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From Puzzle to Paradigm: A Kuhnian Perspective on Javanese Islam

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Abstract

Drawing on Kuhn's understanding of scientific paradigms as exemplary ways of problem solving, this article critically assesses the current status of the study of Javanese Islam, in particular the long-standing debate on its nature. Is it a syncretist, animist religion or is it essentially Islamic? An analysis from a Kuhnian perspective indicates that both stances are actually the outcome of the same standardized theoretical approach. Consequentially, certain phenomena that are usually considered part of the Javanese religious condition now appear as anomalies of a paradigm. They will remain unsolvable, unless different theoretical approaches are developed. Locating a central assumption in the research into non-Western cultures – the universality of religion – is a step in that direction. From there, generating new descriptions and new research questions becomes a possibility.

Keywords

Javanese Islam – paradigm – philosophy of science – religious studies – Javanese studies

This investigation into the study of Javanese Islam is guided by Kuhn's model of scientific practice. The objective is to bring clarity to a central debate in Javanese Studies – that on the nature of Javanese Islam – and to suggest a more productive way of tackling the issues that are keeping it in its current deadlock. Employing Kuhn's idea of paradigms in the field of religious studies is not new. As early as 1973, John Hick called for a Copernican revolution, or a

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paradigm shift, in the philosophy of religion (1973: vii). James Samuel Preus has discussed the naturalist paradigm in the study of religion (1987). More recently, Oliver Krüger (2022) proposed that religious studies is actually undergoing a paradigm shift, from an Aristotelian to a relational. Space does not permit to properly engage with these and other works.¹ However, while it has become common in the humanities to equate a paradigm with a theoretical framework or a set of assumptions that underly theory formation, I share with Krüger the emphasis on Kuhn's understanding of a paradigm as a problem-solving activity. As will become clear, such an understanding allows for a fruitful analysis of the issues at stake and opens doors to new solutions. It is well known that Kuhn's model of scientific practice has met with criticism, in particular his proposal that paradigms are incommensurable. This has often been interpreted as scientific truth being relative to a specific paradigm and consequentially that scientific progress over paradigms is not possible. However, Kuhn did not think of scientific progress as a process by which we come closer to the truth, but rather as providing better, more reliable, and more comprehensive solutions to certain problems. In that sense progress over paradigms is indeed possible.² We will apply these ideas to the debate surrounding Javanese Islam.

Today, few people would argue about what religion the majority of the Javanese confess to. It is of course Islam. However, this apparent consensus hides a long-standing discussion. For quite some time now, two kinds of Islam are thought to exist alongside each other, which for the sake of convenience can be called "Javanese Islam" and "International Islam." The latter term refers to a transnational Islam, which can be found in the wider world. The Javanese who adhere to International Islam are Sunni, and follow the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence. Obviously, many Muslims outside of Java fall into the same category. Moreover, the Javanese adherents of this Islam have been connected to their fellow believers in many other parts of the world for over half a millennium. Javanese Islam, on the contrary, is considered unique to the island. Because of its peculiar features, it is the object of both academic and non-academic fascination and enquiry. Javanese Muslims, so the story goes, besides being Muslim, also uphold religious beliefs and practices, that have, one would be inclined to think, little to nothing to do with Islam. Upon closer inspection, such beliefs and practices might even seem to run counter to central tenets

1 For a discussion of Preus's views on the naturalistic paradigm, see Balagangadhara 2005: 144–173. Gavin D'Costa (1984) and George Loughlin (1985) cross swords regarding Hick's Copernican revolution.

2 See Krüger 2022: 63–67 for an excellent summary of Kuhn's approach and the critique on Kuhn's idea of incommensurability.

of Islam. Consider, for example, the following testimony of a corporal in the service of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) by the name of Christophorus Schweitzer, who lived on Java during the 1680s:

The Javanese, [the] proper inhabitants of this island; most of them [are] black-yellow folks, who around their waist wear a skirt of linen or silk, and who have themselves circumcised like the Turks: otherwise they worship a fabricated statue with a lion head; venerate sun and moon, etc.

FRIK ET AL. 1694: 351³

Venerating the sun and the moon and worshipping a fabricated statue with a lion's head appear to be religious practices that run counter to the Islamic principle of *tawhid*, the oneness of God, the principle that as a Muslim one can only worship Allah. Schweitzer's description is not an isolated instance. Many generations of Western visitors to Java observed such practices and over time, from the descriptions of their experiences, the religion of the Javanese came to be understood as a mixture of Islam with other religions, such as animism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, this mixture has been labeled syncretist, which carries the connotation of it not being truly Islamic. Especially during the colonial period, Islam in Java was often considered to be but a thin veneer, barely covering the Javanese true religious disposition: a syncretist animism. Particularly from a postcolonial vantage point, this take on Javanese religion has increasingly come under attack, and has been supplanted by an alternative viewpoint: Javanese Islam is not a syncretist religion, it is actually truly Islamic, albeit in a Javanese way. However, despite the latter being the currently dominant position, the matter is hardly settled. Even today, the nature of Javanese Islam is still a contentious issue, a topic that is surrounded by an apparently interminable debate. This discussion is further complicated by two interrelated issues. On the one hand, there is a continuous deepening or intensification of the Islamization of Java, which has contributed to International Islam becoming ever more dominant and Javanese Islam allegedly being on the brink of complete dissolution (Ricklefs 2012: 446). This implies that the discussion is turning from the socio-cultural into the merely historical, and might at some point be without contemporary reference. On the other hand, it is not always clear which practices and beliefs instantiate Javanese Islam and which International Islam. As Islam spreads, it incorporates local, cultural, or religious practices – just like any other religion that travels. In doing so, these are adjusted so as to ensure that

3 Unless noted otherwise, translations are my own.

they do not conflict with the teachings of Islam. For example, in the course of Islamizing a ritual, certain “heterodox” parts will be adjusted or eliminated. Often, the end result is also called Javanese Islam. In other words, the distinction between International and Javanese Islam can be blurry.

This article acknowledges these and other complications. It intends to bring some clarity to the matter by representing the debate on Javanese Islam in terms of a spectrum along which the different academic positions can be plotted. Its focus is on uncovering the theoretical structure underlying the debate, which in turn will be analyzed from a Kuhnian perspective. First, it situates the study of the religion of the Javanese in a much larger paradigm that entails the Western study of non-Western cultures. Second, it employs Kuhn’s model of scientific *practice*, in which paradigms are understood as exemplary ways of scientific problem solving. This approach permits the identification of key aspects of this debate as scientific anomalies. Third, the article discusses a major assumption inherent to this paradigm: the universality of religion. Last, it presents an alternative reflection on *agama* as tradition instead of religion.

1 The Orientalism of Javanese Islam

Situating the scholarly debate on the nature of Javanese Islam within a theoretical framework that is demonstrably Western does not entail the claim that the debate is only carried out by Westerners, but that the framework or worldview within which Javanese Islam as a conceptual entity emerged is a Western one and that the debate on its nature, both in its Orientalist and postcolonial incarnation, is embedded in this framework. The conceptual roots of Javanese Islam can be traced back to Western eyewitness accounts from as early as the seventeenth century. An exhaustive genealogy goes beyond the confines of this article. Hence, the genesis of the concept and the debate it sparked are illustrated with a selection of sources. It is relevant to note that early descriptions of the religion of the Javanese – roughly from the early sixteenth to the late eighteenth century – are rare and usually superficial. Often these descriptions are based on hearsay and do not go beyond pointing out that the Javanese are “Mohammedans” or heathens. Only gradually do such descriptions become slightly more extensive. It is striking to what extent these treatises copy, very often *ad verbatim*, each other’s descriptions. For the purpose of this article, however, the focus is on the evolution in the conceptualization of Javanese religion. A next phase in that evolution is illustrated by the account of rear

admiral Johan Stavorinus, who, while employed by the VOC, visited Java several times between 1768 and 1778. On the religion of the Javanese, he noticed the following:

Their religion is that of the Mohammedans; yet is accompanied by many superstitions, which they have retained from the religion of their ancestors, who were all Heathens; the further to the interior, the more they cannot form any other ideas, besides those that fall within the immediate reach of their gross senses.

STAVORINUS 1798: 270

Stavorinus clearly acknowledged that the religion of the Javanese was Islam and, just like Schweitzer a hundred years earlier, he claimed the Javanese also adhered to other beliefs (superstitions). However, Stavorinus added a qualification: these beliefs stem from Java's previous religions. A couple of decades later, during the British interregnum of 1811–1816, Thomas Stamford Raffles, then Lieutenant-Governor of the Dutch East Indies, made the same point: "Their profession of Mohametanism has not relieved them from the superstitious prejudices and observances of an anterior worship: they are thus open to the accumulated delusions of two religious systems" (1817: 1:245).

During this same period, which marks the beginning of scientific research into Java, Western scholars came to identify this "anterior worship" as Hinduism and Buddhism. John Crawfurd, Resident Governor at the court of Yogyakarta, and serving under Raffles, discussed several examples that should illustrate just how much Javanese Islam had retained from Hinduism. One example was the role of the Javanese priests, who "are the successors in office, and almost in duty, to the priest and astrologer of the Hindu village," another was certain Javanese religious festivals, such as "Rabbi ul awal," which commemorated the birth of the Prophet (Crawfurd 1820: 2:262, 266). The latter, according to Crawfurd, was in all probability instituted to replace a Hindu festival. He regarded this as "a discreet concession made to the Javanese by the first Mahomedan missionaries" (262). Although Crawfurd evaluated such a concession positively, it raised doubts as to the truly Islamic character of the festival, since "[e]very part of the ceremony puts Mahomedan decorum at defiance" (263).

Within a matter of decades, the conceptualization of the religion of the Javanese received another refinement, when the mix of Islam with Hinduism, Buddhism, and animism was labeled syncretist. The first person to describe the religion of the Javanese – or Javanism – in these terms was the Dutch missionary Samuel Harthoorn.

It [Javanism] is not an original religious doctrine, not an original system, but the unnatural union of the old religious service with the Indic and Arabic religion and philosophy. The old religious service [consists] of the worship of nature and the adjuration of ghosts, enriched with a couple of ideas from elsewhere.

HARTHOORN 1860: 111

Elsewhere in the same report, Harthoorn called this unnatural union “syncretism,” meaning “a boundless confusion of ideas” the cause of which lies in the supposed inertia and underdeveloped mental capabilities of the Javanese (1860: 246–247). The same sentiment can be found in the works of Harthoorn’s contemporary, the missionary Carel Poensen. His characterization of Javanese Islam reads as follows:

The religion of the Javanese world is the product of Buddhism, Brahmanism, Shivaism, Mohammedanism, and so forth, not processed and brought to a whole, but all mixed up and miraculously confused ... A number of eras and occurrences has brought the Javanese world into contact with confessors of different religions; it has adopted something from each, outwardly and often unconsciously.

POENSEN 1865: 178

The reports of Poensen and Harthoorn were often used as data in the works of their contemporaries. Additionally, their conceptualization of a syncretist Javanese religion – be it Javanese Islam or Javanism – was very influential. Hence, it is safe to state that around the 1860s the image of a syncretist Javanese religion had fully crystallized.

Two observations are relevant for the discussion at hand. First, this image or *Gestalt* is the product of an extended process. The above discussed quotations reflect a genealogy in which each new generation of descriptions depends upon the previous. That is, from very early on, Western observers had laid down the conceptual structure with which to capture what they considered to be the religion of the Javanese. This conceptual structure did not fundamentally change, but only grew in terms of detail and refinement. A case in point is the identification of the former religions of the Javanese as Hinduism and Buddhism, which replaced the older label of “Heathenism.” Similarly, the qualification of syncretism supplants the older idea of mixture. Hence, what we see here is a relatively stable conceptualization of the Javanese religious condition. However, it was not executed by the Javanese themselves, but by Westerners.

Second, these descriptions display a tendency to think of Javanese Muslims as not proper, but only superficial Muslims. This sentiment is expressed by, for example, Raffles who noted that the “Mahomedan religion, as it at present exists on Java, seems only to have penetrated the surface, and to have taken but little root in the heart of the Javans” (1817: 2:5). This alleged superficiality of faith lays bare the fundamentally problematic nature of these descriptions: they portray Javanese Muslims as infringing upon the principle of *tawhid*. In this particular context, it means that the belief in one God, Allah, cannot go together with the belief in and worship of other deities. However, this is exactly what the religious behavior of Javanese Muslims is said to be. Especially in the manner that Poensen and Harthoorn used the term, syncretism means that certain contradictory religious tenets are brought together in one religion. This is why they characterized Javanese religion as an unnatural union and as miraculously confused. The derogatory connotations are difficult to miss. After all, in order to make sense of such a seemingly inconsistent religious system, one would either need to claim that the Javanese do not understand what it means to be a Muslim or that they maintain to be Muslim, but in fact are not.

Summarizing from these colonial-era accounts of a (syncretist) Javanese Islam, the Javanese emerge as less than truly Muslim. They are self-professed Muslims who concurrently uphold religious beliefs and practices that run counter to the principle of *tawhid*. Moreover, they are either indifferent to or unaware of these inconsistencies, which basically reflects their low evolutionary development, their confinement to a semi-barbarian state. This is what is considered the Orientalism of Javanese Islam and more recent scholarship has attempted to rectify this.

2 A Postcolonial Rebuttal

The connotation that adherence to a syncretist religion undermines the status of the Javanese as Muslims did not escape scholars in the second half of the twentieth century, especially since Edward Said's *Orientalism* rendered most of the scholarly production from the colonial era as almost by definition suspect. Ever since, a strong tendency to insist upon the Islamic essence of Javanese Islam has been a noticeable trend in the postcolonial literature.

Such literature renders Javanese Islam as a “local Islam” or “native Islam” (Woodward 1989; Florida 1997). These concepts convey the idea that Javanese Islam is a Javanese expression of Islam, implying that the Javanese are truly Muslim, albeit in a Javanese way. This position also recognizes the presence

of a more orthodox and modernist Islam in Java (International Islam). The basic argument is that in the process of the Islamization of Java, the Islam that had reached the island – usually identified as Sufism – assimilated many local, native elements. These range from “mundane” things, such as architecture and clothing, to more “elevated” aspects, such as art, spiritual rituals, and traditions. This argument is often coupled with a critique of the Orientalist viewpoint. First, the Orientalist viewpoint is thought to essentialize the Javanese as second-tier Muslims. After all, theirs is only a superficial Islam. Moreover, it assumes to know who is a true Muslim and who is not. This kind of arrogance belittles the Javanese and turns them into an inferior Other. Second, the Orientalist account is not the product of disinterested scholarship. Rather, it is deemed an essential building block in a larger Orientalist discourse that was designed to legitimize colonial hegemony. Hence, as the postcolonial position has it, the idea of the syncretist Javanese Muslim is but the product of a willful imagination.

At this point, two very distinct views on Javanese Islam have been isolated. On the one hand, Javanese Islam is depicted as an essentially syncretist religion and only superficially Islamic. On the other hand, Javanese Islam is thought to be an Islamic religion in essence, which has assimilated pre-Islamic beliefs and practices. The first view is usually considered distinctly Orientalist, the second distinctly postcolonial. However, as I argue below, the Orientalist perspective is being reproduced in postcolonial literature and the postcolonial viewpoint had already been formulated in Orientalist scholarship. This being the case, there are good reasons to assume a continuity between Orientalist and postcolonial scholarship.

2.1 *The Orientalism of Postcolonialism: Clifford Geertz and Said's Humanism*

The importance of Said's 1978 *Orientalism* for the critical assessment of the study of non-Western cultures cannot be overstated. It made visible to a large public, both academic and lay, the gross misrepresentations present in much of this academic output. As discussed above, according to Said and the postcolonial scholarship in his wake, these misrepresentations are originally motivated by political concerns, but are also attributable to scholars being unaware of the extent to which they themselves are embedded in an Orientalist narrative. Hence, besides deconstructing the Orientalist narrative, Said also stressed the value of disinterested scholarship, which he refers to as humanism, which is the attempt: “to dissolve Blake's mind-forg'd manacles so as to be able to use one's mind historically and rationally for the purposes of reflective understanding and genuine disclosure” ([1978] 2003: xvii). This implies that, as an

academic, one has to be aware of one's own position within the colonial or Orientalist discourse. Only through such an awareness can a scholar overcome the restraints of Orientalism. For one thing, this means that one has to be "on guard against *idees reçues* all too easily handed down in the profession" (326; emphasis in original).

According to Said, a prominent example of a scholar who has achieved such a profound humanism is the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, whose interest in Islam "is discrete and concrete enough to be animated by the specific societies and problems he studies and not by the rituals, preconceptions, and doctrines of Orientalism" (Said 2003: 326). We should thus think of Geertz as a postcolonial scholar, someone who has either overcome the limitations of Orientalism or at least is not affected by them. Given Said's laudation, it makes much sense to consider Geertz's seminal 1960 *The Religion of Java*, and in particular scrutinize the way he makes sense of the phenomenon of Javanese Islam. Geertz distinguishes three variants of Javanese religion: *abangan*, *santri*, and *priyayi*. For our purposes it suffices to look only at the first two.⁴ The first refers to Javanese Islam, and the second to what I have called International Islam. Interestingly, this first variant, the religion of the *abangan* ("the red ones," a synonym for syncretist or nominal Muslims), is described by Geertz as "a balanced integration of animistic, Hinduistic, and Islamic elements, a basic Javanese syncretism which is the Island's true folk religion" ([1960] 1964: 5). The resemblance to Harthoorn's 1860 description of Javanism is uncanny. Not only did Geertz recognize a Javanese folk religion that is syncretist at heart but also, just like Harthoorn, he saw in it an expression of Javanese civilization. In fact, the only real difference between the two is that Harthoorn would prefer to see Javanism rooted out, while Geertz was rather sympathetic toward it. And, where Harthoorn believed that the Javanese were still at a very low rung of civilizational development, Geertz considered the civilization of the Javanese to be very complex, which is expressed in the complexity of its religious condition ([1960] 1964: 7). In other words, aside from a difference in appreciation, Geertz actually made use of the same conceptual structures that were already fully crystalized during the colonial era. The extent to which he rehashed the Orientalist description, can be gauged from his assessment of the *santri* religion, which he called the "purer Islam" (5). By implicitly calling the Javanese Islam of the *abangan* less pure than that of the *santri*, the negative

4 In fact, Geertz describes the religion of the *priyayi* (nobility) as the genteel version of *abangan* religion. While the first is more refined and more oriented toward the fine arts and mysticism, which Geertz identifies as Hindu-Buddhist, the second stresses the animistic aspects of the overall Javanese syncretism ([1960] 1964: 5–6).

connotations inherent to the Orientalist depictions are smuggled back into this humanist narrative.

The point here is not to charge Geertz with crypto-Orientalism, but rather to raise a theoretical issue with regard to the syncretism position: there is an evident continuity between today's "humanist" or postcolonial scholarship and Orientalism. A similar observation can be made with regard to the Islamization position.

2.2 *The Postcolonialism of Orientalism: Snouck Hurgronje and Local Islam*

Geertz's discussion of the religion of the Javanese has received a good deal of criticism, although its essential correspondence with Orientalist descriptions has so far been overlooked. Toward the end of the twentieth century, the syncretism narrative became supplanted by one that stressed the essentially Islamic character of Javanese Islam and rendered it as a local or native Islam. As pointed out above, the basic argument that underpins this stance has it that, in the process of the Islamization of Java, Islam assimilated many religious elements that are local or native to Java.

Perhaps ironically, but certainly interestingly, the argument that the Javanese are proper Muslims had already been developed and put forth by the Netherlands' most famous Orientalist, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje.⁵ He strongly opposed the suggestion that the inhabitants of the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) were only superficially Islamic. Although Snouck Hurgronje tended to speak about Islam in the Dutch East Indies in general, it will not do an injustice to his argument to render it as focused on Javanese Islam alone. After all, his ideas on the matter clearly covered the Javanese religious condition, as he abundantly referred to the reports of Poensen and Harthoorn to make his point. As early as 1883, a mere two decades after Harthoorn's description of syncretist Javanese Islam, he developed an argument directed explicitly against the representation of Javanese Islam as a garb with holes through which the half-Hinduized, Polynesian heathen still peaks through – a view championed by scholars such as Poensen (Snouck Hurgronje 1884: 100–101). Snouck Hurgronje argues that the scriptural ideal of the Qur'an and hadith has not been and cannot be attained in any Muslim country, and thus one

5 Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje was both a brilliant Islam scholar and the quintessential Orientalist in the Saidian sense of the word. He put his scholarly knowledge, his connections, and his status as *mufti* among the Muslims in the Netherlands Indies at the service of the Dutch colonial regime. If it had not been for the intelligence he delivered, the Dutch would not have been able to subdue Aceh.

cannot and should not expect the Javanese to meet higher standards than, for example, the Muslims in Mecca and Medina who had been converted to Islam many centuries earlier. Whenever Islam – or any other religion for that matter – gains a stronghold in new territories, it faces certain cultural or “heathen” practices and beliefs that run counter to its central tenets. If these cannot be eradicated, then the need arises to bring them in line, or assimilate them, with Islamic teachings in such a fashion that the greatness of Allah is not degraded. Consequently, Snouck Hurgronje argued, through the intervention of *fuqahā*’ (Islamic jurists), most of whom also share these popular superstitions, such practices and beliefs are smuggled into the official doctrines and dogmas (103–106). According to this argument, the Javanese are as much Muslim as the Egyptians and Saudis. Javanese Islam, just like Islam in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, is simply Islam that has accommodated local popular religion. Strikingly, the postcolonial narrative of a local Islam adds little to the points already raised by Snouck Hurgronje. The only difference lies in the appraisal of this Islamization. Snouck Hurgronje, himself a *mufti* (Muslim legal expert), took a rather patronizing stance. He considered many of these Islamizations borderline, if not outright, heretical. This estimation appears to be in line with his low regard of Javanese civilization (Dijk 2010). However, for a scholar like Mark Woodward, Javanese Islam (or Islam *Kejawen*) testifies to “the ingenuous and artful ways in which such a large body of Hindu and Buddhist tradition has been so thoroughly Islamicized” (1989: 17). Despite this difference in appraisal, there is great overlap in the way they make sense of their object of enquiry.

Similar to the discussion of the syncretism position, the interest here is theoretical. There is a clear conceptual continuity between the Orientalist and postcolonial understanding of Javanese Islam. These continuities, it will be argued, are indicative of a larger framework.

3 From Continuity to Paradigm

The above analysis has isolated the two main positions in the debate on the nature of Javanese Islam: the syncretism and the Islamization stance. These were illustrated by a limited number of authors, who nevertheless have been crucial to the way this debate took shape. The syncretism position was sketched with reference to Harthoorn, Poensen, and Geertz. The former two were the first to formulate this understanding of Javanese Islam, and provided the ethnographical data for any scholar working in this domain until anthropological research on the matter took off in earnest. Geertz’s work on religion in Java has been so influential that he could not be omitted from this analysis. The

Islamization viewpoint was illustrated by Snouck Hurgronje and Woodward. The former's research on Islam in general – and with regard to the Dutch East Indies in particular – generated a veritable research program. His impact on the field cannot be overstated. The latter is an influential scholar in his own right and his position is representative for that dominant today. Hence, these two positions can be considered two poles on a spectrum along which virtually all standpoints with regard to the nature of Javanese Islam can be plotted. That is to say, while the manifold scholarly arguments we encounter in the literature do show subtle variations and nuances, they nevertheless tend to gravitate to one of these two poles.

Additionally, instead of a fundamental rupture, the analysis revealed a substantial continuity between Orientalist and postcolonial scholarship, which, as will be argued, indicates the presence of a paradigm in the Kuhnian sense. There are two qualifications to this proposal. First, it is not suggested that this paradigm is solely centered on the study of Javanese religion. In fact, the discussed descriptions of the Javanese religious condition are part of a much larger enterprise that tries to make sense of Javanese culture and society, which in turn is to be located within an even broader endeavor: the Western project of describing and studying non-Western societies. Hence, the issues and questions relevant to the discussion at hand also appear in scholarship regarding other non-Western cultures, the development of which, historically speaking, largely coincides with the study of Javanese society.⁶ Second, a paradigm is understood as a problem-solving activity. As is well known, Kuhn (1970) described a paradigm as a framework consisting of assumptions about the phenomena under study, of specific theoretical notions, and of styles of theorizing.⁷ Here the focus will be mostly on the last aspect: a paradigm determines what counts as a productive question, what counts as a valid answer, and how to get from the one to the other. Hence, if the two positions regarding Javanese Islam are to be situated within one and the same paradigm, they are two different outcomes of the same style of theorizing. This proposal can be developed along three interconnected strands: an observational, conceptual, and methodological continuity, each of which is related to the idea of a Kuhnian paradigm as a problem-solving activity.

6 See Balagangadhara 2005 for a thorough discussion of this Western project and its ramifications for our understanding of non-Western cultures.

7 This is where my proposal diverges from Krüger's (2022). Krüger recognizes a paradigm at the level of religious studies, while I locate the paradigm in a broader project, that of the Western study of non-Western cultures. Additionally, Krüger's primary focus is on the activity of defining, while I focus on theorizing itself.

The sketched genealogy shows a continuity in what is being observed. Western scholars and travelers notice that Javanese Muslims adhere to religious beliefs and religious practices that are on the one hand Islamic and on the other hand pre-Islamic. Often a contradiction between these elements is noticed. In Kuhnian terms this is a *Gestalt* and the discussed genealogy illustrates the crystallization of it. Virtually from the moment Westerners reached Java's shore, and thus independent of and prior to a recognizable colonial discourse, they noticed the particularities of what they considered to be the religion of the Javanese. Over the course of several centuries, this image remained remarkably stable, merely gaining in detail and becoming ever more embedded in the Western narrative about the Javanese and their culture. From a Kuhnian perspective, a *Gestalt* is structured around concepts and is thus theoretically informed.

This brings us to conceptual stability. Both the Orientalist and postcolonial descriptions are structured around the concepts of religious beliefs and religious practices, where the latter are usually interpreted as expressions or embodiments of the former. Early descriptions of the religion of the Javanese are built around the concepts of idolatry and superstition. The latter indicates a false belief, meaning an unjustified belief in supernatural causation, which is usually attributed to a spirit, ghost, or natural power. It is contrasted with true belief, which, from the perspective of Western observers, implied Christian belief. Idolatry, then, commonly means the worship of false idols and indicates (religious) practices that express adherence to false beliefs. As time progressed, and Java's pre-Islamic religions became identified as Hinduism, Buddhism, animism, and ancestor worship, these beliefs and practices became identified along the same lines. However, the basic conceptual structures of these descriptions remained the same. A Kuhnian paradigm relies on conceptual stability. We have observed such a continuity in the precolonial, Orientalist, and postcolonial descriptions.

The methodological continuity, which is intertwined with the conceptual and observational stability, is apparent in the way different scholars attempt to categorize the religion of the Javanese. Their focus is directed at uncovering the central beliefs of the Javanese, tracing these beliefs back to their religion of origin, and finally unveiling the mechanism that allows the bringing together of these disparate beliefs. Especially from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, when through the translation of Sanskrit and Pali texts the central tenets of Hinduism and Buddhism gradually came to be mapped, different pre-Islamic beliefs became more easily identifiable according to their religious origin. Early examples are the aforementioned Raffles and Crawfurd. Being administrators in the British East India Company, they would both have

had access to late eighteenth-century studies of Hinduism based on Sanskrit texts.⁸ It explains the ease with which, for example, the former established Hindu influences in Javanese texts and the latter identified Java's pre-Islamic religions on the basis of Hindu and Buddhist archeological remains (Raffles 1817: 1:397–524; Crawfurd 1820: 2:194–272). A more recent example is Johns's analysis of different versions of the Javanese *Bhimasuci* story, in which he identifies and discusses the evolving prevalence of Hindu, Mahayana Buddhist, and Islamic elements. It allows him to speak of the syncretism and “compromises and combinations” of different religious traditions (Johns 1966). The philological interest of (mostly) Dutch scholars in the *Bhimasuci* story goes back to at least the 1870s (Purbatjaraka 1940: 7–55). Additionally, the proliferation of ethnographic reports added further refinement with regard to those beliefs that lacked (clear) scriptural foundation. Missionaries like Harthoorn traced back specific Javanese practices and beliefs to their supposedly religious origin such as Buddhism, Shivaism, and Islam (1860: 226–227, 229). His works and that of his colleagues can be regarded as the first ethnographical study of Javanese village life. Before their departure from the Netherlands, all missionaries to Java received training that taught them about the religious condition of Java (Niemann 1861: 413; Noort 2012). Additionally, a missionary like Harthoorn was deeply embedded in a specific theological worldview that discusses the world's major religions, among which are “Brahmanism” and Buddhism (Scholten 1859; Boogert 2017). More recently, Andrew Beatty (1999) links distinct parts of the Javanese *slametan* ritual to different religions. As for the way these scholars uncover the mechanisms that bring these disparate beliefs together, we have already discussed the two main positions on the issue.

Summarizing, this observational, conceptual, and methodological stability points in the direction of what Kuhn calls a paradigm. With regard to the study of Java, we see a stable object of investigation and an extended period of productive scholarship, both of which are evidenced by the genealogy of Javanese Islam and the ensuing debate on its nature. This counts as a period of normal science, in Kuhnian terms, during which scientific practice resembles a puzzle-solving activity: “The existence of this strong network of commitments – conceptual, theoretical, instrumental, and methodological – is a principal source of the metaphor that relates normal science to puzzle-solving” (Kuhn

8 Among these studies we would find works such as “Nathaniel Brassey Halhed's *A Code of Gentoo Laws* (1776), Charles Wilkins's translation of the *Bhagavad-gita* (1785), several articles on Hinduism by William Jones and Henry Colebrooke in *Asiatick Researches*, and Charles Grant's *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain* (Lorenzen 1999: 638–639).

1970: 42). In the case at hand, we notice that the approach to answering the question of what is the religion of the Javanese, is fairly standardized: it can be deduced from their religious beliefs. These in turn can be found in Javanese (religious) texts, in Javanese traditions, in Javanese arts, and so forth. Hence, anthropologists have ventured into the religions of the Javanese by probing the beliefs that underlie their rituals, and by eliciting from their informants' explanations of how such disparate beliefs can be combined. Philologists have scrutinized Javanese literature, locating and interpreting different religious beliefs, and tracing them back to the religion of origin. In short, there is an exemplary way to answer the question of what the religion of the Javanese is, and this is what a Kuhnian paradigm is: an exemplary way of problem solving.

4 A Productive Paradigm and Its Anomalies

Taking a paradigm as an exemplary way of problem solving (Kuhn 1970: 174–175, 187–191) helps us to further qualify the observed continuity in the study of Javanese religion. The standardized treatment of the religion of the Javanese has proven to be very productive. After all, the strategy to isolate its central religious tenets, trace them to their original religion, and hypothesize a mechanism that brought these disparate beliefs together, has led to an extensive body of research and has sparked academic debate up to this day. However, any paradigm is confronted with anomalies, which are to be understood as empirical observations it cannot properly explain, or that violate the expectations induced by the paradigm (52–53). The case at hand illustrates this well. After all, each description of Javanese Islam is confronted with the task of explaining how it is possible for Javanese Muslims to not experience the inherent tension between the principle of *tawhid* and the worship of other deities as problematic. However, as will be argued, it appears that none of these satisfactorily solve the matter. As it is impossible to deal with each individual study of Javanese Islam separately, the focus will be on the syncretism and Islamization poles of the discussed spectrum. There are three arguments to support the claim that we are dealing with an anomaly. First, the debate on the nature of Javanese Islam appears to be interminable. Second, the two principal positions are inconclusive. Third, there is the problem of *petitio principii*.

Regarding the interminability, it suffices to bring back to mind the fact that both positions were already developed in full in the latter half of the nineteenth century and that the second half of the twentieth century saw their reiteration on the basis of virtually identical arguments. Although after the late 1980s the Islamized position has become dominant, the debate has still

not been settled. Merle Ricklefs's *Mystic Synthesis in Java*, though it does not use the term, quite obviously discusses a syncretist Javanese Islam, when he describes it as a synthesis of a Javanese (or pre-Islamic) and Muslim identity. He qualifies the synthesis as a tradeoff or negotiation between two radically different, incompatible ways of looking at the phenomenal and eternal world: a characteristically Middle Eastern worldview and a characteristically monsoon-Asian religiosity (2006: 222–223). Ricklefs thus resuscitates the syncretism position and delivers it to the twenty-first century, thereby (implicitly) challenging the idea that Javanese Islam is an Islamization of Java's pre-Islamic religious practices and beliefs.

A crucial reason why the debate is interminable is that each position is inconclusive. In the case of the syncretism stance, the main issue is how to account for the way the Javanese bring together disparate, even contradictory beliefs. For the missionaries Poensen and Harthoorn this was quite clear. They considered Javanese syncretism as inherently problematic and explained it by referring to the underdeveloped evolutionary state of the Javanese, who, being semi-barbarians, simply did not understand what they were doing. While such an explanation is obviously unacceptable, it does have the benefit of being clear and consistent with their theological worldview (Boogert 2017: 365–367). Geertz, however, does not explain how the syncretism is achieved. While he calls it a balanced integration and goes to great lengths to discuss all kinds of syncretist rituals, we are none the wiser as to how the Javanese accomplished this feat. It is remarkable that, perhaps with the exception of Beatty (1999), postcolonial scholarship that relies on the syncretism position tends to use the term as purely self-explanatory and does not venture into any kind of explanation. The Islamization stance turns out to be inconclusive as well. First, as already discussed, both the Orientalist and postcolonial versions of this stance argue that the discussed doctrinal tension is resolved through bringing conflicting beliefs and practices in line with the tenets of Islam. However, accepting this explanation implies taking up a position in an Islamic theological debate. After all, what is an acceptable integration of non-Islamic practices for one group of Javanese Muslims, can still be unacceptable to another. Second, through the process of Islamization, the pre-Islamic practices are often altered or eliminated altogether – this is what resolves the initial tension. However, has not the phenomenon under discussion changed through this process? For example, there is a difference between a *slametan* ritual that contains an invocation of local guardian spirits and an Islamic prayer, and a *slametan* that only contains the latter. In other words, there is considerable ambiguity as to whether the Javanese Islam under discussion from the Islamization perspective has not more in common with International Islam, than it has with

Javanese Islam. For these reasons, the assimilation position does not tackle the issue conclusively either.

Last, both positions exhibit traits of the fallacy of *petitio principii*, taking for a fact that which needs to be proven. This is quite obvious in the Orientalist accounts of Poensen, Harthoorn, and Snouck Hurgronje: they all treated the same data, namely, examples from the missionary accounts, as self-evident proof for their respective positions. For example, the fact that the prayers for invoking the village guardian spirit also include Muslim prayers besides the traditional formulas, instantiated the Islamization of pre-Islamic beliefs for Snouck Hurgronje. However, for Poensen it instantiated syncretism (1864: 230, 232; cf. Snouck Hurgronje 1884: 106). Something similar happens in the post-colonial accounts. For Woodward, Islam is the organizing principle of Javanese society and culture. He discusses many practices and concepts, such as the *slametan* ritual, *wayang* (traditional theater), ideas of kingship and power, and even architecture as self-evident instances of Sufism (Mystical Islam), while many other scholars would regard these as typically Javanese. However, by treating these as self-evident instances of the Islamization he wishes to demonstrate, Woodward's explanation becomes circular. The same can be observed in Ricklefs's account of the mystic synthesis. He attributes the bridging of the divide between the Middle Eastern and monsoon-Asian worldview to the "ecumenical genius of mysticism" (Ricklefs 2006: 223). What is meant by this remains vague. Subsequently, Ricklefs argues that the dominant mode of religiosity in Java was the mystic synthesis on the basis of numerous examples of what he considers as self-evident instances of this mystic synthesis – never proving that this is what these instances are.

Based upon this three-tiered argument, I propose that our current theories do not satisfactorily explain the observation that Javanese Muslims adhere to contradictory religious practices and beliefs, but do not experience this as problematic. Hence, from a Kuhnian perspective, we should regard these observations as anomalies to the dominant paradigm.

5 From Anomalies to a Background Assumption

At this point it is important to be very clear about what is and what is not being said. I am not arguing that Javanese Islam is an anomaly, thereby implying that Javanese Islam is an extraordinary religion or an oddity in comparison to "normal" religions. What is being argued is that the persistence of specific phenomena, such as certain rituals (specific kinds of *slametan*), performances (specific kinds of *wayang*), and texts (for example, *Wedhatama*) cannot be

properly explained by the prevailing theories regarding Javanese Islam. These phenomena are thus anomalies in the sense that they defy the expectations and explanations as induced by the dominant paradigm (Kuhn 1970: 52–65). When, as Kuhn suggests, scientific practice is taken to be a problem-solving activity, then scientific development is propelled by finding new ways to tackle such empirical anomalies. However, before considering alternative ways of doing so, it is important to analyze one of the central assumptions of the current paradigm: religion as a cultural universal.

Recent scholarship has drawn attention to how the idea of the universality of religion underlies the study of non-Western cultures, and is thus a constituent element of the paradigm under discussion (Balagangadhara 2005; Roover 2014). The assumption that each culture knows of its own religion(s) and that no culture is without religion, can be traced back to early Christian apologetics that argued that God had given the true religion to all of mankind. Over time, this original religion became corrupted, as people were being lured into false religion by the devil and his minions. The revelation in Christ offered humanity the possibility to return to the true religion. Hence, in all religions, regardless of how far they have diverged from the truth, one can still find traces of the original.

Importantly, this account both predicted and required the presence of religion among all human groups. As the Creator had given awareness of his existence to humanity, it appeared to have become *theologically impossible* that people without religion could exist. From the church fathers to the Renaissance, the belief in the universality of religion rested on Christian theology and its references to an imaginary *consensus gentium*.

ROOVER 2014: 8 (emphasis in original)

Up until the Renaissance, having a religion or the capacity to religiosity, was considered the hallmark of being human. In fact, religiosity and not reason was thought to separate humans from animals. During the Age of Exploration, the universality of religion was contested precisely on this point. Reports of “uncivilized” tribes in the Americas and Africa, and “civilized” nations in Asia that appeared not to have any religion and did not know of a supreme being led to questioning this assumption. Central was the atheist claim that religion was just a manmade idea, as a civilization without religion would provide evidence in favor of this position. The advocates of the universality of religion could explain away the “atheism” of native tribes by referring to them as savages, meaning uncivilized and thus not human. However, the encounter with a

high civilization of atheists, Confucian China, made things considerably more difficult (Roover 2014: 11–13). In the end, this essentially theological discussion was settled in favor of the universality of religion, which over time grew into a scientific trivium. Nonetheless, the idea that religion is a cultural universal is a presupposition that Western scholars inherited from Christian thinkers, which has been and is still being reproduced without any genuine empirical or theoretical support (26).

6 Theoretical Consequences

Operating within a paradigm that takes religion to be a cultural universal, the descriptions and study of Javanese culture are constrained in two ways. First, scholars and observers are compelled to approach certain phenomena as religious phenomena. The fact that a Javanese Muslim might proclaim to be a Muslim and also practice rituals that are (apparently) at odds with the principle of *tawhid*, is considered to be a religious phenomenon and not, for example, a cultural phenomenon – regardless of what we might understand by culture. Second, the description of Javanese Islam as a mixture of Islam with elements from Java’s pre-Islamic religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, is premised upon the presupposition that these latter concepts do indeed refer to entities that can be categorized as religions. However, the discussion as to whether Hinduism and Buddhism are religions is in fact all but settled. After all, the study, conceptualization, and arguably reification of Hinduism and Buddhism are to be located within the paradigm under scrutiny. Similar to the above-presented genealogy of Javanese Islam, Western scholars have carved out scholarly entities by the name of Hinduism and Buddhism from the myriad of local traditions and scriptures Western observers encountered in South and Southeast Asia.⁹ The term Hinduism was coined only as late as 1787 by Charles Grant (Oddie 2010: 45). Likewise, the term Buddhism was first employed in literature only in 1817 by Michel Jean François Ozeray (Ozeray [1817] 2017).¹⁰ However, it is not just the terms “Hinduism” and “Buddhism” that were alien to South and Southeast Asia, the actual concept of religion was absent as well. Although the terms *agama* and *dharma* are often employed to

9 With regard to Hinduism see, for example: Sweetman 2003; Balagangadhara 2005; Pennington 2005; Oddie 2006; Gottschalk 2013. Regarding Buddhism, see, for example: Almond 1988; Cohen 2006; App 2010; Lopez and Jinpa 2017.

10 Compare with Engelbert Kämpfer’s mention and description of “Budsoism” as early as 1690 (Kämpfer [1690–1692] 1906: 66).

convey the meaning of the term “religion,” neither actually denote this. The first (*agama*) means tradition – that which has come down – and often refers to texts containing specific kinds of knowledge that have been handed down over generations. The second (*dharma*) is notoriously difficult to translate into English for lack of a corresponding concept, but “law of nature” and “code of conduct” are two of its main meanings.

In light of this dependence on the universality of religion, the theoretical and empirical evidence upon which the scholarship on the religions of South and Southeast Asia religions relies appears to be dubious. While early descriptions of Javanese religion were clearly embedded in a Christian theological framework, later descriptions were cleansed of this explicitly theological content. Consider in this regard the evolution of the descriptions of a syncretist Javanese Islam from those of missionaries like Harthoorn and Poensen to that of a scholar like Clifford Geertz. A similar evolution can be observed with regard to Western descriptions of Hinduism and Buddhism (Balagangadhara 2005; App 2010). Additionally, over the course of time, scholars of these “religions” ran into certain anomalies, such as belief and doctrine not being central to Buddhism and Hinduism, or Hinduism not knowing of an ecclesiastical structure. In an effort to save the descriptive entities, these anomalies were met by *ad hoc* modifications to the concept of religion, making it more open, porous, flexible, and encompassing, and by positing different kinds of religions (Roover 2014: 21–22). A similar process is discernible with regard to Javanese Islam. In order to save the entity “Javanese Islam,” it was necessary to explain, and even explain away, the apparently contradictory practices and beliefs that are prevalent in the Javanese religious condition. The explanations, ranging from syncretism to Islamization, intend to do exactly that.

The current analysis leads to the following suggestions. First, the study of Javanese Islam instantiates a paradigm understood as an exemplary way of problem solving. Second, the apparently contradictory practices and beliefs are anomalies of that paradigm. Third, the assumption of the universality of religion is constitutive to the paradigm in question. Consequently, it is implied that in the study of Javanese culture progress can be expected from developing new ways of solving the empirical anomalies that the current paradigm puts before us. What does such a proposal entail?

7 Paradigm Shift? Caveats and Conditions

Following the logic of the above analysis, we need nothing short of a paradigm shift. Although such a task would be enormous and would certainly not

be limited to Javanese Studies, the foundations for it have in all probability already been laid (Balagangadhara 2005). This endeavor of developing a new theoretical approach implies formulating new sets of research questions, new (exemplary) ways of answering them, and a reassessment of what counts as proper answers. The proposal in this article is many times more modest and takes the form of a caveat and two conditions.

First a caveat. Since it has been argued that our current theories belong to a particular paradigm of a Western creation, should we then not expect to find a different paradigm in a Javanese viewpoint? We need to be cautious with this expectation. On the one hand, Javanese scholars dealing with the subject have been trained in academic disciplines that operate within the dominant paradigm. Their discussion of Javanese Islam is firmly rooted in the established discourse. Perusing the relevant Indonesian academic output of the last two decades, one can observe the following. First, this research stays within the boundaries set by the two poles of the described spectrum. For example, the particularity of Javanese Islam is explained by reference to Ricklefs's idea of mystic synthesis (Tungkagi 2017), Woodward is invoked to argue that a certain ritual is Islamic (Syamsuddin 2017), or starting from a critique of Geertz, it is argued that Javanese Islam is the result of Islamization (Murtadho 2002; Pranowo 2009). Although Javanese Islam is sometimes explained in terms of syncretism (Murtadho 2002; Sumbulah 2012; Mutaqin 2014), the term *akulturasi* (acculturation) appears more prominently. *Akulturasi* is employed to convey the idea of syncretism (Syamsuddin 2017), or the idea of assimilation (Susilo 2016), or both (Khalil and Syaifuddin 2008; Qomar 2015). Even when the two positions, embodied by Geertz and Woodward, are downright rejected, the alternative explanation is one that stays within the same paradigmatic confines: an ever-evolving hybridity of both stances (Hilmy 2018). Second, regarding the universality of religion, these works consistently present Javanese Islam in terms of religious beliefs, and a mixture of religious beliefs of different descent. In short, instead of offering a viable alternative, it seems that the Indonesian or Javanese academic discourse is replicating the existing framework. On the other hand, it would be incorrect to assume the Javanese have never been consulted on matters of Javanese religion. Quite to the contrary, missionaries, ethnographers, and anthropologists did and do pose questions to their Javanese informants, philologists did and do translate Javanese texts about the issues at hand. However, the questions that are posed are those that are intelligible and relevant within the dominant paradigm. Consequently, only the answers that dovetail, or can be made to dovetail with these questions appear as sensible. Hence, it should be obvious that it will not suffice to simply ask, for example, how eighteenth-century Javanese theorists themselves dealt

with “a complex religious situation in which different and partly incompatible traditions met” (Arps 2019: 308–309).

Second, there are conditions that any hypothesis that wishes to address the conundrum of “Javanese Islam” will need to meet. Minimally, any such theory needs to say something about religion and culture. By means of a very short reconceptualization of *agama* in the Javanese context, I hope to provide some substance for this suggestion. Starting with the latter, many of the “Javanese Islamic” traditions are upheld because they are considered to be part of Javanese culture. In this regard, it is relevant to point out that not only Javanese Muslims have been categorized as syncretist, but the same label has also been attributed to Javanese Catholics, Protestants, Buddhists, and Hindus. That is, many Javanese from different religious backgrounds are involved in traditions that are often considered to be central to Javanese Islam, such as the *slametan*. Consequently, any new hypothesis should be able to address the relationship between being Javanese and upholding certain traditions. With regard to religion, consider the difference between the “contemporary” and the “older” meaning of *agama*. In many instances, Javanese sources on the phenomena under scrutiny (our empirical anomalies) discuss these in relation to *agama*. However, we cannot simply assume that *agama* refers to religion in this context, especially since there is no “indigenous” Javanese equivalent for the concept of religion. Although today in Indonesia the term *agama* does indeed refer to religion, originally it did not.¹¹ Michel Picard (2011: 6) argues that in its original meaning, *agama* used to be conflated with *adat* (tradition). An *agama* was actually considered to be an *adat*. In general terms, traditions are fixed sets of practices handed down from generation to generation. Moreover, specific traditions usually belong to specific social groups. Hence, it appears that *agama* used to designate a certain kind of knowledge and/or a set of practices, handed down over generations within a certain social group. Consider in this regard the *Wedhatama* in which Mangkunagara IV speaks of an *agama* that is particular to Java, which he qualifies as a tradition, and as a specific kind of knowledge that can be obtained only through the right ascetic practice (Robson 1990: 20–21, 26–27). Moreover, specific *agama* are particular to specific social groups: the *agama* that is fitting for the *kaum* (the pious, professional religious community, usually Islamic), is not the *agama* that is fitting for the *priyayi* (Javanese nobility) (32–33). This Javanese characterization of

11 What constitutes a religion in Indonesia is a rather clearcut affair since the Ministry of Religion has decided on the matter. In order to be recognized as such, “a religion must be revealed by God, possess a prophet and a holy book, have a codified system of law for its followers, and further, it should enjoy international recognition and not be limited to one single ethnic group” (Picard 2011: 13).

agama generates several questions, which will need to be addressed by any hypothesis on the matter. For example: What is the difference between *agama* as a religion and *agama* as tradition? What kind of knowledge is imparted through *agama*? Why would it be fitting for different social groups to have their specific *agama*?

By pointing out an important caveat and by briefly discussing two conditions any new hypothesis would need to meet, I have attempted to indicate a direction that could be taken in the endeavor of formulating new hypotheses. Having merely suggested the contours of a reconceptualization, it is clear the road ahead is still long.

8 Conclusion

This article has argued that the study of Javanese Islam needs to be located within a Kuhnian paradigm – understood as an exemplary way of problem solving. Western research into non-Western cultures has relied to a large degree on the question of religion. In this case, knowing what religion the Javanese adhere to supposedly gives insight into the lives and minds of the Javanese. Consequently, from a Kuhnian perspective, the study of Javanese Islam appears as a puzzle-solving activity with a fairly standardized way of formulating and solving research questions, of which both the syncretism and Islamization standpoint are the outcome. The Kuhnian perspective has the benefit of clarifying the continuity between Orientalist and postcolonial scholarship in terms of an anomaly: Javanese Islam's central conundrum is actually unsolvable within this paradigm. Only a different paradigm, with different research questions and methods can help us forward. Will we be able to compare these paradigms and establish whether the new one is an improvement? According to Kuhn we will. Science is, after all, a problem-solving activity and our choice of theory should be guided by which one does the better job. Criteria such as accuracy, consistency, scope, simplicity, and fruitfulness can help us in this decision. With this last consideration in mind, I propose that the task of developing competitor hypotheses should be firmly on the agenda of contemporary Javanese Studies.

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