SANTRI AND ABANGAN AFTER A HALF CENTURY OF CLIFFORD GEERTZ

Amanah Nurish  
School of Strategic and Global Studies, Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia  
e-mail: amanah11@ui.ac.id

Abstract

This research paper analyzes the religious phenomenon of culture in Modjokuto or Pare, where Geertz carried out his thesis on the "Religion of Java." Although there are many pesantrens in Modjokuto, there is still a religious tradition associated with Kejawen as a local belief, particularly among rural Muslim farmers. Javanese mysticism, however, plays an important part in Muslim abangan. Some Muslim villages in Modjokuto, both NU and Muhammadiyah, are not very distinct in religious tradition. They have performed slametan, tahlilan, and ziarah as religious rituals. Kejawen's teachings are more observed by traditionalist Muslims in Modjokuto, who commonly refer to abangan as the categorization of Islam in Java. Some claim that abangan refers to the proletarian class and former followers or founders of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Some also said that Islam abangan means adherents of the teachings of Sunan Kalijaga, Syech Siti Jenar, and all the descendants of Sufi masters. In addition, we cannot argue that since the reformation of Indonesia, Islam in Java has changed and has gone forward in a number of ways. As a result, this research paper is trying to explore Islam abangan and its resurgence in detail. I recognize that the resurgence of Islam abangan in Java is somehow intended to address the increasing radicalism and Islamic sectarian. Using an anthropological approach, this research paper attempts to explore what Geertz examined in the "Religion of Java" after a half-century, which needs to be re-examined in the context of contemporary Indonesia.

Keywords: Abangan; Java; Religion, Modjokuto

Abstrak


Kata kunci: Abangan; Jawa; Agama; Modjokuto

A. INTRODUCTION

Starting with Geertz's ideas for his book "The Religion of Java" (1960) and "Modjokuto: The Social History of Indonesian Town" (1965), this research paper aims to look closely at the abangan in Modjokuto. After 1965, the debate on abangan was the first phase in which the height of the politicization of religions, including Islamization in Java, began to take place as written by Hefner, stating that religious culture was more affected by political growth factors. During this analysis, I started wondering why Geertz had selected Pare or

Modjokuto to study the religions in Java. However, Geertz's research in Modjokuto or Pare – Kediri East Java was contentious, which clashed with the pseudonym "Modjokuto" Perhaps for Geertz himself, the name of Modjokuto was a trick to conceal the original position where the political situation in Indonesia at the time was chaotic. In addition, Modjokuto was deemed not only to defend the Code of Ethics of Science exclusively, but also to protect Geertz's informants and respondents.

According to Nono Makarim, Geertz's student at Harvard University, he argued that Geertz had selected Modjokuto as his place of study since, in the 1950s, Indonesia was perceived to be one of the most advanced constitutions in the world, promising human rights and freedom of expression. Another explanation for this being that the country of Indonesia consists of a number of faiths and cultures. In addition, Modjokuto was selected to equate the anthropological tradition in the United States. In addition to these factors, Geertz considered that Modjokuto has a literate heritage and has an ancient belief in the pattern of local society, both urban and rural, where people are almost exclusively homogeneous and the people of Modjokuto are capable of engaging actively in the political movement.2

The three dichotomies on "Religion in Java" -- "santri, priyayi and abangan" have always contributed to countless debates from the past half century to the present 3. Unfortunately, in his fieldwork, Geertz did not have much interest in exploring in depth the position of modernist Islamic groups such as Muhammadiyah in Modjokuto, which they have been forming since 1933. "modernist" Muslims in Modjokuto have also succeeded in encouraging education, such as the Muhammadiyah Islamic Madrasah (MIM) Schools, which were established in 1950 and are still more developed nowadays. Maybe Geertz had only a thorough explanation why he did not pay any attention to the "modernist" Islamic classes in his research. Apparently, he chose to use the word priyayi as another "face" of nobles who hold Islamic values by combining elements of Hinduism with Javanese ancient traditions.

Many, however, said that Geertz's thoughts were more inspired by his key informants and his close friend during the fieldwork in Modjokuto, a prominent religious teacher in the

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village, or a kampung, where he was a Gontor’s pesantren alumni who successfully pioneered "English Village" (kampung inggris). He is a Muslim scholar who has learned tens of foreign languages. In summary, from the genealogy of Geertz's ideas on Islam in Java, this research paper is intended to re-examine the dichotomy of abangan in Modjokuto and how the religious activity of abangan deals with modernization and globalization. I think that after Indonesia's constitutional court accepted indigenous beliefs in November 2017, it seems abangan is more revivaled than diminishing today.

This qualitative research is focused on a socio-anthropological methodology that focuses on ethnographic approaches in which author engage in group day-to-day practices and include specific informants and respondents as resource evidence. In addition to ethnography, this research is related to historical literature by archives and documents. Data gathering methods from studies and interviews include religious figures, scholars, practitioners, social workers, etc. as influential sources. The tools and opportunities of individuals are dependent on disparities in age, ethnicity, religious background, history, social and economic status.

The study of the data gathered from fieldwork relies not just on the critical text and meaning, but also on the sociological approach to the local population. As a tool for understanding current social phenomena in society from a philosophical and psychological point of view, particularly from a social and historical point of view. Many scholars suggest that, in order to apply these approaches, researchers need to consider the meaning, not based on the subjectivity but objectivity of the researcher. The rationale for using phenomenology


as an alternative method for analyzing and researching human existence in the study of abangan in Modjokuto.

B. DISCUSSION

1. Redefinition of the Abangan

According to Geertz, abangan was associated with the identity of poor and subordinate Javanese citizens, especially farmers and laborers. Although Post-Geertzian has various abangan opinions. It was discussed in the post-Geertz studies on Islam in Java, many accepted that the word abangan had modified in terms of context. Islam abangan is a pattern of syncretism and assimilation of a kejaw combined with Hinduism and Buddhism. Post Geertzian observed abangan is a specific model of Islamisation or dakwah in Java. During Sukarno, the word abangan indicated proletarians and supporters of the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party). The dichotomy of abangan contributes to an ambivalence of interpretation, particularly after the collapse of the New Order regime. Nowadays, abangan has become a belief system among villagers in Modjokuto, both the middle class and the lower class of society.

However, Geertz's study of abangan is often understood as individuals who do not obey the Islamic laws or shariah and the customs of santri. Hefner argued that abangan was a non-standard Islam. In some abangan communities, a few of the spirits of heaven and earth might have ‘Hindu’ names, but these figures were drawn from Javanese epics and shadow plays, not a formalized tradition of Hindu knowledge. Abangan also performed rituals of a less normatively Islamic cast, including a variety of household, village, and curing rites. Some kiyai or ulema from Salaf pesantren in Modjokuto say that abangan is part of the sufism taught by Syech Siti Jenar. Abangan can be seen as a critique of the bureaucratic aspects of the structure and power relations within the pesantren and feudal society.

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8 Robert W. Hefner, “Where Have All the Abangan Gone?”, 2011, 75.

can be related to the hierarchical system of santri and priyayi as a counter-part of the Javanese people, particularly farmers and wong cilik in Modjokuto. Most religious leaders in Modjokuto also say that abangan means adherents of the teachings of Sunan Kalijaga, Syech Siti Jenar, and their descendants, including groups named kebatinan, pengayat, etc., who are not accepted as pure Muslim are still identified with abangan.

Throughout mysticism (Sufism) which epistemologically means Islamic practices it leads to purify soul and mind of human beings to achieve the truth in hakikat and makrifat. In this context, Sufism is synchronized with abangan, although Geertz's view in his dichotomy of santri, priyayi and abangan in Java that according to Hodgson point of views, tends to be influenced by Muslim modernist thinkers. Hodgson analyzed a sharp and critical arguments on the category of Islam in Java regarding the concept of polytheism. Hodgson emphasized that the term "abangan" is seen out of Islamic norms and shariah. Hodgson criticized Geertz’s ideas that more accepted the definition of modernist group about the term "shirk" when he categorized abangan. The social and religious dichotomy in Modjokuto reveals that Geertz's understanding of the two divisions of santri and abangan applies to the character of traditionalist Muslim communities, while priyayi is more Islamic and Hindu syncretism with Muslims across the palaces.

Unlike Geertz, Koentjaraningrat argued that Geertz's ideas of Java religions are the most important works in Indonesian studies, but Geertz has shortcomings in the study of Javanese culture from a variety of aspects such as the religious structure, Javanese theology and mysticism that cannot be understood by non-Javanese people. In contrast to Geertz, Koentjaraningrat preferred using the term "Agami Jawi and Santri Islamic Agami".

“The Javanese variant of the Islamic religion called 'Agami Jawi or Kejawen' is a multiple Hindu-Buddhist, and its ideas appear to be supernatural, and is mixed into one body of the belief system and is known as an Islamic religion. 'Kejawen' religion culture structure is taught through oral tradition, but there are significant sections in the process of Islamization in Java that show historical traces of holy and moral literature.”

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14 Koentjaraningrat.
Different from Koentjaraningrat, the term *abangan* is defined by Ricklefs on his publication of “*The birth of the term abangan*” saying that “*abangan*” was firstly raised by Dutch Christians, Hoezoo in 1855. Ricklefs argued that “*abangan*” means profane people. Likewise, the *abangan* groups are people who keep ritual meals or *slametan*, but are not *slamet* or protected, since they do not completely follow Islamic laws or *shariah*. Later, the word *abangan* has been more grounded after Clifford Geertz published his thesis on Modjokuto. Ricklefs also argued in his study that *abangan* is not only common to Muslims, but also to other religious groups, such as Christian culture.

The binary opposition of *abangan* is *putihan* identified as santri or people affiliated with pesantren following the Islamic laws and *shariah*. According to Harthoorn, *abangan* and *putihan* are phenomena which emerge in response to the spread of Islamic revivalism. This group was quite strategically built since the disparities between the *abangan* and the *putihan* in the Dutch colonial era contributed to the separation of the social and economic classes of the Javanese society. Ricklefs stressed *abangan* vis-à-vis *putihan*, where two Christian missionaries from the Netherlands, Heozoo and Ganswijk, misread the comprehension of *abangan* and *putihan* of the Javanese culture. Ricklefs also did not explicitly accuse the distribution of *abangan* and *putihan*, since the Dutch missionaries in the 1800s told them they were in the vicinity of Semarang, Kediri and Malang. It was a major error, according to Ricklefs, to infer the difference between *abangan* and *putihan*. Categories of *putihan* and *abangan* were very popular among the people of Javanese at that time. The word *abangan* and *putihan* is like a "myth" created by Dutch missionaries to form the Javanese culture in order to increase economic and political influence. Meanwhile, according to Sapardi Djoko Damono (1989), the *abangan* itself has etymologically distinct interpretations from the viewpoint of Javanese culture as follows:

“According to Javanese oral tales, the term *abangan* is believed to come from the Arabic word "aba'an." The Javanese language reads the letter 'ain' to be 'ngain.' The meaning of the words is more or less "inconsistent" or "those who leave." Hence, ulema used to assign nickname to people who convert Islam but do not follow Shari'a (Javanese: sarengat) is aba'an, which is called "abangan". So, the word "abang" here is

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17 Ricklefs, “A History of Modern Indonesia since c.1200.”
18 Ricklefs, “A History of Modern Indonesia since c.1200.”
not from the Javanese word "abang" which means red, but from the Arabic word "aba'an"." 19

Eric Wolf on his book entitled "Farmers: In the Anthropological Review" (1966) supported Geertz’s ideas regarding with the three dychotomies of Religion in Java (santri, priyayi, and abangan). Religious pattern of farmers is abangan while the opponent is in the priyayi. The rich class of traders and peasants in Javanese society are generally classified as santri. 20 Santri and abangan are religious and social patterns to classify Javanese society based on social and economic classes. The literal meaning of santri is “students in religious schools” although in contemporary discourse the term santri refers to the people who uphold shariah-centered interpretation of Islam that Ricklefs defined as mystic synthesis in Java. 21 Santri are those who practice the five pillars of Islam (Sholat, Hajj, zakat, etc.) while abangan is people who rejected Islam’s pillars but they still practice communal meals or slametan and sometimes they also practice tahliil like santri. However, since reformation the definition of abangan and santri are changing especially the term abangan has shifted in wider space and social class. 22 The definition of abangan nowadays can not only be seen as social category of rural farmers but we can also find ‘abangan’ in urban communities.

2. Abangan, NU, and Pesantren

The inhabitants of abangan and kejawen have a close relationship with NU (Nahdlatul Ulama), pesantren, and nearby sugar factories. While they have different positions, as farmers and labor abangan and kejawen communities agree that their role is to maintain environment, culture and social harmony. With supernatural and divine strength, spiritual kejawen are also trusted as guardians of "safety". The Sugar Factory in Ngadirejo is one of the examples, and it's about 39 km from Modjokuto. Here abangan and kejawen employed as farmers and laborers have a significant role to play in the economic distribution of sugar cane plantation. The mode of processing and sale of sugar factories in this small town preserves a reciprocal system as part of the Javanese culture. In several examples, the mutual exchange arrangement continues to be practiced by abangan and kejawen. During the Dutch colonial period, most farmers and sugar factory workers, after earning pay, spent their money just for pleasure, such

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as alcoholic drinks, and did not apply the idea of long-term economic or financial sustainability.

Farmers who used to be part of the Union of Indonesian Farmers (BTI/Buruh Tani Indonesia) and sugar factory workers are very strong with abangan and kejawen. It's unusual to see santri working in businesses or factories. The sugar factory in Ngadirejo used ceremonial rituals to connect sugar production activities to "mystical power" and this practice is for the purpose of good production. People believe that the sacred "rites" that such rituals have been performed since the factory was first built. One of the rituals is Giling Manten, which is planned to preserve the fertility of sugarcane land and the sustainability of sugar production. The practice of Giling Manten as a local heritage has been active since the Netherlands. The purpose of this ritual refers to the socio-cultural interaction between indigenous peoples and the sugar factories founded by the Dutch. This tradition can also be interpreted as a motive for the development of a cohesive and unique economic structure that combines farmers, workers and factory owners.

The Giling Manten rite, involving laborers, farmers, religious leaders and local populations, is a style of development policy in which the role of elements of community and communities plays an important role. Giling Manten normally performs multiple rituals, such as: (1). Slametan or shared food (2). Choosing a healthy sugar cane (3). Slaying the Buffalos (4). Producing dolls and food offerings for the bride. This magical rite is designed to preserve the vitality of sugarcane cultivation and sugar factories. This practice was first formulated by Mbah Wongso (a village elder) well-known as a spiritual figure who was able to communicate with the sugar factory guards. As mentioned in the previous section, abangan and kejawen are closer to NU taking these two cultures together. However, the growth of pesantren after 1965-1966 plays an important role in the Islamisation of abangan and kejawen. "The involvement of NU in political practice ended in 1984 and the second round of NU which was full of glory was over with disappointment". Farmers' societies and staff who were abangan and kejawen after 1966 finally got closer to NU and pesantren. As ex-members and followers of the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party), abangan and kejawen have more social and religious links with the NU. The four values of dakwah within the NU organisation have been active in adopting abangan

and kejawen. (1) *Tasamuh*, which means a tolerant approach in reaction to differences of opinion (2). *Tawazun*, which means a balanced mindset in the name of Allah and humanity (3). *Tawasut* and *I’tidal* which mean fair and right attitudes to avoid bad deeds (4). *Amar ma’ruf nahi munkar*, which means promoting positive deeds in order to discourage acts that weaken the ideals of life. These four ideals of *dakwah* are the national, spiritual and religious capital of the United States. In fact, the *dakwah* model of NU being more embraced by *abangan* and *kejawen* is also seen as an obstacle to missionary "Islamic purity" that avoids the local custom of Javanese culture such as *ziarah*, *khaul*, *slametan*, etc. While santri was the opposite of *abangan* and *kejawen* before the tragedy of 1965, the abangan and kejawen in Modjokuto remain were "symbiotic mutualism" Many *abangans* and *kejawens* sent their children to *pesantren* to study.

It is clear that we can differentiate between *abangan* because *kejawen*, and both categories do not follow sharia; they still have parallels in terms of practice and ritual. While there are small and large *pesantrens* in several villages that were founded after 1965, *kejawen* as a belief system is well-maintained by *abangans* in Modjokuto. Local communities in Modjokuto, represented by *kejawen*, such as *Sapta Darma*, *Hardapusara*, *Susila Budi Darma* (Subud), *Paguyuban Ngesti Tunggal* (Pangestu), *Paguyuban Sumarah* and several others, exist. The oldest *kejawen* is *Hardapusara*, founded in 1895 by Kyai Kusumawicitra of Purworejo-Central Java, while *Sapta Darma* is the youngest *kejawen* founded in Modjokuto in 1950s. *Sapta Darma* has wider communities that are approximately 4 million followers in several regions like East Java, Central Java, West Java, East Kalimantan, and South Sumatra. There are also many practitioners of *Sapta Darma* living in New Zealand, Malaysia and Japan. According to Kamil (1990), the largest number of followers of *Sapta Darma* are in Central Java, such as Pati, Klaten, Purworejo, and now the base of association of followers of *Sapta Darma* is in Yogyakarta. Many of them are peasants and laborers, like the *abangan* people, and the representatives of this group are mainly *priyayi*.

Decision of the Indonesian Constitutional Court (MK/Mahkamah Konstitusi) on 7 November 2017 that recognised indigenous faiths or aliran *pegayat kepercayaan*, including *kejawen*. It’s a positive sign of a religious life in Modjokuto. This opens up a broader field of religious equality for minority communities. However, the current *abangan* and *kejawen* in Modjokuto have more recently formed on the soil. In the case of Modjokuto, modernisation and globalization are leading to current *abangan* and *kejawen*. Religious life, faith, and

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cultural transition and globalization have been explored by academics from diverse backgrounds where the community is constantly dealing with severe economic challenges and technical advances. Recently, it is popular for abangan and kejawen to preserve their life with shamanic practices and go to 'sacred sites' to search 'wealth' or pesugihan and 'supernatural powers' or ilmu kesaktian. Shamanic practices are seen by abangan and kejawen as a sacred legacy that is also problematic with a pesantren tradition.

Besides shamanic rituals, tarekat as a mystical movement through pesantren is also popular with abangan and kejawen, followed by older people over 50 years of age, most of whom are farmers and traders. Martin van Bruinessen claimed that tarekat was a Sufi group under the guidance of a Sheik who extended his teachings to his disciples. Tarekat is also meant as a path taken by a Sufi candidate to attain ma'rifat. Sheik Yusup Makassari (1623-1699) was the first person to bring this prayer to Indonesia. Its distribution ranges from Makasar, Kalimantan, Sumatra, Central Java and East Java. Assimilation, acculturation, syncretism, are indeed as key success story in the spread of religion in Java.

C. CONCLUSION

Speaking of the religious life of society in Modjokuto, it reveals that Islam and kejawen are well maintained as a belief system. The Mystic Synthesis of the Javanese Culture is emerging in Mataraman areas such as Madiun, Kediri and the Brantas River valley. Back in the political situation before 1965, residents in this small town were religiously and economically difficult to identify. Santri and abangan were politically engaged with NU and PKI/Partai Komunis Indonesia (Indonesian Communist Party) but some were still loyal to Masjumi, while priyayi appeared to support the PNI (Indonesia Nationalist Party).

Due to the unstable political climate in the late 1950s and the 1960s, there was a religious polarization in the framework of society. Religion and politics were starting to happen at the time. What is happening now, most of the people known as an abangan after the catastrophe of 1965 became more religious. Much of the abangan now follows local

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29 Koentjaraningrat, Kebudayaan Jawa.

30 The Masyumi was not too dominant compared with PNI, PKI, and the NU Party. But usually supporters of Masyumi were living in urban where urban people were predominant as priyayi.
traditions. At least hundreds of local beliefs exist regularly in Kediri, although at least some local beliefs are practiced by many people in Modjokuto/Pare:

1. Sapto Darmo
2. Penghayat
3. Kejawen
4. Kepercayaan
5. Suwong
6. Jawa
7. Etc.

Indeed, the revival of Islam *abangan* is a new religious phenomenon that can be differentiated in a variety of categories. In the first place, religious *abangans* are still participating in religious practices such as *tariat*, *tahlil* and *ziarah*. While they are known as *abangans* who become *santri*, they cannot read the Qur'an and do not often pray five times a day. Second, deterministic *abangan* means that they do not totally follow the customs and practices of *santri*, but often participate in communal ceremonies, pray for *idul fitri* and *idul adha*, even though they do not fast during *ramdhan*, *ziarah* and *slametan*. It's *abangan-kejawen*. The *abangan-santri* and *abangan-kajawen* are farmers from the lower to the middle classes. I think that the fertile movement of *abangan* at this time is, possibly, a form of resistance to modernity and globalization. I think that this can be interpreted as an organic prevention of the flow of religious radicalism and the growth of the trans-national Islamic movement after more than a half century of Clifford Geertz.

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