact of this approach things can be seen from the Javanese court literature in the early eighteenth up to nineteenth centuries, which promote the acculturation of Islam, especially Sufism, with Javanese mysticism.

In the subsequent development, the term *poetiban* is replaced with *santri* to attribute to Muslim pupils who learn Islam at traditional Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, many *kyais* (Javanese Muslim scholars) established numerous *pesantrens* in several areas in Java. *Santri* comes to traditional Islamic schools mainly to learn to read the Qur'an and study other Islamic subjects such as Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), Islamic law (*fiqh*), Arabic grammar (*nahwu*), *ushul al-din* (theology) and *tasawwuf* (mysticism). Another vital landmark displaying the significance of *santri*'s influence on Java was the growing number of Islamic schools at this period by the end of the nineteenth century. At the end of the 1880s, for example, there were 10,830 Islamic schools with 272,427 total students in Java and Madura.²⁸ This era also witnessed the increasing number of Muslims who performed the hajj to Mecca.²⁹

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

²⁷ The same question applies to the Hindu context in India. Did it exist before the colonial time, or was it invented, described and thus defined during the British occupation? See Brian K. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?: Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-70.

Islam had been institutionalized both theologically and socially, especially in the coastal regions of north Java since these areas made direct contact with Muslim preachers coming from the Middle East and South Asia.

However, this development does not lead to a complete Islamization that removes prevalent belief systems, especially in remote inland areas. While coastal Javanese towns were almost purely Islamicised, marked by the rising of *santri* enclaves, interior regions remained strongly influenced by old beliefs, mysticism and traditions during the Islamic Javanese Mataram Court in Central Java. Sultan Agung, who ruled this kingdom from 1613 to 1646, was believed to be the first Javanese ruler to blend Islam with Javanese beliefs and cultures when he introduced the Islamic moon-calendar while maintaining the Hindu solar calendar (*shaka-era*).³⁰ Another proof of syncretism is concerned with the spirit cult to the queen spirit of the Southern Ocean, *Nyi Roro Kidul*, who was also believed to have helped the Sultan of Yogyakarta establish the court and later became his virtual wife and the wife of all his descendants who would rule the court.³¹ Moreover, from this court, several pieces of literature regarding Islam and Javanese mysticism in different formats emerged, such as *suluk*, *primbon* and *serat*.³² *Serat Cabolek*, written by Yasadipura I (1729-1803), and *Serat Wirid*, written by the Surakarta court poet Ranggawarsita (1802-1873), best represents the authors' intention to integrate and combine Sufism with traditional Javanese mysticism.³³ Likewise, *Serat Centini*, written during the reign of Pakubuwana V of Surakarta (1820-1823), displays the *sufi* character and its integration with the mysticism of Java.³⁴ Another work called *Serat Wedhatama*, devoted as a guide to young noblemen and composed during the Surakarta Prince

³⁰ Brakel-Papenhuijzen, *Islamic Syncretism in Indonesia*, p. 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Suluk* means mystical wayfarers connoting adepts in mysticism searching for the means to God. It is a work describing the ways a person approaches God. *Primbon* is literature books published by early religious scholars on Java for teaching Islamic matters. Meanwhile, *serat* simply means books or compilations. See Federspiel, *A Dictionary of Indonesian Islam*, p. 246; *ibid.*, p. 207; *ibid.*, p. 237.

³³ Anton Geels, *Subud and the Javanese Mystical Tradition* (Richmond, Surrey: Routledge, 1996), pp. 46–54.

³⁴ Judith Becker, *Gamelan Stories: Tantrism Islam and Aesthetics in Central Java* (Tempe, Ariz.: Arizona State University Press, 1993), p. 100.

Mangkunegara IV ruling from 1853 to 1881, even obviously demonstrates a strong syncretistic tendency. It appeals to the readers in Java to embrace Islam, but only nominally for they are merely Javanese. A passage from this book that is often cited to emphasize the syncretistic nature of Islam in Java states:

Lamun sira paksa nulad, tuladbaning Kanjeng Nabi,

O ngger kadoban panjangkah, wateke tan betah kaki

Rehne ta sira Jawi, sathithik bae nus cukup

Aywa guru aleman, nelad kas ngeblengi pekih

Lamun pengkah pangangkah yekti karahmat

“If you would try to follow the example of the Prophet,

Then, o young men, you want too much, usually, you will not feel at ease

As you are indeed Javanese, be satisfied with just a little

Do not strive for people’s praise

Imitating exactly the ways of Islamic scholars

You will definitely receive God’s mercy

If your intention is firm.”³⁵

This text reveals that to the Javanese having an inner good intention to observe Islam would be sufficient, at least in the author’s eyes. This text also conveys a clear message that being a Muslim for Javanese does not necessarily mean to leave behind all Javanese old beliefs, traditions and customs. Since this view was clearly expressed in one of the court literature, it suggests a strong indication of a model of religiosity among Javanese that was prevalent at the time in the court and society in general. From these sources, it is evident that the integration of Islam under the significant influence of Sufism with Javanese mysticism took place in many ways and was recorded through the court documents. This explanation demonstrates that, in addition to the report from the Dutch missionaries regarding the sharp religious division among Javanese

³⁵ Brakel-Papenhuijzen, *Islamic Syncretism in Indonesia*, p. 8.

Muslims in Central and East Java in the middle of the nineteenth century, a similar polarization was also found in the Javanese court in an earlier time. Although the text did not apply the term *santri* and *abangan*, its main idea accurately represents such a polarization. These proofs disclose that syncretism and the different essential construction of self-religiosity and identity among Javanese have emerged since the Mataram Kingdom.

Another area where such syncretism occurs is ritual. The accommodative approach of Islamization by the Muslim saints (*wali*) contributed to ritual practice where elements of local tradition are adjusted to Islam.

C. Javanese Islamicate *Slametan* Tradition

In Java, there are generally three kinds of *slametan*: individual, public and court.³⁶ The distinction can also be made in terms of ornaments and food offerings. Individual rituals include *slametan* for such events as birthday, circumcision, marriage and death. In the individual *slametan* ritual, the host invites relatives, close neighbours, work colleagues and other acquaintances. The host or its representative starts opening the ritual by first of all, expressing his/her gratitude for guests' attendance. The second speech confirms the intention (*bajat*) for which the *slametan* is performed, such as for pregnancy (*mitoni*) and childbirth (*babaran*), circumcision (*sunatan*), marriage (*mantenan*), and death (*kenduren* or *tablilan*). Other purposes for this ritual may include expelling wicked spirits and avoiding bad luck (*ruwatan murwakala*),³⁷ invoking success in exams, or hoping for safety when beginning to occupy a new house or any other broader intentions that the host may possess.³⁸

Therefore, *slametan* constitutes an underlying spirituality for the Javanese Muslim ritual feasts. Almost no life cycle or pivotal event in life passes without this ritual. According to the Javanese cosmological view, human life is a manifestation of "The One" and the cosmic and the social

³⁶ Suryo S. Negoro, *Javanese Traditional and Ritual Ceremonies* (Surakarta: Buana Raya, 2001), pp. 1–2.

³⁷ For detail and excellent analysis on this specific ritual see Stephen Cavana Headley, *From Cosmogony to Exorcism in a Javanese Genesis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³⁸ Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, pp. 11–5.

order is one. Everything has been predestined in order by cosmic law.³⁹ Consequently, every change of life cycle should be passed in a smooth, safe way, so that it will not disrupt the order. The *slametan* thus provides a symbolic medium through which the order is hoped to work correctly, and any transformation within it will not cause trouble in one's life.

In recent *slametan* practices, the *abangan-santri* polarization in certain instances appears to be less significant. *Santri* and *abangan* might sit together in a *slametan* ritual and at the same time chant exactly an equivalent prayer without creating a hindrance to each other. They join it to show their respect to the host even though they may interpret the ritual differently. The *slametan* thus becomes an ambiguous ritual reflecting a complex phenomenon.⁴⁰ It is no longer merely an exclusive category belonging to either group. Some may join *slametan* because they believe it to be an essential religious ritual to maintain the cosmological order. Others simply come to show their social relationship and appreciation to a neighbour's invitation. Still, other participants perhaps conceive it as a sort of rewarding prayer since the name of God is always shouted. In short, *slametan* now constitutes interwoven socio-religious praxis within a sophisticated social setting. Unlike individual *slametan* that has undergone considerable changes, the public ritual of village purification (*bersih desa*) is only performed by the members of a village.⁴¹

Meanwhile, court rituals are performed to commemorate significant events such as *Gerebeg Mulud* (the Prophet's birthday), *Gerebeg Sawal*, after Ramadan, and *Gerebeg Besar* on the tenth of the *Dzul Hijja* month of Islamic calendar or in *Besar* of the Javanese month, coinciding with the peak of the hajj ritual.⁴² Several mountain-like foods (*gunungan*) are brought to the grand mosque and distributed to the crowd waiting there. The *gunungan gerebeg* is offered by the sultan who invokes to God for the safety and welfare for the court, the state and society. The foods symbolize blessings (*berkah*), and therefore people are willing to wait until the procession is over and finally grab the food to get a blessing. These

³⁹ Niels Mulder, "Abangan Javanese Religious: Thought and Practice", *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, vol. 139, no. 2 (1983), pp. 260–7.

⁴⁰ Beatty, "Adam and Eve and Vishnu", pp. 271–2.

⁴¹ Negoro, *Javanese Traditional and Ritual Ceremonies*, pp. 55–70.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 80.

ritual traditions have been conducted since the court was established. In addition to these, the court also regularly performs other ritual processions in which Islamic prayers are almost always chanted. For example, the procession of *Kanjeng Kyai Tunggul Wulung*, a sacred dark banner with Arabic inscriptions in it, is only occasionally held in such conditions as the national calamity of severe epidemics.⁴³

D. The Death *Slametan* Ritual: Syncretism, Symbolic Communication and Honor

Death ritual represents a vernacular Javanese Muslim religious ritual aimed at invoking God for the benefits of the spirit of the dead and restoring symbolic communication between the living and the dead within the framework of honour and respect. The critical elements of this ritual contain both Islamic teachings and Javanese tradition. The death *slametan* ritual in this context thus plays a decisive role in paying such respect and establishing uninterrupted metaphorical communication.

A preliminary death ritual starts immediately after the news of one's death is announced. The family members gather in the house receiving condolences from relatives, neighbours, friends and guests. After the corpse has been bathed and covered with white muslin, it is then put in the main room of the house. An individual person responsible for the handling of Islamic religious procession of a corpse (*modin*) or his substitute leads the reading of the passages from the Qur'an around the corpse. Other Arabic chanting is also sometimes heard from the house. After nearly all the family members are complete and significant numbers of mourners are present, a congregational ritual prayer for the corpse (*shalat janazah*) is performed, either at home or in mosques. The next phase is a burial procession gathered by mourners. The number of masses who participate in the burial procession can be more significant, depending on how many colleagues or acquaintances the deceased recognized or how popular he/she was in the community or society.

Despite apparent Islamic prayer as the manifestation of worship, the *slametan* remains a syncretistic ritual tradition for some reasons. The

⁴³ R. Soedjana Tirtakoesoema, "The Procession with Kanjeng Kyai Tunggul Wulung at Yogyakarta", *The Kraton: Selected Essays on Javanese Courts*, ed. by Stuart Robson, trans. by Rosemary Robson-McKillop (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2003), pp. 91–106.

substance of it is no doubt worship (*ibadah*) to God because participants chant and shout God's name. To them, Islamic teachings consisting of *doa* (prayer) and *sadaqa* (almsgiving) by distributing the foods to the guests constitute the essence of this ritual.⁴⁴ In every *slametan* ritual, at least a simple *doa* derived from the Qur'an will always be chanted. This benefits both the chanters and the ancestors and the deceased to whom the *doa* is devoted.⁴⁵ However, syncretism can mostly be flagrant in regard to the time and date of the ritual strictly held in consecutive days. The time and date pattern appear to be alien to Islam and should therefore have been borrowed from other rituals through the process of acculturation with local tradition.⁴⁶ Non-Islamic elements thus relate to the exterior aspect of the ritual or the container, such as date and time, but not the interior or substance.⁴⁷

The claim to the syncretism of this ritual thus holds true since there is no sanction from the Islamic texts as to how and when one should conduct the rite. The argument for preserving the date for the *slametan* because it is neither forbidden nor allowed according to *shari'a*,⁴⁸ thus leaving it optional. The dating system of this ritual is, therefore, a part of historical creation resulting from the encounter of Islam with local cultures whose outcomes of acculturation are subject to eclectic interpretation. It is said that the inventor of the *slametan* ritual, including Javanese shadow puppets (*wayang*) and the state ceremonies of the

⁴⁴ This is Woodward's central argument in his 'The Slametan'.

⁴⁵ Beatty, *Varieties of Javanese Religion*, p. 121.

⁴⁶ In Lombok, the most celebrated event in this respect is *nyiwak*, the *slametan* at the ninth night of the day of the death. Meanwhile, Sumbawa Muslims usually only hold this once time on the third night.

⁴⁷ In Gayo society, the consummation of the death ritual called *kenduri* takes its peaks from the first up to the seventh day after the date. The ritual performers believe, during those days, the spirits of the deceased is still wandering around and will return to the grave after the days. See John R. Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 259–62. This perhaps similar to the Javanese case since *kenduri* is with a small variation another form of *tahlilan* in the Gayo context. However, since I do not base my study on ethnography research, I leave this issue undiscussed.

⁴⁸ For a good discussion in the issue of *shirk* in Javanese Islam, see Woodward, *Islam in Java*, chap. 7.

Javanese Muslim court, was Sunan Kalijaga.⁴⁹ According to *Babad Tanah Jawi*, the oldest Javanese manuscript, two *walis* played an essential role in establishing the spiritual foundation, the rise to power and the defence of the Islamic Kingdoms in Java after the downfall of the Hindu Javanese Majapahit Kingdom. They were Sunan Kudus for the Demak Kingdom in the northern coastal region of Central Java and Sunan Kalijaga for the Mataram Kingdom in the southern interior of central Java. Sunan Kalijaga also assumed a pivotal role in transforming the food-offering Hindu ritual into *slametan* in which the essence of Islamic doctrine was inserted. One source mentions that:

“The kings of Majapahit [the last Hindu-Javanese Kingdom] used to have a ritual at which offerings of food were presented to the people. At the time of Demak [one of the first Islamic states], this practice was discontinued, and as a result, crops were poor, and many people went hungry. The Sultan of Demak asked Sunan Kalijaga [one of the *walis*] what he should do about this. Sunan Kalijaga replied that even though he was a Muslim, he had a duty to provide for the well being of the people and to teach them, Islam. He then instructed the Sultan on how to perform the *slametan* in ways which did not violate the tradition of the Prophet and told him to teach it to his subjects.”⁵⁰

As for the more Javanese-values oriented people, the tradition of food offerings to local spirits may still be preserved well since its footprint can be partly found in this ritual. They frequently make offerings to local spirits and Javanese heroes as well as prepare an exceptional food offered to the spirit of the deceased and put it in the middle room of the house where the spirit is believed for sometimes to return home and taste it.⁵¹ For this reason, it is understandable why Javanese repudiated to convert into Christianity since there would be no more *slametan*, visiting ancestral graves or praying in the village shrines. Javanese were also feared that such conversion would mean abandoning exorcism (*ruwatan*), *slametan* and celebration for the Prophet’s birthday (*muludan*), the evening meal feast in Ramadan (*maleman*) and other beliefs and traditions.⁵² No wonder,

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁵⁰ Quoted from Woodward, “The Slametan”, *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁵¹ Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, p. 72.

⁵² Ricklefs, *Polarizing Javanese Society*, pp. 107–8.

the success of the nine saints in Islamizing the Java land was mostly dependent on this acculturation method.

Nevertheless, there has been a tendency of increasingly Islamicised tradition in Java. A recent study of Islamization in Surakarta, Central Java, found that *abangan* abandoned using amulets since this practice was perceived to be polytheism endangering Islamic faith.⁵³ In an increasingly Islamic *abangan* village in South Malang, East Java, the Muslims are now used to perform ritual in compliance with the Islamic tradition, such as *akikab* (the birth of the child) in addition to traditional ritual of *rumatan* devoted to the village deities (*danyang*).⁵⁴ The same applies to the *slametan*. The death *slametan* is now often refashioned into more Islamic term, replacing it with *tablilan*. The ritual evolution from traditional *slametan* into a more Islamic one, namely *tablilan*, signifies the strengthening and penetrating of Islamic ritual in Java. In Batasan, Salatiga, Central Java, the ritual for the deceased constitutes the worship to God, a practice that used to be merely an offering to local spirits in turn of asking for protection from disaster.⁵⁵ Before the introduction of *tablilan*, the people of this village used to put a bunch of flower and a basket of foods near sacred places of the village where the spirits are supposed to dwell. *Tablilan* is therefore meant to replace those old polytheistic habits of the village rituals and purify them from animistic and polytheistic elements.⁵⁶ The Islamization of Javanese rituals and their gradual transformation into *tablilan* in rural Java cannot be separated from the role of *santri* and their religious institutions (*pesantren*) which widely spread in rural areas as a center of religious learning which dominantly mold the character of the rural Javanese Muslims' religiosity.⁵⁷ The fact that *santris* mostly lead all Javanese *slametan* accelerates such process.

Symbolic communication between the dead and the alive first occurs during the burial procession. When the corpse is being laid down

⁵³ Haedar Nashir and Mutohharun Jinan, "Re-Islamisation: The Conversion of Subculture from Abangan into Santri in Surakarta", *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2018), pp. 1–28.

⁵⁴ Dahniar, "Batara Kala Masa Kini", p. 101.

⁵⁵ Braten, "To Colour, Not Oppose", p. 165.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁵⁷ Hilmy, "Islam and Javanese Acculturation", p. 65.

into the grave, a *modin* jumps into the grave hole shouting the Confession of Faith to the ear's corpse to remind the deceased's belief. Shortly after the corpse has been buried, the ceremony called *talqin* is performed.⁵⁸ A *modin* or *kyai* delivers a loud speech addressed to the deceased as if he speaks directly and give advice to the deceased lively that something is going to happen immediately in the grave. According to this belief, God will soon send two angels after the corpse was buried and after the burial procession is over. They will interrogate for the first articles of the faith to the deceased that include the questions about God, religion, prophet, religious lodestar and the direction of performing prayer. In this speech, the speaker calls the name of the deceased and tells the answers for those questions and reminds the deceased to reply to the angles' questions as he told.⁵⁹ This ritual implies an intensive one-sided symbolic communication between the alive and the deceased. The *modin* portrays as an active communicator delivering messages to a passive receiver, the dead, who is believed to be still able to listen to the messages. Although the dead has physically disassociated from its social living community, it remains an essential member of the society and should therefore not be left unheard. Speaking to the death demonstrates that even though one has been physically stateless, one is still symbolically alive. Therefore, intensive communication should be maintained by using a specific model of discourse that enables interlocutors to convey and receive messages of communication.

Upon completing the burial ritual procession, the family members return home and prepare for a *tablilan*. In general, the pattern of *tablilan* in Java is just the same as other *slametan* rituals of life cycles. However, the death rite seems to draw undivided attention since the phase of commemoration and recurrence always take several times. This constitutes the most importance, elaborate, sacred and perpetual ritual engaged by tripartite: the family, the society and the deceased. For those practising the *tablilan*, death is not, therefore, the last history for the deceased, but

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71. For the recitation of talkin among Gayo Muslims, north Sumatera see Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse*, pp. 255–6.

⁵⁹ Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, p. 71.

recreates a new social relation and reposition in some respects.⁶⁰ It is not uncommon that attendants of the *tablilan* ritual may just know each other when they joined it. An informal dialogue and a new friendship amongst those participating *tablilan* often come out. Even other serious and formal conversation take place when the family member discusses the position that the deceased still holds in the family. The reposition in specific association or organization also occurs if the deceased holds a position in it. In this regard, death could encourage a new concern of relationship amongst the family, the association and the society in which the deceased used to belong to or associate with.

Tablilan also differs in many ways from other sorts of *slametan* ritual. The time, the duration, the place and the foods for this ritual constitute special characters. In terms of the time and the duration, *tablilan* is formally held in a specific date and in a long-lasting consecutive event, starting from the first day of the death. This continues to the third, the seventh, the fortieth, the hundredth, the first and second anniversaries and finally the thousandth day from the date of the death.⁶¹ It then can be at any time held sporadically thereafter, either at home, mosques or cemetery, attended by various guests ranging from relatives, neighbours, and colleagues. The sacrosanct and enduring death ritual, as well as its diverse participants, indicate that death was not solely a personal matter, nor is it merely a familial issue. Nevertheless, it is rather individual, familial and social concern as well. It is “a social being grafted upon the physical individual which destruction is tantamount to a sacrilege against social order”.⁶²

Like other *slametan*, *tablilan* begins when all guests have come and are lead by a *kyai*. Nowadays, a handy, printed *tablilan* book is available in Latin transliteration and Indonesian translation versions so that one can simply read if one cannot memorize it. In *santri* Muslim communities,

⁶⁰ John Middleton, “Lugbara Death”, in *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, ed. by Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 134.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 72. Geertz however, never mentioned this ritual as *tablilan*, but rather a *slametan* cycle of *layatan* (mourning) for death cycle, even though his short description to this demonstrates *tablilan* ritual.

⁶² Robert Hertz, *Death and The Right Hand*, trans. by Rodney Needham and Claudia Needham (London: Cohen & West, 1960), p. 77.

the ritual's participants memorize the prayer, not reading it, by following the chanting of the leader. A slight different prayer composition might also be possible. However, the main idea is always individually sending the reward of prayer to the deceased. The reward is also devoted to the Prophet, his companions, Muslim saints, and, ancestors, including all late Muslims.⁶³ The participants invoke God's mercy and blessing and implore Him to grant pardon to the deceased, accept his/her soul and ethical conducts, forgive all faults and eventually send the deceased to heaven.

This ritual can also be held individually or communally, at home or the graveyard, right in front of the predecessor or parents' graves. Invariably, upon in-home *tablilan*, the host family may also visit the graves in the following day and set a short prayer there. In Java, the practice of tomb visitation is a quite popular tradition known as *ziarah*, especially to the saints' graves.⁶⁴ By directly attending to the graveyard, the descendants attempt to show their most profound appreciation to the deceased. During *ziarah*, descendants or visitors might recite the Qur'an, pray *tablilan*, or conduct other activities ranging from meditating until sleeping close to the tomb hoping to gain supernatural inspiration, especially in sacred tombs of saints.⁶⁵ *Tablilan* in another shorter form might also be held in mosques especially after the Friday prayer followed by "an absentia prayer for the corpse" (*shalat janayah ghaib*) since the corpse was buried several days ago in a distance place in which the congregation members of the Friday prayer did not attend. *Tablilan* has, therefore, a specific purpose and is held in a relatively fixed timing, yet can be held at any time and place upon completing the following dates of its consummation. The moderate and flexible *tablilan* performance suggests that an essential thing in this ritual is, in addition to the prayer chanted, to maintain continuous communication with the spirits of the late parents, ancestors or saints as it is indicated in grave visitation. Sacred tombs and predecessor's graves symbolize the continuity from life to death and another life. Prayer,

⁶³ In *abangan* communities, the reward is sometimes offered to Adam and Eva, the local spirits, and Hindu-Javanese heroes. See Beatty, "Adam and Eve and Vishnu", p. 72.

⁶⁴ Jamhari, "Ziarah Traditions", *Religion and Ritual*, ed. by James J. Fox (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1998), pp. 34–5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

reciting *tablil* and visitations virtually bridge communication between material life with an immaterial and spiritual entity.

No less critical disposition of *tablilan* ritual is that it is intended to show respect and honour to the deceased. Descendants wish to display their highest courtesy to the late parents and predecessors even though they have passed away. Incidentally, Javanese norms and Islamic teaching are in principle congruent in this respect. To the Javanese, there are some ways to express respect to the parent. Of these, language is the most salient gesture of respect in the pattern of parent-children communication. In general, Javanese speak in the different proper style of speech depending on whom they talk to. If their interlocutors are grandparents, parents, older people, or respected persons, they should speak in the *krama inggil* style as the most respectful and polite speech, or at least in the second middle degree that is *krama*. If they speak with their fellows or friends, they may use informal speech in *ngoko* styles.⁶⁶ Children or juniors should not address their parents or seniors simply by calling their nicknames but should use kinship terms such as *pak* for father and *bu* for mother. The same applies when youths are speaking to the elders, either *mas* (for brother) or *mbak* (for sister) should be put in front of the elder's names. This language etiquette must be highly enforced in daily discourse by children, youths or juniors unless they will be considered rude and impolite (*kurang ajar* or *jangkar*).

Respect and honour should also be paid to the late parent and predecessors in another way. Descendants usually hold a collective responsibility to visit and repair the ancestors' grave. Jay, who conducted research in the same town as Geertz did in East Java, acknowledged that mutual respect within the bonds of Javanese kinship and family would still continue and remain strong beyond the grave.⁶⁷ He found a popular tradition of visiting parents' and predecessors' graves at the beginning of the fasting month called *megengan* in which descendants exchanged forgiveness with, and prayed for, the late parent and predecessors.

⁶⁶ James Joseph Errington, *Structure and Style in Javanese: A Semiotic View of Linguistic Etiquette* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988); James Joseph Errington, *Shifting Languages: Interaction and Identity in Javanese Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁶⁷ Robert R. Jay, *Javanese Villagers: Social Relations in Rural Modjokuto* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1969), p. 111.

This applied not only to *abangan* but also *santri* families. Moreover, at the end of the fasting month and in welcoming the *riyaya* (*Id al-Fitri*) holidays, descendants usually go to the graveyard asking pardon and blessing from God for the soul of their parents and predecessors. This tradition is in line with *tablilan* ritual.⁶⁸ It is then a sort of ritual tradition intended to maintain familial affinity between ancestor-parent and their descendants. Since the fundamental Javanese kinship and family system are bilateral and generational, respect must be tightly enforced within this fundamental social structure.⁶⁹ Respect (*urmat/ngajeni*) then becomes a critical conceptual etiquette for children-parent and descendent-predecessor relationships within familial and social interactions and should be maintained throughout the life, history and beyond.

According to Islamic ethics, the ethical codes of parent-children relations are well established through the institution of family in which every party, parent and children alike, assume their rights and responsibilities.⁷⁰ The devotion to parents is only second to obey God's command and His messenger. Several scriptural texts confirm this fundamental duty that must be fulfilled by all Muslims. Just to mention one, a verse of the Qur'an echoes this obligation:

“We have enjoined on men, kindness to parents: in paid did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give birth. The carrying of this child to his weaning is a period of thirty months. At length when he reaches the age of full strength and attains forty years, he says, O my Lord! Grant me that I may be grateful for Your favour which you have bestowed upon me and upon both my parents and that I may work righteousness such as You may approve, and be gracious to me in respect of my offspring.”⁷¹

It is not without coincidence that the textual basis influences the

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Hildred Geertz, *The Javanese Family: A Study of Kinship and Socialization* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961).

⁷⁰ Tamara Sonn, “Islam”, in *Comparing Religious Traditions: Ethics of Family Life*, ed. by Jacob Neusner (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2000), pp. 74–9; Hammūdāh. ‘Abd al-‘Āṭī, *The Family Structure in Islam* (Indiana: American Trust Publication, 1977), pp. 182–3.

⁷¹ The Qur'an, 46: 15. See Abdullah Yusuf Ali (tran.), *The Glorious Qur'an* (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2004), p. 336. There are a lot of verses dealing with this issue. See Sonn, “Islam”, pp. 78–80.

structure of the family in Muslim societies which, according to Khurshid Ahmad, take in many ways a shape in extended family and nucleus relationship.⁷² In this pattern, the core member of the family consists of husband, wife and children as well as parents who wish to live with them. The bond also extends to close relatives. This relation is based mainly on consanguinity and affinity that include father, mother, grandfather, grandmother and other direct forebears, and direct descents such as sons, daughters, grandsons and granddaughters as well as fathers' and mothers' brothers and sisters. The genealogy and familial link as such bear further consequence on inheritance's share in which the estates of the deceased are shared to their heirs covering parents, and grandparents, and children and grandchildren.⁷³ It is thus no exaggeration to argue that family constitutes the most basic substantial unit in Muslim societies, in which every member endure rights and obligations within respectful manners. Subsequently, this close and intimate relationship will remain secure. The realization of this ethic is employed in many kinds regardless of time and space and expressed in such a tradition of *tablilan*. The traditions of *tablilan*, *ziarah*, visiting predecessor and parent's grave are the most apparent manifestation of this principle. It is thus evident that both the Javanese norm and Islamic doctrines emphasize the significance of honouring parent and maintaining close relationships amongst family and relatives. Javanese Muslims are, in principle, taught how to pay honour to the parent and ancestors (*lelubur*) which must be kept connected from the past up to the present and until the next generations.

E. Concluding Remarks

The death *slametan* constitutes a Javanese Muslim ritual and is syncretistic in nature. Its exterior elements have been adopted from the old Javanese beliefs, while its essence is obviously Islamic. Syncretism of this ritual is concerned with food offerings to the spirits and burning incense amongst more traditionally Javanese oriented Muslim society, although this practice is gradually disappearing as the Islamization continues. The renaming of the *slametan* into *tablilan* shows further

⁷² Khurshid Ahmad, *Family Life in Islam* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1974), p. 32.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

evidence of the increasing influence of Islamization in Java. However, despite being more Islamised, the *tablilan* does not erase the legacy of local elements regarding the time and date of this ritual. These are defended since there are in principle not forbidden in Islam. The gradual evolution of this ritual is a logical consequence from a long process of Islamization in Java that began from the times of the Mataram Islamic Kingdom, and the introduction of the accommodative approach of Islamization by Muslim saints, whose method of preaching Islam entailed acculturation and convergence with indigenous traditions, up to the present.

The reason why Javanese Muslims still maintain the ritual lies on the fact that it mirrors both Javanese and Islamic values. This basic idea lies in congruous commonality in Islam and Javanese norms regarding paying respect and honor to ancestors and parents. Such good relationship should remain stable for the whole life and should be symbolically communicated beyond the grave. To Javanese Muslims, death is not the end of history since they believe the life after death. The deceased is physically separated from his/her family and living community, but socially still belongs to society. In this respect, the deceased is still alive in an imaginary world, and therefore symbolic communication should be maintained through various means. Sending prayer and offering food, which constitutes a core of *tablilan* ritual, thus means a medium through which respect and honor as well as symbolic communication between the alive and the dead amongst Javanese Muslims are well preserved.

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