

# **Durga's Mosque**

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# **Durga's Mosque**

**Cosmology, Conversion and Community  
in Central Javanese Islam**

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**INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES**  
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# PREFACE

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What's in the *umma*? The *umma* is not a congregation (*jamā'a*, Arabic; *jemaah*, Indonesian)<sup>1</sup> of a given mosque, but the entire community of faithful. For the word *umma* (Ind. Jav. *umat*) there can be no translation into English, only a paraphrase for an attempted definition. Can an *umma* be localized, that is to say, does it have boundaries, whether ethno-linguistic, national, or otherwise? Can we write a book, for instance, about the Javanese *umma* as a vector for the introduction of individualism in Java? There certainly is an *umma* in Java, but clearly it is not only made up of Javanese. Recently, the leader (*penghulu*) of the largest mosque in Surakarta (Central Java) came from the eastern island of Sumbawa, and no one found this unusual. Indeed, the *umma* is cosmopolitan. Does this mean that the *umma* is as ethnically varied as the entire Indonesian archipelago? Should we include in it the Muslims of Malaysia, Sulu (the Philippines), and Petani (southern Thailand)? If one begins to think in terms of a transnational virtual *umma*, it often becomes so vague, that locality disappears as a pertinent marker of identity. In this study, we are committed to describing the development of the *umma* of a given area, Kaliasa. Central Java is the historic heartland of the island and our focus precludes a broader comparative perspective.

Arjun Appadurai (1996, ch. 8) pointed out that ethnographers have long been occupied with studying how local subjects are produced by particular rites of passage. But the "local" *umma* in Central Java has become over time, since 1660, less and less preoccupied with incarnating locality, with taking over the social space and clientele of older "Javanese" deities like Durga. In the course of eighteenth century, this network of mosques spread from city to city and then out into the countryside once royal patronage became a burden as much as an advantage. The urban mosques and rural Koranic schools, began to realize that their teachers who had studied in Medina and Mecca and their faithful who had done the *hajj* (Ind. *haj*), were much less motivated in incarnating local identity than in propagating a renewed vision of what it meant to be a Muslim based on contacts with currents of Muslim thinking in the Middle East. The recent flood of Muslim publication from Yogyakarta (LKIS) and Bandung (Mizan) indicates that this interest is on the increase. Paradoxically while these ongoing connections to Middle Eastern Muslim thought in all its diversity is still being strengthened, Javanese Islam remains

very Javanese. Though increasingly sophisticated in its understanding of contemporary Muslim reflection throughout the world, the *umma* in Java may not be made up only of Javanese, it nonetheless remains very self-reflective and Javanese.

Let me give an example of the applicability of one kind of Middle Eastern Muslim thinking. Following the Gulf War in May 1991 (Talal Assad 1993, ch. 6), a debate in Saudi Arabia began with an open letter to King Fahd from a hundred of *'ulamā* claiming that the “rights of the individual and society” were not being guaranteed. Since this criticism (*nasīha*) dealt with issues affecting the entire “local” Saudi *umma*, it could be made public. The juridical precedent of Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) was cited as a justification of this effort to hold the king accountable as a moral person in the public domain. As al'Za'ayr, a well-known Saudi preacher and lecturer on moral and political criticism (*nasīha*; Assad 1993, pp. 214–23) had been saying, the virtuous Muslim is not judged on what he believes, but on how he lives in that moral space (*umma*) which links all those who are bound to Allah. “The first foundation of independence for the *umma* is to know that it is indissolubly bound to God.” This requires not blind obedience but self-evaluation. “If one doesn't secure one's own independent thinking the *umma* is made into an appendage of others. And if that happens, the *umma's* essence (*huwiyya*) and its independence disappear together.” This view helps us to understand that the social space of the *umma* is indeed a “singular plural”. Based on the monadic character of Allah to whom all submit unconditionally, the *umma* is inconceivable without this focus, but this community is realized by personal piety and a common religious life of individual Muslims. This kind of pious lifestyle has been transposed to Java for centuries now. Recently it has again been applied in *da'wa* campaigns to “purify” rural Islam of its Javanese-ness, and in urban contexts to criticize the government of the Indonesian Republic for its corruption and irresponsibility towards its people. If Muslim religion is as much about virtue than about credos, it is because lacking virtue, no practical reasoning can be undertaken by a Muslim. For as Za'ayr shows, the *umma's* piety is deployed not in a secular social space but in a divine and eternal religious *and* civil space where Muslim criticism, punishment, and power have their place.

This book provides one explanation of how Islam in Java stayed Javanese for so long and how now (2004) it has rejuvenated itself, changing in the light of “purer” Muslim models and a renewed Muslim fervour, at the same time as splintering into political factions as post-colonial independence offered it the possibility, not only to deploy its moral authority, but also to gain and exercise power. All this is deliberately seen from the locality of a rural area



north of the city of Surakarta, where one can perceive how the holism of Javanese cosmology was lost and then sought after anew as the urban fibre of Surakarta began to tear apart under the Soeharto dictatorship in the 1980s. Reinventions of lost cosmologies are rarely successful, but they do reveal on the part of those who rediscover them a degree of self-understanding. Those Javanese Muslims whose lives have been jeopardized by the unfulfilled promises of democracy are an ethnic majority; they are not the worst off among the ethnic components of what was supposed to become a republic. Society as a project of modernity in Indonesia is now being called into question using such concepts as society without the state (*masyarakat tanpa negara*). Just as the attributes of religion are seen as too visible, too liable to political manipulation (vote Muslim!), so too are the pretensions of popular representation seen to be an illusion in an ongoing crisis where downscaling, using the local resources of the neighbourhood to protect one's family against state terror is envisioned at the local level as more viable than the large scale networks of a governance that are manipulated top to bottom.

Over the last thirty years, so many Javanese have taken of their time to help me understand their language and culture that I could not acknowledge or thank them all here. The earliest contacts I had in 1973 with the village of Krendawahana, the stepping off point in the upper Solo river basin of the volume, was with *radèn*<sup>2</sup> Sastrodiwiryo who was its *lurah* (mayor) until the early 1980s. In October 2003, his family was still surviving, barely, as was that of the elderly *modin* (muezzin), Amah Achiar, who lives directly behind the widow of Sastrodiwiryo. The economic crisis of 1997 had left deep wounds, despite what the macro economic surveys say about current recovery.

Radèn Tanaya, an almanac writer and literati living modestly in the shadow of the Dutch fort Vastenburg, introduced me in 1973 to the Javanese use of corresponding sets of classifications and the mythology that deploys these networks of categorical relations. Many literati at the Reksapustaka, the Mangkunagaran palace library in Surakarta some fifteen kilometres to the south of the village of Krendawahana, helped me locate and read the descriptions of this palace's *Maesa Lawung* offerings at the tertre of the goddess Durga in that village. Friends in Surakarta lodged me with their families and helped me to transcribe recordings and translate texts that proved difficult for me. Cornelios Reismartono, Yermia Prasetyo Yidi Modorumpoko, Yustina Ramtina Wulandari, and Stephanos Siagalaksana were my assistants in gathering and analysing the materials for Chapters 12, 13, and 14. Without their help the work would have taken much more time and would not have been as interesting. Kyai Haji Dian Nafi' director of the Windan (Makam Haji, Kartasura) branch of the

al-Muayyad (Mangukuyudan) Koranic school (*pondok* pesantren), as well as his collaborators, introduced me to many other Muslims in the Surakarta area who helped me to understand how they analysed sociologically the current situation using their Muslim values.

In Europe over the years, I have received much encouragement and criticism from anthropologists, historians, and philologists interested in Java. These friends not only took a professional interest in my writing, but also helped me believe in the conclusion of a project that at times seemed too ambitious an undertaking. I am deeply aware of how much support I received from Ben Arps, Andrew Beatty, Tim Behrend, Valdimir Braginsky, Clara Brakel, Peter Carey, Robert Hefner, Frans Huskens, Charles Macdonald, Jan Mrazek, David Parkin, Merle Ricklefs, and Jessica Rose. Since 1998 I have received a great deal of support from the ERASME (CNRS, Paris). from its members Cécile Barraud and André Itéanu, and especially from Daniel de Coppet (+2002) who supported my overall approach to Java as an instance of a hybrid holistic society.

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## NOTES

1. Spelling conventions of foreign words in Indonesian and Javanese are not fixed. The first time a term is used in this book, we have tried to give its Arabic or Indonesian/Javanese spellings in parentheses. When an Indonesian or Javanese author uses a term in his native language or cites a foreign term we have tried to adopt the spelling he or she used if this is recognizable. Abbreviations: Ar. (Arabic); Ind. (Indonesian); Jav. (Javanese); San. (Sanskrit).
2. Javanese titles. Some are capitalized (Ki Dhalang XXXX) as if they were the proper name and others are lower-cased and in italics (*ki dhalang* XXX). We need to flag this ambiguity; the Javanese practice (to leave them capitalized as if they were part of the proper name, which any Javanese know they aren't) is confusing to the non-Javanese.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This book, long in its gestation, is the result of many years of research. Certain ideas have been treated partially in the author's previously published articles, published in French or in English, listed below. Chapters 6, 10, and 13 are revised versions of these previously published articles.

- Ch. 1: "The Body as a House in Javanese Society". In *De la Hutte au Palais, sociétés "à maison" en Asie du sud-est insulaire*, edited by Charles Macdonald, pp. 133–52. Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1987.
- "The Idiom of Siblingship". In *De la Hutte au Palais sociétés "à maison" en Asie du sud-est insulaire*, edited by Charles Macdonald, pp. 209–17. Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1987.
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