

# Re-Islamisation: the conversion of subculture from Abangan into Santri in Surakarta

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# Re-Islamisation: the conversion of subculture from *Abangan* into *Santri* in Surakarta

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## Abstract

This paper discusses the on-going process of re-Islamisation in Java. In the context of re-Islamisation process, a Muslim is expected to be a pious one, both from the aspect of belief, knowledge, and practice. The process is characterized by the intensification of Islamic ritual practice and the enforcement of Islamic norms in various aspects of life. Additionally, it is accompanied by the deterioration of animism—as represented by amulets, heirlooms and shamanism—which are popular among *abangan* communities. Amulet is a peculiar feature in the belief and life system of Javanese society, namely the belief in the magical objects used by the owner to gain power, convenience, and magnificence. In Surakarta, the phenomenon of the decline of ‘magical’ amulets is perceived as the conversion process from *abangan* to *santri*. Yet it is a dissimilar kind of conversion compared to the previous ones. It reaffirms that in Java, Islamisation is an unending process nuanced by the volatility of socio-political and cultural dynamics.

Artikel ini membahas proses reislamisasi di masyarakat Jawa yang saat ini masih terus berlangsung. Reislamisasi adalah proses dimana seorang muslim menjadi lebih islami, baik dari aspek keyakinan, pengetahuan, maupun pengamalan ajaran agama. Reislamisasi ditandai dengan menguatnya pengamalan ritual Islam dan ditegakkannya norma-norma Islam dalam berbagai aspek kehidupan. Dalam waktu yang sama diikuti melemahnya kepercayaan animistik, seperti kepercayaan pada jimat, pusaka dan perdukunan di kalangan masyarakat abangan. Jimat merupakan salah satu ciri penting dalam sistem kepercayaan dan kehidupan masyarakat Jawa, yakni kepercayaan kepada benda-benda yang dikeramatkan yang digunakan pemiliknya untuk memperoleh kekuatan, kenyamanan, kemuliaan hidup. Di Surakarta terdapat fenomena komunitas abangan meninggalkan jimat sebagai bagian dari proses konversi dari abangan menuju ke santri. Ini merupakan konversi baru yang berbeda dengan konversi lama. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa proses islamisasi di Jawa sebagai proses yang terus berlangsung mengikuti dinamika sosio-politik dan kultural yang berkembang di Jawa.

**Keywords:** *Amulet; Re-Islamisation; Conversion; Abangan; Santri*

## **Introduction**

The spread of Islam or Islamisation has been a major topic of discussion in the history of Indonesia, and yet it still leaves dispute among scholars. One of the causes is related to the geographical location of Indonesia, which is the furthest from Mecca as the holiest city in the religion of Islam. This geographical fact is significant in explaining the process of Islamisation, particularly related to who introduced and when it was initially introduced in a region.<sup>1</sup> The archaeological study found the Muslim Arabian traders had arrived in the region of Sumatra and Java for several centuries before Islam was established in the form of Islamic kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *Islam Nusantara: Jaringan Global dan Lokal*, Bandung: Mizan, 2002, 37-38.

<sup>2</sup> Hasan Muarif Ambary, *Menemukan Peradaban: Jejak Arkeologis dan Historis Islam di Indonesia*, Jakarta: Logos, 1998, 54.

In some regions, particularly on the coast of Sumatra and Java, Islamic kingdoms were present as the culmination of the Islamisation process that lasted for centuries.<sup>3</sup>The expansion of Islam in Indonesia indicates numerous variations with diverse level of acceptance of Islam and also assimilation patterns depending on the arrival period and the character of local community.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the distance and diversity, Islam has been successfully spread in Java and Sumatra almost perfectly hence it becomes religion with the highest number of adherents. The Central Bureau of Statistics records more than 207 million (about 87%) of Indonesia's population are Muslims, who scattered throughout the urban to the rural areas. The figure situates Indonesia as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. The success of Islamisation has brought Islam as the religion of the majority and positioned it as a solid unity in the culture of Javanese society.<sup>5</sup>Islamisation has moved beyond the native and previous established religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, through peaceful approach and cultural acculturation. It is an affirmation that Islamisation attains an unfathomable level.<sup>6</sup>

Nowadays, the process of Islamisation is still prevailing both in terms of the inclusion of external communities and the enrichment of Islamic sense among the Muslims. The optimistic view that Islamisation in Java is a never-ending process is suggested by Ricklefs (2012), who mentioned

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<sup>3</sup>H.J. de Graaf and Th. Pigeaud, *Kerajaan Islam di Jawa: Peralihan Majapahit ke Mataram*, Jakarta: Grafiti, 2002, 27.

<sup>4</sup> Djoko Suryo et al., *Agama dan Perubahan Sosial: Studi tentang Hubungan antara Islam, Masyarakat dan Struktur Sosial-Politik Indonesia*, Yogyakarta: Pusat Studi Sosial dan Asia Tenggara UGM, 2001, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Hefner, "Agama Berkembangnya Puralisme", in Donald K. Emerson (ed.), *Indonesia Beyond Suharto: Negara Ekonomi, Masyarakat, Transisi*, Jakarta: Gramedia, 2001, 368.

<sup>6</sup> M.C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia Since c.1200*, Third Edition, London: Palgrave, 2001, 3.

the development of Islamic society in Java as “an Islamising society”.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, Azyumardi propounded different term, referring this on-going development with “santrization”, to define the phenomenon of Muslims who are moving towards a more Islamic life by practicing the norms and symbols as a reference of daily life.<sup>8</sup> More interestingly, this santrization broadens to all segments of society both at the level of upper, middle, and grassroots.

This paper is departed from study on the sophisticated local people who begin to abandon the mystique tradition of supernatural belief as indicated by their engagement in the puritan movement. Among the noticeable evidence is the conversion of Javanese Muslims who practice a much more syncretism version of Islam or called *abangan* into orthodox *santri* by repudiating their amulet or heirloom and abandoning shamanic practices—which have been formerly believed to bring good luck and salvation. Amulets and shamanic practices are one sub-category of *abangan* society beside other sub categories, such as *slametan*,<sup>9</sup> the belief in deities,

<sup>7</sup> M.C. Ricklefs, *Mengislamkan Jawa: Sejarah Islamisasi di Jawa dan Penentangannya dari 1930 Sampai Sekarang*, Jakarta: Serambi, 2012, 793.

<sup>8</sup> Azyumardi Azra, “Islamisasi Jawa” *Republika*, 12 November 2012. See *Reposisi Hubungan Agama dan Negara*, Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2002, 87.

<sup>9</sup> Slametan is the center of the whole Javanese religious system, particularly for the *abangan* sub-culture of rural communities. Nevertheless, there are disputes among scholars about the source of this tradition. Some argue that it is a manifestation of the interpretation of Islamic texts and ritual held by the larger Muslim community. In other words, the event and meaning of *slametan* comes from Islamic texts as interpreted in the royal tradition and public in general. Mark R. Woodward, *Java, Indonesia and Islam*, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 2011, 113. The Scripturalist and top-down views toward customary rituals oppose Geertz’s view on *slametan* (1: core ritual of “Javanese religion”)—that it is derived from ancient-rooted animism. See Andrew Beatty, *Varieties of Javanese Religion: An Anthropological Account*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 28; See also Agus Salim, “Javanese Religion, Islam or Syncretism: Comparing Woodward’s Islam in Java and Beatty’s Varieties of Javanese Religion”, *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, vol. 3, no. 2 (December 2013), 223-266.

and magic.<sup>10</sup> This paper answers the question of how is the on-going Islamisation process in Java? How is the conversion process of the *abangan* sub-culture group into puritan group? The data were collected through in-depth interviews with the perpetrators as well as observation in the museum of amulets. This study was conducted in Surakarta and primarily focused in an Islamic group as the object of study, namely the Majelis Tafsir Al-Quran (MTA). The collected data were analyzed with Islamisation history as the theoretical framework. It used historical-sociological approach in terms of linking the conversion process and Islamisation with the involved social contexts as well as the sociological implications.

### **Theoretical construction of Islamisation**

Several theoretical constructions of the Islamisation process have occurred in many countries that are now inhabited by Muslims. *First*, the theory of “religion of sword” (Baer, 2008),<sup>11</sup> which suggests Islamisation is forcibly led to radical and meticulous conversion. Islamisation is typically performed by military and political power in conquering a region through battle. The study of the conversion process in the early days of the crusade between Christians and Muslims used to apply this theory. Nevertheless, such a theory is less eligible to be implemented in Muslim countries, i.e., Indonesia (Southeast Asia), India and Mongol.

*Second*, the theory of political patronage links religion to political power. This theory argues that conversion is done order to gain benefits from the authorities, such as bureaucratic position, tax-free, and other

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<sup>10</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Abangan, Santri dan Priyayi dalam Masyarakat Jawa*, trans. Aswab Mahasin, Jakarta: Pustaka, 1989, 116-151. See also Arni, “Kepercayaan dan Perlakuan Masyarakat Banjar terhadap Jimat-Jimat Penolak Penyakit”, *Studia Insania*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (April 2016), 39-56.

<sup>11</sup> Marc David Baer, *Honored by The Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 140.

predominance.<sup>12</sup> Apparently, this theory is utilized to legitimize the massive Islamisation process in the early days of the Islamic kingdom around the fifteenth century. However, it fails to explain Islamisation in some remote areas which distant from the urban or central government, i.e., Pattani, Southern Thailand and Rohingya group in Myanmar.

Third, the theory of social liberation postulates Islamisation as the consequence of the socio-religious system that contains discrimination among its people as propounded by Lapidus to describe Islamisation in India.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the caste system is implemented by particular religions in which discrimination of social organization is prevailed. Consequently, lower-class castes believe in Islam as an ideology of social liberation. The massive conversion to Islam is perceived as an elucidation to diminish the class oppression. The spread of Islam in Java and other regions is generally closely related to this social liberation. The Muslim preachers emphasize the magnitude of brotherhood in religion instead of underlining the differences of descendants, classes, and ethnic groups. It becomes such an allure for people who perceive they have no rights to themselves and the surroundings due to their social status. They perceive Islamic values eagerly promote the equality to create order and security, and to show the harmony among the Muslims. This theory is frequently used to reveal the Islamisation in India since this country is predominantly Hindu, hence there is a stratification of society based on religious class or caste.<sup>14</sup> The

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972, 4-7. See Peter Hardy, "Modern European and Muslim Explanation of Conversion to Islam in South Asia: A Preliminary Survey of the Literature", Nehemia Levtzion (ed.), *Conversion to Islam*, New York and Meier, 1979, 78.

<sup>13</sup> Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 361-370.

<sup>14</sup> Lapidus reveals the conversion of Indian society, particularly the lower-class groups in the Indus valley. Conversion usually occurs when Islamic preachers establish *Khanaqah* or mosque as a center of gathering of peasant society to introduce Islam as a new religion. *Khanaqah* is usually built on the outskirts of the city making it easier for people to interact

objection to this theory is related to the past, the absence of any record or movement that refused the caste system in the marginal society, thus the life-based castes in religion and society were accepted as the way it was.

Fourth, the theory of accretion and reformulation.<sup>15</sup> It argues people who embrace a new religion do not straightforwardly discard former traditions and beliefs, but instead adding new beliefs and symbols of the new religion within their life. The concepts, doctrines and beliefs of the former religion are still implemented at once. After some time or even the change in generation, the former religion practices are finally completely obliterated and a new belief is established, or called the stage of reformulation. This theory is more appropriate to disclose the Islamisation in Java in particular and Indonesia in general, in which the process took place gradually since the arrival of Muslim traders and preachers from Mecca in the seventh century until the establishment of prevailing Islamic organization and institution within the society.

Scholars have discussed both the individual and collective Islamisation processes by entailing the socio-culture, economic, and political factors that affect the conversion. Arthur Darby Nock brought in the terms of *adhesion* and *conversion* to distinguish the type of conversion. *Adhesion* is a more supple, conversion of people to other religion without entirely abandoning the former religious beliefs and practices. Meanwhile, *conversion* is the process of converting to another religion by demanding absolute commitment without any compromise for other paths of salvation.<sup>16</sup> In Indonesia, Islamisation had initially an adhesion type, an

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with the lower-class groups. Conversion is also triggered by the growth of new cities that diminish the boundaries between castes in social interaction. See Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies...*, 363.

<sup>15</sup> Richard M. Eaton, "Pendekatan terhadap Studi Konversi di India", in Richard M. Martin, *Pendekatan Kajian dalam Studi Agama*, trans. Zakiyuddin Baidhawiy, Surakarta: UM Press, 2002, 151.

<sup>16</sup> Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New Religion from Alexander the Great to*



inclusive process with most of early Indonesian Muslims upheld various non-Islamic commitments, beliefs and practices.<sup>17</sup> This framework is able to explain the Islamisation process in Java with the assumption it is a continuous process despite the differences resulted from the dynamically evolving society.

Nehemia Levtzion scrupulously discussed the phenomena of conversion in assorted geographical areas, i.e., Iran, Anatolia (modern Turkey), South Asia, Indonesia, China, and Africa.<sup>18</sup> He highlighted the significance of “the environment” constructed from the combination of newly formed Islamic institutions/communities and the immigrant Muslims, which demonstrate how environment stimulates the conversion. He claimed the distinction between the concept of “conversion” (which is limited to proprietary prophetic religions) and “adhesions” (which is typical of minor religions and based on pragmatic attempts to indulge “natural needs”). Furthermore, he argued that even though Islam is a prophetic religion, its expansion throughout the Middle East and North Africa can be clarified only in the context of adhesion process.

### **Islamisation in Indonesia: from adhesion to conversion**

Adhesion requires complex and long-term process, even hundreds of years, to reach institutionalization stage. Hasan Muarif Ambary explicated the three stages of Islamisation in Indonesia. *First*, the early stage of the presence or arrival of Muslim traders comes from Arabia to various regions of Southeast Asia in the seventh century. The regions have been outstanding as the main route that links the western and eastern regions since the beginning of the century. *Second*, the establishment of Islamic

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*Augustine of Hippo*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933.

<sup>17</sup> Nur Syam, *Islam Pesisir*, Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Nehemia Levtzion, *Conversion to Islam*, New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1979.

kingdom or rule in the thirtieth century. There is strong archaeological evidence that shows the existence of the Islamic kingdom in Pasai, Sumatra. *Third*, the institutionalization of Islam is done through various Islamic social institutions, i.e., building, tomb, marriage and so on.<sup>19</sup>

The Islamic preachers were exceptionally tolerant in giving space for the established local beliefs imbued by superstitions, animism and dynamism. In many cases, the preachers invited people to embrace Islam by showing of their supernatural gifts. Such an approach is known as syncretism, which later produces a hybrid cultural system.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, there is a stereotype clutched by both local and foreign people that most Javanese Muslims are *abangan*, nominal Muslims or “Islam KTP” whose religiosity is positioned in the geological structure of Javanese culture.<sup>21</sup> The term *abangan*, which has been circulated within Javanese society, is then popularized in the international academic circle by an American anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, in his classical work “*Religion of Java*”.<sup>22</sup>

In Indonesia, Islamisation is an evolutionary process. When the acceptance of the indigenous rulers had been acquired, Islam started to flourish among the common people. The Islamisation of different ethnic groups in diverse regions is not a single and identical conversion, it is actually a long process toward a greater compromise of Islamic exclusivism.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, it is an on-going and continuous process considering numerous factors that contribute in the process towards such a compromise. The development of Islamic scholarship and studies at local lev-

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<sup>19</sup> Hasan Muarif Ambary, *Menemukan Peradaban...*, 58-61.

<sup>20</sup> M. Darori Amin, “Sinkretisme dalam Masyarakat Jawa”, in M. Darori Amin (ed.), *Islam dan Kebudayaan Jawa*, Yogyakarta: Gema Media, 2002, 85-118.

<sup>21</sup> Howard M. Federspiel, *Islam and Ideology in the Emerging Indonesian State: The Persatuan Islam (Persis), 1923-1957*, Leiden: Brill, 2001.

<sup>22</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Abangan, Santri dan Priyayi dalam Masyarakat Jawa*, trans. Jakarta: Pustaka, 1989, 85.

<sup>23</sup> Azyumardy Azra, “Islamisasi Jawa” ..., 16.

el, religious and intellectual network with Islamic centers in the Middle East, and social, economic, educational, political and cultural shift make a tremendous contribution to attaining greater compromise with Islam.<sup>24</sup>

In fact, it is obvious that the people in Indonesia were moving from a contested beliefs and identity toward a universally acceptable acceptance of what is known as syncretism. Regardless Islamisation was once accompanied by polarization among Javanese people—in which they were divided into the Muslim group of *santri* and the Muslim groups of *abangan* who retained the “mystical synthesis”,<sup>25</sup> the political dynamic of Indonesia encourages the continuation and re-implementation of the Islamisation process. In general, the path is precisely directed toward an increasingly Islamic society characterized by the rife of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Islamisation in Indonesia reflects a universal change in how people interpret religion in their personal and social lives. It is indicated by the transition of religion as an identity, statement and recognition of one’s membership in certain cultural and social groups, into religion as something related to internal beliefs and piety.

The history of Islamisation in Indonesia and its challenges incessantly roll in line along with the national and international dynamics toward a decisive stage. Islamic teachings have been rooted in many aspects of life. In the context of Javanese society, it is difficult to imagine that the strengthening influence of Islam can be stopped or reversed by anyone who persistently opposes it.<sup>26</sup> The history of Islamisation in Javanese society has reached a significant stage, “the Islamising society”, both among

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<sup>24</sup> A comprehensive study about the Islamisation process and its association with economic growth has been carried out by Dobbin in a study case of Padri (Muslim clerics) at rural villages in West Sumatra. See Christine Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy Central Sumatra 1784-1847*, London: Curzon Press, 1983, 189.

<sup>25</sup> M C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia...*, 31.

<sup>26</sup> M C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia...*, 793.

the urban middle class and the grassroots in rural areas. In a study of re-Islamisation among the Muslim middle class, Norhaidi Hasan (2012) underlined the trend of urban Sufism in the cities, among others, the phenomena of a grand *zikr* led by a number of new popular preachers.<sup>27</sup> In addition, Wasisto Raharjo Jati (2017) revealed the relationship between the rise of the Muslim middle class and its involvement in Islamic politics.<sup>28</sup>

The “Islamising society” is characterized by the rampant Islamic symbols and concepts in political affairs, the assertiveness of Islamic institutions such as the MUI in supporting any notion of a more Islamicist society, the support for feminist movement from many circles particularly modernist and traditionalist groups, and the public interest in popular culture as channeling gender equality ideas through films and novels. Popular culture has become a creative space for the young generation to contribute in the process, among others through Islamic fashion and religious music.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, in the sector of trade and banking business, the establishment of Islamic banks has reached the district level. The educational institutions show similar propensity in which Islamisation penetrates into the institutions from elementary to university levels. At the elementary and secondary levels, Islamic-based schools are favored by the urban middle-class society. Meanwhile, the state and private universities open a scheme of new admissions and scholarships for prospective stu-

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<sup>27</sup> Noorhaidi Hasan, “Piety, Politics, and Post-Islamism: Zikir Akbar in Indonesia”, *Al-Jami'ah*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (2012 M/1434 H), 369-390. Hasan observed the high number of participants in Grand Zikr (*Zikir Akbar*) in Indonesia. The event transforms into a “stage” where political ideas are inculcated hence it has a significant role in strengthening and negotiating new public spaces.

<sup>28</sup> Wasisto Raharjo Jati, *Politik Kelas Menengah Muslim Indonesia*, Jakarta: LP3ES, 2017. Jati elaborated the symbols and practices among the middle-class Muslims, such as popular culture, urban Sufism, and Sharia-based fashion as an identity and Islamic literacy.

<sup>29</sup> One of the most noticeable phenomena in the dynamics of Islam in Indonesia over the last two decades is the popularity of veil and Sharia-based clothing among Muslim women. See Anilatin Naira, “Makna Budaya Pada Jilbab Modis (Study pada Hijab Style Community Malang)”, *Jurnal Mahasiswa Sosiologi*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2014).

dents who memorize the Quran, even though the latter is controversial.

Many studies discuss Islamisation or santrization in the middle-class group with indicators of economic growth, education and compatibility between Islam and modern values such as democracy and human rights.<sup>30</sup> Only a few confer the re-Islamisation that occurs among the grassroots conducted by preacher groups over the last few decades. Nevertheless, it is interesting that the process undergone by groups previously referred to as *abangan* into *santri* has a *conversion* type instead of *adhesion*. Unlike the Islamisation of the non-Muslim into Muslim, *conversion* becomes a new story of Islamisation within the internal Islamic circle from one sub-culture to another. In Surakarta, the inter-subcultural conversion process from *abangan* to *santri* is massive as indicated by the increasing number of people abandoning shamanism and amulet possession.

Amulet is one of the sub-variants in Javanese society which existence has been very long, a tradition from generation to generation from generation to generation, and reproduced by shamanic techniques. In this study, the Islamisation process is identified from the phenomenon of amulet submission to the museum by an Islamic organization in Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia. This process of re-Islamisation or santrization at the grassroots is a *conversion*, not an *adhesion* as once took place in a religious group whose members are very rigid in holding new ethical values when they enter a new group.

### **Amulet as sub-culture symbol**

Amulet or *azimat* is an object that some people believe has the magical power to protect its holder from ailment or other things.<sup>31</sup> Amulet or

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<sup>30</sup> Noorhaidi Hasan, "Islam di Kota-kota Menengah Indonesia: Kelas Menengah, Gaya Hidup, dan Demokrasi", in Gerry van Klinken and Ward Berenhot, *In Search of Middle Indonesia: Kelas Menengah di Kota-kota Menengah*, Jakarta: KITLV-Jakarta: 2016, 215-245.

<sup>31</sup> <https://kbbi.web.id/azimat>

*Tamimah* is an object that is typically worn on one's person, vehicle, or building and considered to have the magical power to protect its holder, either to protect them in general or from bad luck.<sup>32</sup> The word "amulet" comes from the Latin word *amuletum*, which means "an object that protects a person from trouble; an object, either natural or man-made, which is believed to protect a person from danger."<sup>33</sup> The inappropriate interpretation of an amulet has become an obstacle to conduct a comprehensive study. However, the English terms of amulet, talisman, charm, and spell can imply the superstitious beliefs about the magical power of objects or irrational requests against supernatural or preternatural powers to understand natural events.<sup>34</sup>

People who believe in and possess an amulet usually use it to seek for imperviousness, soldiery, courage, good luck, attraction, compassion, lover, authority, beauty, trade marking, wealth, treasure, as well as to reject bad luck, storm and to ease the delivery process. Amulets are kept and cherished with particular rituals, such as cleaning and bathing known as *jamasan*. Among the popular amulets are *keris*, spare, stone, Istanbul Quran, cloth, belt, vest jacket, *badik*, *rencong*, agate, *tasbih*, paper, bones, *wayang golek*, *wayang kulit*, and so on. The functions of the amulets must be believed by the holder.

Amulet is an object that is believed to have supernatural powers and abilities beyond the reach of human senses, and is believed to help solve the daily life problems. The religious or miraculous power entrenched in an amulet is linked to the sacred carried within the object. The power is then believed by the holder to help overcome the life problems. Despite

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<sup>32</sup> <https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimat>

<sup>33</sup> Migene Gonzales-Zippler, *The Complete Book of Amulet and Talisman*, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications St. Paul, 1991, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Don C. Skemer, *Magic in History: Binding Words Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages*, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006, 6.

its ordinary physical form, an object will have a dissimilar value when a kind of religious feeling is infused within it. Daniel L. Pals described it as a transformation from profane to sacred one, or in other words, the physical aspect of the amulet as a common object may be alike other objects, but it becomes a new holy object when it is occupied by such a religious feeling. The transformed objects are referred to as imaginative objects or symbols. The symbols are ultimately attributed to the Divinity, and then manifested in the reality.<sup>35</sup>

Amulets with verses of the Holy Quran still become a dispute among scholars. Some even argue that it can be a part of living Quran in everyday life.<sup>36</sup> In the Javanese tradition, amulet was actually one of the main techniques of healing among rural *abangan* society, in which it was practiced by people in general even by *santri*, although there were diverse frequencies and types.<sup>37</sup> As a traditional Javanese technique of treatment, it is a combination of magic and traditional medicine to treat specific diseases, for instance the chronic ones that cannot be cured with traditional, herbs or modern medicine. Its practice is based on shamanism that produces various types of amulets according to one's demand. Briefly, it is a belief that is addressed to an object according to the desire of the holder. The most important thing in an amulet is its alleged power to protect its owner from any danger and to give happiness and luck. Many theories and controversies have been disseminated among scholars who observed supernatural natural phenomena. Some claim that amulet truly

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<sup>35</sup> Daniel L. Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 244-252.

<sup>36</sup> The study of the amulets in the community is linked to the Quranic verses as done by Islah Gusmian, "Santri dan Pemaknaan Kitab Suci: Studi Interpretatif Simbolik terhadap al-Qur'an di Pesantren Yogyakarta", in Irwan Abdullah et al., *Dialektika Teks Suci Agama, Strukturasi Makna Agama dalam Kehidupan Masyarakat*, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Recently, several scholars have reported various *santri* groups and their affiliation with local culture in North Coast and Central Java. Timothy Daniels, *Islamic Spectrum in Java*, Burlington: 2009, 49.

has magical power. Others insist that it is merely psychological suggestion that strengthen human's courage and security.

The creator of amulets, who is called *wongpinter* or a gifted one, is a person having spiritual intelligence and supernatural gift. Another term is *wongtuoor* the elder one, which is used to refer the wisdom owned by the creator of amulets. *Wongpinter* is generally perceived to understand the unseen things that cannot be comprehended by common people and to have the ability of communicating with supernatural beings as well as such a divine imminence with Allah Almighty. The relationship between people and *wongpinter* is a kind of intermediary one, in which due to the nescience of people, they have a high level of resignation. Such a relationship will be stronger if the miracle and all beyond human sense can be brought in and indulged by *wongpinter* adored by the community.

In their lifetime, humans will always face and have to solve problems by the mediation of reason and science—in which in reality is very limited. Consequently, some problems cannot be addressed by those systems, and magic or supernatural power becomes an alternative. Magic is defined as all human actions to achieve a goal through the powers that exist in nature, as well as the whole complex of assumptions accompanied it. Initially, humans only utilize magic to unravel problems that is beyond the limits of ability and knowledge.

### **Amulet museum: a conversion path of *Abangan* sub culture**

This study was carried out in Surakarta, Central Java, a very dynamic city in the context of the establishment of Islamic religious movements and organizations.<sup>38</sup> Culturally, Surakarta is referred to as the center of Javanese culture, thus any religious practices including Islam as the dominant

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<sup>38</sup> Kuntowijoyo, *Raja, Priyayi, dan Kawulo*, Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2004, viii-x. There is several uniqueness of Solo or Surakarta. In its history as a city of literacy, Solo is a center of national awakening and religious movement, both politically radical and dynamic.



religion are syncretism. It is an attempt on the way of life resulted from a synthesis between religious doctrines and local culture. Geertz (1985) claimed that people in Surakarta can be grouped as *abangan* or nominal Muslims signified by the myriad of mystical and supernatural practices in daily life. Another characteristic of *abangan* society is belief in objects as sacred heirlooms/amulets—which contains supernatural powers that can assist people in pursuing mundane desires.

Syncretism in Surakarta, alike others Javanese communities in general, is gradually but steadily shrinking. In fact, Muslims in Surakarta intensively disseminate Islamic teachings throughout Islamic study groups, Quranic studies in mosques, workplaces and even market.<sup>39</sup>The activity is mostly pioneered by modernist Muslims in an endeavor to avert the revival of the militant communist forces (PKI) particularly in the post-coup attempt in 1965. In Surakarta, a number of religious groups are actively engaged in *da'wah*, particularly those from modernist organizations and activists, i.e., Muhammadiyah, Al-Irsyad, Jamaah Tablig, Majelis Pengajian Islam, dan Majelis Tafsir Alquran.<sup>40</sup>The main characteristic of this movement is to invite people to be puritan and humble as well as to promote work ethic and educational consciousness.<sup>41</sup>

Amulet Museum is a collection of various types of amulets that are stored in the headquarters of Majelis Tafsir Al-Quran,<sup>42</sup>a puritanical Is-

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<sup>39</sup> Mutohharun Jinan, "Melacak Akar Ideologi Puritanisme Islam: Survei Tiga Biografi Tiga Abdullah", *Walisongo: Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan*, Vol. 22, Nomor 2, November 2014, 381-412.

<sup>40</sup> Zainudin Fananie et al., *Radikalisme Keagamaan dan Perubahan Sosial*, Surakarta: Muhammadiyah University Press, 2002, 64.

<sup>41</sup> Syafiq M. Mughni, *Nilai-Nilai Islam: Perumusan Ajaran dan Upaya Aktualisasi*, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2001, 58.

<sup>42</sup> Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an is an Islamic movement in Surakarta established by Abdullah Thufail in 1972. The main activity is *da'wah* in the field of religiosity and socio-culture that reaches out Muslims in the grassroots level. Currently, MTA is led by an "Imam" called "Ustad".

lamic movement in Surakarta. It aims to rebuke Muslims in general and the members on particular that storing and believing peculiar objects with supernatural powers are shirk and detrimental deeds. This museum implies that the objects are unfeasible anymore hence they should be alienated at a distance. People can visit the museum to recall the experience with the amulets is a destructive one and against the Islamic teachings. Meanwhile, for the repentant holder or shaman, Amulet Museum is symbolically the release of utopian beliefs and mentality in life and the conversion into a new and more religious lifestyle. Life is no longer illicit by unrealistic beliefs. For these puritan Muslims, the possession of amulets is a sign of how polytheism is still ingrained in their life. On the contrary, the increasing number of Muslims who handed sacred objects to the Amulet Museum ever more encouraged the puritan preachers to advocate the purification of Islam in society. Symbolically, the museum is a realization of Islamisation through radical conversion that occurs among grassroots.

The efforts to eradicate the traditions which are deviant from Islamic teachings have been performed by puritan groups. They receive both convivial and cynical responses from the Muslims. Nevertheless, the efforts have considerable effect in diminishing shamanism, which is entrenched deeply within the society. The positive response is indicated by the increasing number of Muslims who send their amulets to the center of religious group and declare their repentance after attending the sermon. The exceptionally proactive purification movement to fight against combat the syncretism tradition can be identified easily, especially from the materials of the *da'wah*. In addition, it is circulated by radio broadcast.

Puritan groups have received hundreds of amulets from their members and radio listeners in which most of them are novice. They come from various circles and backgrounds, including former shamans, ordinary

people, educated people, officials, and lower-class society classified as *abangan*. The submission is evidence of the desertion of syncretistic-mystical beliefs as well as the conversion from *abangan* into *santri* sub culture. The submitted amulets are collected in a glass cabinet that is positioned in front of the main entrance of the building. It is aimed to be witnessed by the group members thus they can learn from it. Moreover, the submission is held in the final session of Sunday morning regular study. Those who hand over their amulets will stand in front of the members, next to the pulpit, to show the amulet to other participants. The process, more or less, can be illustrated from the record as follows:

”Next, there is a request from the participants who want to hand over their amulets, ustadz (while showing off the objects to all participants). This one is called “lembu sekilan”, a black vest with Arabic letters, an efficacious bulletproof and other sharp weapon (accompanied by laughter of all participants). While this one is called “kitab Istanbul”, a tiny box containing a very tiny book to boost up the charisma and confidence of the holder. Next, it is called “sabuk inten”, a fabric belt with Arabic letters on it and supposedly purchased for five million rupiah from a “gifted one”. Last, this one is called “tombak nogososo”, a family hereditary relic (in the form of spear) as guardian of family salvation. Furthermore, ustadz will present explanation that amulet is shirk and prohibited by Islam.”<sup>43</sup>

People who hand over their amulets basically endure a profound conversion by holding the new doctrine and abandoning the former doctrine. Perhaps, it is complicated for assuming a transition as an absolute conversion. Essentially, one is able to attain some sorts of convenience, and to participate in a group which connects them with a valuable past

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<sup>43</sup> Field observation on Sunday, November 14, 2016. The hand-over process is always an attractive session for the attendance due to its peculiarity and amusement. It also fortifies their faith in their Puritanism. At the same time, Ahmad Sukina will reaffirm and demonstrate that *tahayul* and *churafat* among the Muslim communities should be exterminated.

experience as well as a regular and attractive reward that generates a vision of the future in order to mobilize energy and inspire self-reliance. Affiliation to a group necessitates compliance to particular philosophy that may offer assistance, guidance, focus for loyalty, and a framework for action. Engagement in mythical, ritual, and symbolic systems provides the order and meaning of life. Sharing belief systems with those having similar mindset will facilitate people to connect with others on a deeper intellectual and emotional level.

In this context, *conversion* is defined as a simple transformation from the absence into the commitment on a system of faith, from religious affiliation to one system of faith to another, or from one orientation to another in a faith system. It means a transition of one's personal orientation toward life, from superstition to God worship, from belief on mantras and rituals to a belief in the Divinity, from beliefs on peculiarities that threaten, punish, and deem others into sympathy, supportive, and good attitudes. As Nock said, *conversion* means a radically shifting belief that can lead to a new loftier faith in terms of intensive attention, commitment, and involvement.

Lewis Rambo suggested the seven stages of *conversion* process, namely context, crisis, problems, meeting, interaction, commitment, and consequences. The stages occur interactively and simultaneously in an individual.<sup>44</sup> The interaction, commitment and consequence stages are strongly emphasized to retain the integrity of the community. Some participants are willing to leave their families, hometown and occupation in order to be a part of the group/community. *Conversion* distinguishes the indigenous findings that abandon only a part of the customary tradition and take part in a new tradition.

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<sup>44</sup> Lewis Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, 16-17.

*Conversion* is associated to a number of social change assumptions, particularly social disorganization, leading to the deterioration of cultural consensus and group solidarity as well as situating people in a “search for community”, namely new values for their guidance and new group for sharing the values. According to van Bruinessen, it means that *conversion*—the acceptance of new group—is closely related to needs and aspirations that are powerfully affected by the social circumstances, although in such cases, social circumstances are not the only simple and unique causal elements.<sup>45</sup> In fact, urbanization and economic monetization lead to the increasingly deterioration of traditional social bonding.

In a traditional village, each person is the member of a fairly intimate community with conservative social control and reliable social protection and security system. A vast family network involves each member in a system of rights and obligations—in which to some extent—ensure their well-beings. On the contrary, in modern urban society, each individual interacts with far more people, and yet the relationship is relatively superficial and unaccountable. Communities like those in traditional village or extended family are lessened, and life has become more individualistic. On the one side, each person is more liberated. But on the other side, there is no longer reliable protection. Many people feel alienated and none can be trusted entirely due to the absence of social control system and all sanctions as well as people are more concerned with their personal interests.

In the context of the purification of faith, the trust on shamanic ritual and practice is also based on the belief in the existence of supernatural powers derived from the occult, jinn, or certain objects including amulets. Belief in such objects is part of the apostasy that must be eliminated.

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<sup>45</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, *Rakyat Kecil, Islam dan Politik*, Yogyakarta: Bentang Budaya, 1998, 258.

Amulet is an object that is believed to carry sacred within to saving, protecting, and giving benefit to the owner. Puritanical jihadist movements boldly disdain the belief and attempt to abolish it by propagating a rational explanation. Nevertheless, some of the preachers are once perpetrators of *kejawen* tradition. It has been admitted by Sukina that prior to his involvement in puritan movement, he is an actor of the mystique of supernatural energy and immunity, even became the leader of Barisan Syuhada Tega Pati (Basutepa). He left all non-Islamic activities after he started to join puritan group. He emphasized it in the statement:

“How can anyone believe that those bizarre objects are possessed by supernatural power and can heal people? If sick person can be cured by drinking the water dipped in stone, then (we can) dismiss hospitals, to prevent unnecessary costs. Shamanism and the reliance on sacred objects show the ignorance of Muslims who do not want to return to the Quran and Sunnah. Otherwise, they will be wiser if they return to the Quran. The genuine implementation of Islam will actually educate people, for sure.”<sup>46</sup>

For repentant people, shamanism and the confinement of amulets are obviously fallacious and opposing the principles of Islamic teachings. Edy Sunarno, a former shaman in Kartosuro, disclosed his “absolute conversion” from the magical to the religious world. He was a *digdong*—a shaman with supernatural powers, immortality, immunity, and prophecy—since he was 17 years. He inherited the power from his grandfather who is an outstanding shaman in Solo. Before joining puritan movement, he was a member of Paguyuban Pangudi Kaweruh with the guidance of the mystical teacher Kyai Dapuk, and had been a senior trainer for 45 streams in Surakarta. He explicated his experience as a puritan follower as follows:

“I was in the mosque listening to Ustadz Ahmad Sukina. The sermon suits me. He conveys the message easily and comprehensible. He is also very humble. Since my house is not too distant from his, we had discussion several times.

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<sup>46</sup> Ahmad Sukina, Ceramah Pengajian Ahad Pagi, on January 4, 2016.

I told him about my profession as a shaman and that I have some sort of supernatural powers. He challenged me to prove the powers. I was astonished then; they cannot be proved because I had never done it. From that moment, I was keen to join MTA. Shamans do perform deception regularly, they just seek for money. Currently, I am terrified of my past. *Alhamdulillah*, I can return to the straight path and I am an ordinary person now.<sup>47</sup>

Later, Edy Sunarno is often invited to travel around by preachers to telling his life experience to Muslims as a lesson and to convince them back to the pure Islam. He is also a keynote speaker in radio and television talk shows that are highly in demand by those who still believe in shamanism and amulets. His experiences as well as other former shamans are a milestone for Islamisation. Moreover, the religious factors in the rise of puritan movement are still under study.

The phenomenon of Amulet Museum reasserts Nakamura's thesis about Islamisation in Java that continues to experience a never-ending dynamics. Nakamura also suggested that Islamisation in Indonesia is an on-going process, not only in the sense that Islam continues to spread among the pagans, but also among Muslim communities who have claimed to inherit Islam since hundreds of years ago in being closer to the true Islamic teachings. In other words, Nakamura reaffirmed that more and more *abangan* communities are interested to becoming *santri*, moving towards the pure Islamic teachings and practices.<sup>48</sup>

*Conversion* occurs not because negotiation or indigenization in which these two entities subtract some of their doctrines and beliefs. Instead, it is a transition from the "older" to the "newer" worldview. *Conversion* obliges the abolition of the customary traditions and beliefs and simultaneously replaces them entirely with the new ones without any traces. The acceptance

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Edy Sunarno (a former shaman) on November 12, 2016 in Makamhaji, Kartasura sub-district, Sukoharjo regency.

<sup>48</sup> Mitsuo Nakamura, *Bulan Sabit Muncul dari Balik Pohon Beringin*, trans. Yusron Asrofi, Yogyakarta: Gajah Mada University Press, 1993, 16.

of new values is undergone as “regeneration” or a radical denial of the past and the adoption of new worldview. Obviously, *conversion* does not only occur within the inter-religious level but also among sub-cultures within a religion in a similar process like inter-religious conversion.<sup>49</sup>

New doctrines proclaimed by a charismatic leader or the adherents are in fact an amalgamation of complicated newer and older elements. The endeavor will end in vain unless they seize the mindset of a community that in some extent has already prepared for new ideas. At the same time, they must either invent something new or modify old stuff into something new. By this method, people who are seeking for new values can be drawn into new group. The shaman or the holders of amulets are those who endure a crisis of religious consciousness hence they are relatively open-minded to accept new values. Moreover, modernity has brought in the seeds of anomaly among these people.

### **Conclusion**

The phenomenon of Islamisation in Javanese society is a series of cultural transition, yet it is a continuous process. After thousands of years of embracing Hinduism, they started to accept Islam. Nevertheless, Hinduism had been entrenched within the Javanese culture thus people transformed it in such a way in order to compromise with Islamism despite of its complexity, revelation and dynamics. Based on the outlook, since the arrival of Islam in the twelfth century, there had been noticeable tension and conflicts between Islam with beliefs and local culture. Nevertheless, approximately for about four and a half centuries, the Javanese could

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<sup>49</sup> Patrick D. Bowen, “Conversion to Islam in the United States: A Case Study in Denver, Colorado”, in *International Muslim World Journal of Religious Studies* Vol. 1 No. 1 (1998):1,42-64. See also Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, “The Dynamics of Islamic Identity in North America,” *Muslims on the Americanization Path?* John L. Esposito and Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck, (Eds.) in Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998, 46.



finally recognize themselves genuinely for having a basic identity defined by Islam. In the eighteenth century, there was a very crucial development in Java, namely the strengthening of Dutch colonial power which coincided with the Revival of Islam.

The Islamisation in Java gained its momentum since the end of colonialism in Indonesia. The political, religious, social and cultural progress impinged on the dynamics of Islamisation and also santrization of the Javanese society as a whole. In the entire protracted process, there is a thing can be ascertained, the *santri* group continues to dominate, which eventually situates the *abangan* group in a defenseless state. One of the most fundamental factors behind the Javanese santrization is the rise of modern organizations among Muslims. Muslims start to establish diverse institutional structures to promote Islam and the adherents. They include MUI, Muhammadiyah, NU and Islamic mass organizations, mosques, pesantren, madrasah and Islamic schools, which successfully reach out the *abangan* groups.

At the same time, the *da'wah* and social activities are rampant. The public and private Islamic educational institutions prolifically generate progressive Muslim intelligentsia and intellectuals who serve as the pioneers in modernizing Islamic institutions. The contribution and involvement of sophisticated *santri* is increasingly perceptible among the grassroots. The "revivalist" discourse and movements massively spread throughout the country. They expand their range of movement into *abangan* society in rural areas through *da'wah* and education institutions that emphasize the virtue of "authentic Islam" as practiced by the generations of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad and his companions (*Salaf*) in their era. These efforts concurrently fortify the re-Islamisation, precisely *santrization*. Religion becomes an integral part of modernity for many Javanese communities. At the grassroots level, they appear to be

more Islamic in terms of faith, ritual, relaxation, social life, discourse, presumption and expectation. At personal level, animistic beliefs, such as the faith in shamans and amulets, are abandoned completely through the *conversion* process.

The discussion about the conversion of *abangan* into *santri* sub-culture has an implication on the future of santrization amid the dynamics of politics and democratization in Indonesia. Ricklefs has reasserted in his latest study, that Islamisation in Java is inexorable. Such an optimistic view does not necessarily declare the nonexistence of further challenges. At least, the Islamisation is accelerated by the alignment of the government and the rulers on those that have been competed to win the hearts of Indonesian society, in showing off its existence in public. It is indicated by, among others, the spread of counter-santrization issue since the beginning of the reform era. Religious-related controversies have lucratively bothered the psychology and convenience of the *santri* groups in Joko Widodo's regime, which is frequently deemed as the *abangan* political victories, i.e., the discourse of the abolition of religious column in the ID card, the demand for an apology to the PKI, the mosque burning in Papua and Aceh, the ban on the veil and moratorium of Islamic financial institutions in Bali, the shutting down of allegedly radical Islamic sites, the freezing of the Regional Regulations stipulating the implementation of Islamic law in the bureaucracy by the Ministry of Home Affairs, the grant for the column of the believer of *Aliran Kepercayaan* (partly syncretic forms of mysticism) in the ID card by the Constitutional Court, and the phenomenon of several preachers including Felix Siau, Abdul Shomat and Bachtiar Natsir. Perhaps, they are not entirely a hindrance, yet they show off their supremacy. It is returned to Islamic movements, whether they will evaluate their movement to move forward against the challenges or to surrender on the prevailing law.

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# Re-Islamisation: the conversion of subculture from Abangan into Santri in Surakarta

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