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# MAKING MONOTHEISM: GLOBAL ISLAM IN LOCAL PRACTICE AMONG THE LAUJÉ OF INDONESIA\*

Jennifer W. Nourse

## Abstract

*This paper explores the complex interaction between state-sanctioned Islam and local religious practice in Indonesia's periphery. In 1982 in the "county" of Tinombo, Central Sulawesi, immigrant Reform Muslims convinced the regional government to ban a spirit possession ritual performed by the indigenous Laujé people. Reformists claimed that Laujé spirit mediums were possessed by satanic spirits. Insulted by Reformists' claims that Laujé rites were pagan and they themselves were not Muslims, prominent Laujé went to officials in the government asking to rescind the ban. In their arguments, Laujé borrowed the rhetoric of Reform Islam. The ban was rescinded in 1984. Once the rite was performed again in 1985 the Laujé participants continued using Reformists' categories to define their rite. This paper examines why and how particular Laujé, female spirit mediums and male interpreters, borrowed the rhetoric of Reformist Islam. The participants in the spirit possession rite, each in their own way, used the rhetoric of global Islam not as a "watered down" version of a Great Tradition, but as a vehicle for subtly subverting the premises on which that rhetoric was based. (Key words: Islam, gender, fundamentalism, Indonesia, spirit possession).*

Modern Reform Islam in Indonesia today is working to overturn an uneasy live-and-let-live distinction between religion (*agama*) and custom (*adat*). To Reformists of various stripes "custom" is anathema. It allows good Muslims to practice bad religion. This paper looks at Reformists' efforts to ban custom in a multi-ethnic Muslim community in the outer islands of Indonesia and the local people's responses to this effort.

From 1983 to 1984 Reformist Muslims in a provincial town in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia banned local spirit possession rituals among the Laujé.<sup>1</sup> The Reformists, immigrants in low-level bureaucratic positions, had various reasons for wanting to ban the *Momosoro*. Some justified the ban because they said "mediums are possessed by satanic spirits," and "are

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a danger to the community." "Spirit possession," said other officials "promotes the belief in multiple spirits and thus is not monotheistic." "It is not religion (*agama*), but custom (*adat*)." Still other Reformists said "It [the *Momosoro*] is contrary to the dictates of Islam and the Indonesian constitution (*Pancasila*)" which requires all citizens to worship one omniscient or monotheistic deity.

The Laujé who participated in the annual spirit possession rites were insulted by the Reformists' claims that the Laujé ceremony was not truly Islamic. Prominent Laujé community leaders met with the most senior officials in local government asking them to eradicate the ban low-level Reformists had instigated. Laujé leaders countered the Reformists' claims that their rites were merely pagan customs (*adat*) by asking the high-level officials rhetorical questions. For example, one Laujé man asked "during the *Momosoro* isn't it spirits speaking through mediums [who] acknowledge that all the audience members are disciples of the Prophet Mohammed?" The implication was that Laujé are followers of Islam and not pagan as the Reformists claim. The Laujé's protests did little to convince local officials to change the ban which remained in effect for three years. Later, however, government officials at a higher level, who were not Reformists but not extremists, decided it was unwise to alienate the Laujé before the upcoming national election. There were more Laujé who could vote than there were Reformists. Thus the high-level officials overturned the low-level Reformists' ban in 1984 and the Laujé performed their spirit possession rite, the *Momosoro*, in 1985.

Surprisingly, however, once the rite was reinstated, the Laujé's defiance of and resistance to Reformists' categories seemed to dissipate. Laujé participants in the *Momosoro* quickly adopted the same categories, those of the Reformists, against which the Laujé had so vehemently protested during the ban. Even though Reformists had included the Laujé in the negatively marked category of non-Muslim followers of custom (*adat*), the Laujé participants who spoke to the audience during the rite borrowed or reiterated these same categories to speak about their rite as both custom (*adat*) and religion (*agama*).

In what follows I explore why the Laujé adopted the Reformists' official party line even though Laujé openly opposed it just months before. I will argue that the Laujé who adopted this rhetoric were not merely accepting a "watered down" local version of global Islam. Nor was the rhetoric tempered by syncretism of Islam and a Little animist Tradition (cf. Redfield 1954). Instead, I will argue that Laujé had a variety of sometimes contradictory reasons for borrowing the rhetoric of global Islam and using it to talk about local beliefs. Some Laujé wanted to belong to the category of religion which global Islamic rhetoric promoted, while others wanted to subtly subvert the premises on which that rhetoric was based.

To delineate how the Laujé participants in the ritual borrowed rhetoric which seemed to support global Islam, but subversively under-

mined its premises, I focus on two groups of participants in the rites: female spirit mediums and male interpreters of spirits' language. To provide a general background for their religious beliefs, I also briefly sketch the history of religious influences—indigenous, Hindu-Buddhist, Sufi Islam and Reform Islam—in the Laujé region.

As we shall see, the male interpreters in the rite are mainly elites. They syncretize some animist practices with Hindu-Buddhist notions but primarily draw from elitist and exclusionary Sufi Islam when they philosophize about ritual and religion. The male interpreters believe that because they adopt Sufi Islam and because they are elites, that their religious practices are superior to all others within the community. They believe their Islam is equivalent to the beliefs and practices of Muslim Reformists and high-level immigrant Reformists who live in the county capital (*kecamatan*) Tinombo, just across the river from Dusunan, the Laujé capital. When the male interpreters borrow the rhetoric of global Islam, with its distinctions between custom (*adat*) and religion (*agama*), they do so to dissolve the distinctions the Reformists make. The males say that their custom (*adat*) is actually religion (*agama*) and the Reformists who argue otherwise are really making ethnic distinctions, not religious ones. They believe the bureaucrats who banned the Laujé rite did so because of ethnic rivalry rather than theological orthodoxy.

The female spirit mediums' subtextual statement about global Islam is more radical than that of the males. The mediums are primarily commoners. They embrace beliefs and practices both they and the Reformists define as *adat*. These women, however, consider themselves to be educated in Islam and see no contradiction in practicing custom (*adat*) with religion (*agama*). These female spirit mediums claim that *adat* existed prior to Islam. Because custom was first, it is superior, say the women, just as a parent is superior to a child. Thus Laujé *adat* is superior to the religion of Reformists. Thus the women uphold the Reformists' distinctions between custom (*adat*) and religion (*agama*), but they reverse the hierarchical distinctions between those categories. In sum, then, the female mediums and the male interpreters, each in their own way, borrow the Reformists' categories of *adat* and *agama* but use those categories to subvert the Reformists' original intentions.

### HISTORY OF ISLAM IN TINOMBO AND DUSUNAN

The conflict between Reformist Muslims and local Laujé believers in "syncretic" Sufi Islam typifies what goes on throughout Indonesia (Geertz 1959; 1960; 1968; Peacock 1978a; 1978b; Seigel 1969; 1979; Bowen 1986; 1987; 1993; Woodward 1989). In the Laujé region, as in other parts of Indonesia, the tensions between newer Reformist forms of Islam and older forms which are dubbed "syncretic" by the Reformists constitutes the bedrock of the Reformist/non-Reformist debate. Reformists believe syncretism is

bad. It is not pure Islam. They rely on scholars of religious history (*Ibid.*) to show how various religious beliefs, first Hindu-Buddhism (one religion) and then Sufism, syncretized with indigenous animism. In their view of history, it was not until Reform Islam purged animism and Hindu-Buddhism from Sufi Islam that "true" Islam was practiced. The Reformists' view, like most scholarly views of Indonesian religious history (cf. Geertz 1960; Peacock 1978a; 1978b), claims to delineate what distinguishes Sufism from animism and animism from Hindu-Buddhism. Scholars, however, attribute the religious differences in Indonesia to historical isolation and class and ethnic disputes. Until the twentieth century, the "syncretic" Islam practiced by the Laujé male interpreters was the only Islam in Indonesia. This mystically oriented Sufism was easily adapted to the Laujé's unique animist practices which had already been influenced in varying degrees by Hindu and Buddhist beliefs and practices. In remote areas like the coastal towns of Tinombo and Dusunan, it was primarily elites who adopted the "rural Sufism" while commoners maintained animist and Hindu-Buddhist beliefs and practices. Because there was no centralized educational facility, and because Sufi Islam was taught primarily one-on-one, the Sufi Islam of the Laujé was slightly different from the Sufi Islam of other ethnic groups in Sulawesi.

In the early twentieth century the tenor of Islam changed as more and more Sulawesians made contact with each other and with the "Middle East fountainhead" (Geertz 1960:125). As Central Sulawesi became a part of the Dutch colony, Mecca became more accessible to local Muslims wishing to go on the *haj* pilgrimage. In much of Central Sulawesi, Dutch chose Muslims from more pacified regions to oversee local bureaucracies and the interregional trade. Increased contact between educated Muslims from long conquered regions and rural Muslims in remote areas like Tinombo began to dissolve the patchwork variability of each region's interpretation of Islam.

Increasing numbers of returning pilgrims from Mecca brought back knowledge about more orthodox and uniform forms of Islam (cf. Peacock 1978a; 1978b). As a result, Reform movements sprang up in Sulawesi and Indonesia in general. Many, like the Muhammadiyah and the Sarekat Islam movements, were ostensibly designed to teach uniform methods of worshipping Allah, but covertly they formed focal points for Muslim resistance to colonial rule. Following the pattern of resistance movements in the Middle East, Sulawesi modernist-Reformists:

believed that the condition of Muslims under colonial rule and other despotism was in part a consequence of their own straying from the basic principles of the religion and their aim was thus, as they saw it, to cleanse and revitalize Islam by discarding tradition and ritual and returning to the central texts, i.e., the Qur'an

and the Hadiths. These views brought them into direct conflict with Islamic traditionalists (Cribb 1992:306).

The newly bred Reformism, unlike older syncretic Islam, became at once a vehicle for critique of and resistance to the presence of Dutch authorities. It became the means through which the educated elite throughout Sulawesi and other Dutch East Indies Islands would one day claim membership in the nation-state of Indonesia.

Reform Islam in the Tinombo region was in the hands of immigrants like Raja Kuti Tombolotutu, an elite immigrant from South Sulawesi, who had been selected by the Dutch to rule over the Laujé and immigrant towns along the western bank of the Tomini Bay. Raja Kuti ruled from 1927 (during the Dutch and Japanese colonial periods) until his death in 1963 (during post-independence Indonesia). Though Raja Kuti was a staunch Muslim member of the covertly anti-colonial Sarekat Islam movement, he did not enforce his own brand of Reformism on the local Laujé who were under his jurisdiction. Raja Kuti disapproved of the Laujé's syncretic Sufism, but "he [Raja Kuti] kept a hands-off approach toward [literally he did not mix his hands into]" syncretic Sufi Islam, said one of Kuti's descendants, "because he knew the Laujé [and other locals under his jurisdiction] wouldn't tolerate having their customs (*adat*) prohibited."<sup>2</sup>

Raja Kuti's live-and-let-live policy toward the Laujé meant that the Laujé's traditional leader, the *olongian*, was allowed to stay in office, albeit with diminished power. In this way the Raja prevented outright rebellion by the Laujé who remained loyal to the *olongian* by not bringing the last vestige of the *olongian's* authority—his ritual power—into question. Though the Raja had usurped most of the *olongian's* political authority, the Raja's live-and-let-live policy allowed the *olongian* to continue to operate as divine-king in the Hindu-Buddhist sense. The *olongian* was overseer of rituals which blessed indigenous, animist agricultural and placental spirits as well as Allah, Mohammed and the Angel Gabriel. Raja Kuti believed such rituals were sacrilegious, but he did not let his own Reformism hinder his live-and-let-live policy toward the Laujé.

Thus two parallel kingdoms existed in this one area. The first, the "legitimate" kingdom, consisted of the Raja with his Dutch-supported political authority and his own appointed Haupt Imam who performed religious ceremonies for the Reformist immigrants up and down the coast. The second, "unofficial" kingdom, just across the river from Tinombo, consisted of the autochthonous Laujé leader, the *olongian*, who acted as religious overseer of the Laujé and on occasion served as imam in the Dusunan mosque.

Historically, the Laujé elites in Dusunan were the only lowland Laujé dwellers. Claiming to have converted to Islam sometime in the late 18th

or early 19th century, lowland Laujé elites believed they were equal to the Tinombo immigrants because they both embraced the same religion, regarded themselves as elites and had somewhat similar patterns of economic subsistence. They were distinct from the Laujé "commoners" who lived in the mountains, practiced subsistence swidden agriculture and embraced "animism." During the early colonial period, this distinction began to change. The Dutch forced mountain Laujé to descend to the lowlands and live among the elite relatives of the *olongian*. Though many "commoners" returned to the mountains in the 1920's and 30's, quite a few settled in the communities of Lombok and Dusunan. To this day many elites still regard commoners as false Muslims and themselves as the purists. They say:

We have been Muslim for centuries. The commoners have just converted from animism in the last generation. All the commoners once lived in the mountains as pagans, but we have been Muslims for centuries.

Many of the newly arrived commoners claimed to be Muslim too, but the elites refused to teach the commoners any Sufi esoteric secrets. The educational program of this syncretic Islam was controlled by Laujé elites who sought to restrict knowledge to those within their own class. When elites learned Islam it was in secret, "in front of four eyes" or with one person teaching another. To "learn Sufi secrets" the acolyte had to bring offerings to the teacher, such as coins, fruit, a knife or machete and a white cloth. Both the teacher and the acolyte sat on the white cloth. The teacher uttered the secret and placed the knife blade on the tongue of the person who had received the knowledge. The acolyte then pledged that if he or she told the secret in any circumstances other than those similar to this—on a white cloth—then his or her tongue would bleed until they would no longer be able to utter other words (cf. Acciaoli 1989). One elite woman explained this process thus:

When my father taught Islam (in the 1930's) it was in secret. A student learned inside a closed tent and had to pay. To learn to pray, for example, one paid seven palm-lengths of coins. Islam was secret and for the privileged. It wasn't until they [the immigrants] came to [the neighboring town of] Tinombo, that Islam became more modern.

Another Laujé man, an elite man who no longer lived in Dusunan, told me:

In the old days, before there were Islamic schools, Islam was a business. The [elite] teachers made a lot of money and only taught those who had the money to pay [i.e., other elites].

In sum, then, for economic and social reasons, Sufi Islam was restricted to Laujé elite and forbidden to Laujé commoners.

It was this exclusivism of elite Islamic practice that contributed to commoners' resentments of elites and their eventual turn toward Reformism in the 1960's. After the anti-communist coup in 1965, many people in the Dusunan community, elites and commoners alike, rushed to gain some sort of training in Islam. In the tense political climate of post-coup Indonesia in which thousands of former communists had been executed, everyone, immigrants, elites and commoners, desperately searched for proof they were not members of the communist, "atheist," party (cf. Hefner 1987). Attendance at mosque doubled during this period (I am told) and everyone who could began to study Islam to "prove" they were loyal citizens and not "atheistic" communists.

Elite Laujé began to hire Sufi tutors from elite families in cities like Palu. Commoners, unable to afford such training, were forced to rely on the popular Muslim education which was disseminated through the government schools. It was this program, part modernist-Reformist Islam and part public school philosophy, that promulgated the distinction between religion and custom. The government schools and the Reformists shared the same categories; religion was monotheism and belief in multiple spirits was custom or paganism. The schools taught that religion (*agama*) was progressive and a requisite of good citizenship.<sup>3</sup> Commoners embraced this new opportunity to learn religion and demonstrate loyalty to the state. Thus the commoners gradually became more educated in mainstream, nationally sanctioned Reform Islam than the elite Sufi Muslims whose education was still secretive and syncretic.

### MEDIUMS, MUSLIMS AND MONOTHEISTS IN THE MOMOSORO

This educational difference between commoner Muslims and elite Muslims had a profound impact upon the attitudes which the female spirit mediums and the male interpreters brought to the *Momosoro*. During the *Momosoro* rite of 1985 there were at least three spirit mediums who I knew fairly well (out of at least 20 who participated in that *Momosoro*). These three women had vested interests in supporting Reform Islam. Much of the reason was due to their class and economic positions within the community. Two of the mediums were widowed and one was divorced. All had adolescent sons enrolled in the public schools. The mothers each had high hopes that their sons' educations would pull each family back from the brink of poverty. Each mother encouraged her son to study the school's Reformist tenets, especially the egalitarian philosophy which disdained the hierarchy of Sufi Islam. Both mothers and sons embraced the egalitarian aspects of Reformist philosophy which argued that everyone



should have access to Islamic knowledge rather than restricting esoteric tutoring to the select few. The mothers helped their sons study for school and encouraged the young men to attend Reformist Islamic events sponsored by the school and the government. On one hand, then, the women supported the tenets of Reform Islam. On the other hand, though, they resented the Reformist outsiders who tried to ban the rite in the first place. Moreover, the women believed their sons should learn the healing chants from the *Momosoro*. The women believed their healing chants were an important legacy which they should pass on to their children.

These women's paradoxical acceptance of Reform Islam but rejection of Sufist elitism and Reform Muslim politics manifested itself in the mediums' speeches from the *Momosoro*. In those speeches the female mediums borrowed the Reformists' categories distinguishing custom (*adat*) from religion (*agama*), but rejected Reformists' claims such categories showed religion was superior to custom. In this way, the women not only rejected claims by Reformists; they also rejected claims by male interpreters in the *Momosoro* who believed their religion was superior to the women's customs.

The Reformists made no distinction between commoner Laujé and elite. They believed all who attended the *Momosoro* were participating in a non-religious rite of custom (*adat*). Reformists reasoned that all Laujé in the *Momosoro* treated Allah as if he were equal to any other spirit or deity. Thus when the *olongian's* and the spirit mediums' liturgies blessed local spirits as well as Islamic deities such as Mohammed, Allah and the Angel Gabriel, the Reformists believed the Laujé were not following the "true path" of Islam because they deified Mohammed and the Angel Gabriel. After all, they argued, this is the basic premise upon which Islam was created. One Reformist man, a member of the Muhammadiyah movement, told me "Allah came down to reveal the teachings to Mohammed so that the mistakes of Christians who deified Jesus rather than God would not be repeated." Another Reformist in Tinombo said "These people here, these locals [Laujé], don't have any education. They mix Islam with *adat*. They are Sufi, not Sunni." Though Sufism actually is a mystical branch of Sunni Islam, this Muhammadiyah Muslim believed Sufism was not religion (*agama*), but custom (*adat*).

It was Reformist attitudes such as this that led to the ban on the *Momosoro*. The Reformists behind the ban were not the elites of the Raja's live-and-let-live days. They were new immigrants who had moved to the county capital of Tinombo from North and South Sulawesi as well as Java. These new immigrants worked as low rung bureaucrats hoping to begin their slow climb up the bureaucratic ladder by using Tinombo as the initial stepping stone. Many found their political aspirations limited by the descendants of the former Raja who still held high government positions in the region. The new Reformist bureaucrats began to use Islamic definitions of *agama* and *adat* to critique the way Kuti had run the government

in the past through his policy of live and let live. By enforcing Reformist ideals (and the Indonesian Constitution) these rather naive young bureaucrats simultaneously hoped to prove they were worthy of advancement to positions outside of Tinombo. Not as conscious of the political backlash any attempts to enforce more strict interpretation of Islam would cause, the Reformist-minded immigrants in Tinombo engendered the conflict with the elite Laujé. Ultimately it was fellow Reformists, descendants of the former Raja, who finally rescinded the ban. These relatives of the Raja and long-time immigrants to the region knew if they did not rescind the ban the Laujé in Dusunan would resent immigrant interference in the *Momosoro* ritual. Thus, in the end, the clash between Reformists and Sufists over *agama* and *adat* became somewhat of a class war. Religious affiliation and belief, while the initial impetus for dividing up one's loyalties, did not in the end determine who belonged to what faction. It is this complex melding of social, religious, economic and political factors that formed the subtext for the performance of the *Momosoro* in 1985.

#### THE MOMOSORO RITE

The controversy over the *Momosoro* resulted from the way in which participants and outsiders defined spirits. Strict Reformists believed *adat* or custom should not be practiced by faithful followers of *agama* (religion) because *adat* was a convenient excuse for people who wished to worship many spirits. Such Reformists believed *agama* was monotheistic, and "true *agama*," Reform Islam, recognized that Allah was the only deity. In response to and in resistance to Reformists' proclamations, the Laujé thus identified the spirits they worship in the *Momosoro* in monotheistic terms. Both female spirit mediums and male interpreters identified the spirit entity possessing mediums' bodies by one unitary term, *umputé* (literally glossed as connection). *Umputé* can simultaneously serve as a unitary monotheistic moniker and refer to a congeries of spirits associated with birth and the womb, e.g., the placental spirit, the amniotic fluid spirit, the umbilical cord spirit, the red blood of childbirth spirit, and so on. Both men and women say that *umputé* is the spirit entity honored in the *Momosoro* even though it may be called by a variety of names in liturgies during the rite (i.e., Ratu Lagu, King of Silver, Queen of Water, etc.). Though I believe the named spirits in the liturgies represent a whole pantheon which the present-day Muslim Laujé are embarrassed to acknowledge since they do not fit with monotheistic Islam, calling the spirits one term, *umputé*, serves as a make-shift or transitional form of monotheism. When contemporary Laujé men and women identify spirits as *umputé*, they are identifying an invented tradition. Though it is possible that *umputé* as a belief began within the animist Laujé belief system, it is just as likely that *umputé* was a Sufi notion and thus part of Islam from the very begin-

ning (cf. Bowen 1987 on *umputé*-like beliefs among the Gayo). Whether or not *umputé* was animist or Islamic is beside the point. The important issue is how and why *umputé* became so important to the Laujé in the present.

Undoubtedly the *umputé* concept as expressed in the *Momosoro* was developed in response to the intrusion of Reform Islam into the community. In part, *umputé* developed in defiance of the Reformists who criticized the Laujé for performing pagan rites. Also *umputé* developed in response to the much welcomed Islamic education which taught commoners and even elites that Muslims were first and foremost monotheists. Thus on one hand the belief in *umputé* became an acceptable cover for people like the Laujé who considered themselves to be Muslim. It allowed them to use one generic term, *umputé*, without relinquishing all of the ideas about a multitude of birth spirits that their ancestors had taught them. In the process of welcoming and resisting Islam into their midst, *umputé* became the response to and the aspect of the new Islam as it is was expressed in the *Momosoro* ritual.

The *Momosoro* translated literally means "to make to stop." The ceremony ostensibly is designed to block spirits who bring illness from the coast into Laujé land. It also purges any plaguing illnesses from people already afflicted. In seven nights of possession and feasting at the *olongian's* house, spirits are invited in by the *olongian* to possess spirit mediums. At the end of the seven nights spirits are exorcised from the mediums' bodies and asked by the *olongian* to board two boats which are sent out to sea. The land and people are then purified.

During the seven nights of the *Momosoro*, offerings to *umputé* spirits are given at an altar in the *olongian's* house. Mediums are possessed by such spirits and sing liturgies to the spirits at the altar. Male interpreters translate the *umputé* spirits' antiquated speech to Laujé community members who come to be healed or blessed by the spirits. When mediums are not singing, curing or making offerings, they and the interpreters as well as interested audience members engage in slow-paced discussions about the nature of spirit/human relations in the rite. During the fourth night of the 1985 *Momosoro* one Laujé male interpreter argued that the rite as a whole should be categorized as religion. He lamented:

Those foreigners, the immigrants across the river there (he gestured with his chin), they say this rite, this *Momosoro* is not religion, it is custom only. But our ancestors, the elites, have always been Muslim. Don't the spirits always refer to us as the disciples of the Prophet Mohammed? Don't they? Those words uttered in the *Momosoro* by the mediums are the words of the ancients. How could they [the spirit mediums] call us disciples of the Prophet Mohammed if we Laujé elites hadn't always been Muslim?

This male interpreter, like others, found a place for the spirit possession ceremony within the category of religion. His claim indirectly refuted everything the Reformists had said. Other male interpreters were more direct. They confronted the Reformists who accused Laujé of worshipping multiple, satanic deities, as though they were pagans. One elite man in 1986 said:

Satan is not what we are honoring here. Our own bodies, that is what we are worshipping—our bodies, the ‘characters’ of our bodies that have slipped away from us. This is what we honor...so that you will not suffer from malaria; so that you will not become poisoned with a fatal disease. This is what is arranged here for the many followers of Mohammed. Some people [the Reformists] have not opened their eyes and looked. For there are some who say that to honor *umputé* spirits here in this place is to worship the devil.

Yet these spirits are what bring order for us...From what do we originate if not from earth the size of a fist...moistened...becoming animated. By the power of Allah...nine months—the big month—I mean the month of ten Fridays, the little became the big, became us. That which engendered us was one with the spirit. Then by the strength of Allah we were made the younger child. We were bespattered or drenched with the liquid of birth and it was as if the world had opened and we had come out—squirted out, one follower of Mohammed, slave of God—that is, one who was made to live. Later after we disciples of Mohammed had been squeezed out from the womb of the mother, then it was known that this placenta, was to be honored because it was given by Allah.

Yet too many of you followers of Mohammed—and I don’t wish to belittle you, I only honor you from the tips of my toes to the tops of the hairs on my head—but many of you followers of Mohammed misunderstand, if you think that what is done here is to honor Satan. For I say from the depths of my soul that there was not a beginning and will not be an end without Allah, the Parent. Allah, the Parent is what made us, that is at the base of all our praise.

This man’s speech defies Reformists’ exclusion of the Laujé spirit possession rite from the category of religion. His speech has both Sufistic and Reformist themes. His remarks about the “characters of our bodies” is Sufistic. It refers to the four humours of the body; earth, water, fire and air. The reference to the fist of earth which created the body and even the emphasis on birth and development of the fetus in the womb are elements of Islam emphasized by Sufis and highlighted in the *umputé* concept.

Much of the rhetoric in this speech, though, is borrowed from Reformism. In this man’s speech all spirits are one and encompassed within the human body. Allah gave humans the body and Allah is equiv-

alent to THE parent who is equivalent to the placental sack which nurtures the fetus in the womb. The metaphoric associations in his speech equating the placenta to the body and the body to the parent and the parent to Allah refer to the *umputé* concept. Each person is said to be nurtured in the womb and born with a multitude of one kind of spirit, *umputé*. Though in private some of the same male interpreters may characterize the spirits which possess the female mediums in the *Momosoro* as though one is a red blood spirit and is distinct from the white placental spirit, in this soliloquy the male interpreter collapses all the various womb spirits into one monotheistic whole. He calls this whole *umputé*. In his speech the male interpreter finds a place for *umputé* inside Islam. The body and its spiritual essence are one monotheistic whole given life by Allah.

Female spirit mediums also make reference to this monotheistic whole. They say "this *umputé* spirit [the placental sack] wraps and protects the child." But the mediums equate the placental spirit, the monotheistic concept of *umputé*, with custom. Here is one woman's speech equating the whole *Momosoro* possession rite with the monotheistic version of placental worship and custom:

Custom, *adat*, was made first here. Before there were humans there was already custom, *adat*. If there was no custom there would be no religion. If there was no religion there would be no custom. We were born with what and how? Wasn't it together with the placenta? If you recognize this you must believe in the custom. For *umputé* is with us. We must respect *umputé*.

Later religion came to us. What is the road for religion? Religion gives meaning to the doctrines in the book...If the doctrines of religion are not put into practice, then certainly Allah's back will be turned to us. If one does not follow the fasting month for 30 days and 30 nights and pray those evenings, one will not receive a guaranteed entrance to heaven. That is religion. And if that religion is not followed, what will happen to your bodies?

Well, the same applies to the custom here [in this ceremony]. Yet, nowadays, it is as if religion is honored, while customs, traditions, have been neglected. This is not right. Tradition, custom, is first. Tradition is...the substance which wraps and protects the child.

Later in another conversation, this spirit medium likened *umputé* and Laujé tradition or customs to the tap-root of the tree of life. She equated religion to the branches which grow after the root is firmly established in the ground saying:

Custom is the root of the tree.  
It is that which wraps and protects the tree.  
It surrounds its roots.  
Pull out a root and look up at the branches.

They will rot and wither.  
 Custom which is let go rots bit by bit until the tree dies.  
 Follow the customs, the chants. Don't stop.  
 Follow the customs, the rites. Don't stop.  
 Carry it with religion.

This medium's soliloquy, as others', likened custom (*adat*) to the "placenta" "the older sibling," "that which wrapped and protected." Religion found a place inside of *umputé*. Custom (*adat*) or *umputé* was the "root" while religion (*agama*) was the "tree." The traditional belief in the placental spirit wrapped and protected.

Here, custom/religion (*adat/agama*) distinctions were used to deliver a truly subversive message. *Umputé* as custom (*adat*) encompassed religion (*agama*). Custom (*adat*), like the placenta which wrapped the fetus and nurtured it, wrapped and nurtured Islam. *Umputé* was to Islam as older sibling was to younger sibling. To make such a claim was to say that Laujé customs were superior to religion. In a hierarchical society in which older siblings deserve more respect than younger ones, such an ontological claim is revealing. The female mediums, while on one level adopting Reform Islam's categories and arguments about traditional spirit possession rites, in the end subvert the Reformists' claims.

By contrast, the males' accommodation to these categories was far less radical. Allah was the parent, while *umputé* and human beings were both children. In these men's schemes Allah was superior to the monotheistic placental spirit *umputé*. On one hand the males defied Reformist's categories, but on the other hand, they accepted Reformists' underlying assumptions about religion. The men upheld the Reformists' basic tenet that Islam is prior and superior. They granted that Allah was first: Allah was the parent. In their scheme of things the bodies of humans were created after Allah. Thus the placental spirit, *umputé*, was created afterwards too.

Though there are differences, there is also consensus in both the male interpreters' and the female mediums' reactions to the Reformist ban of their rite because it was "custom" not "religion." In both cases the men and the women make *adat* monotheistic. They reform it in a sense by relying upon the Reformists' own definition of what constitutes *agama*—monotheistic belief and practice. The local Laujé turn their once pantheistic customs involving multiple spirits into a form of monotheism. They worship one spirit entity, *umputé*, and say it emanates from one source, the body. Thus the Laujé's reaction to Reformists' accusation that their practices are not religious is on one hand to refute such claims and on the other hand to show that Laujé customs are just as monotheistic as any beliefs the Reformists have.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

There are several elements from this case that resonate with other cases throughout Indonesia and beyond. The first point concerns gender and class, the second hegemony and the third monotheism. This first point on gender and class refers to the differences between the Laujé female mediums and the male interpreters. When men and women such as the Laujé express differing viewpoints, it is easy to presume this is primarily due to gender differences and not other factors like class. In the literature on gender and Islam (Strange 1984; Rudie 1983; Cederroth 1983; Lewis 1986; Fuller 1961; Granquist 1947), men are characterized as more quick to adopt the categories promoted by Islam, while women are characterized as more likely to retain the traditional practices and concomitant categories that go along with tradition. It is presumed that local faith grants women more power than does Islam. This case has shown that such a simple dichotomy between male and female and religion and tradition cannot be drawn. Women on one hand adopt Reform Islam and on the other hand resist its intrusion into their "traditional" practices. Some of the female mediums embrace Islam so they and their sons can be like other elites. At the same time these women defiantly refute discriminatory Muslim (Reformist and Sufi) claims that the women's religious knowledge is inferior. The point is that an individual's gender does not determine whether or not an individual will receive or reject Islam and/or tradition. Class, politics and individual history play a substantial and complex role in how belief is expressed in ritual practice.

The second point about this case that resonates with other cases has to do with people like the Laujé who live on the periphery and are able to borrow or resist the categories and words of the hegemonic other. In many respects, the Laujé case seems to be a story about the Great Tradition and the Little (Redfield 1954; Foster 1953) or how the Little Tradition resists the Great (Scott 1976; 1985; 1986; 1990). This is not, however, the complete story. When we characterize Reform Islam as a Great Tradition we lose sight of the fact that there are several loci of power and competing forms of belief and practice within the "hegemonic" global form of Islam.

The Laujé case illustrates how multi-centered, or decentered, hegemonic Great Traditions are. Who or what the hegemonic other is depends to a certain extent on the place the subject occupies or perspective the subject takes within a particular social and ideological context. Thus the Laujé whose ritual was banned saw the Reformists as hegemonic others. The Reformists, however, believed they were peripheral to the bureaucratic regional powers that had allowed the Laujé, under the live-and-let-live policy, to practice *adat*. Thus the Reformists believed their ban was a way to critique and resist aristocratic hegemony in the region. To presume that all Reformists have power and perceive themselves in those terms is to oversimplify the situation. Each individual involved in the

ritual process has his/her own perspective of how one is related to or opposed to a hegemonic center. In this case as elsewhere there is no single and consistent core of Great Tradition counterposed to a peripheral or local tradition. Thus the "center" shifts as one takes the perspective of various participants.

Just as the "center" shifts so does the "periphery." The "periphery" cannot be defined nor located in one particular group or belief. The Laujé do not see themselves as part of a peripheral Little Tradition which is distinct from the hegemonic Islamic center. They believe they are in an ongoing conversation about Islam and what Islam is. Their *umputé* belief is not simply a holdover from an earlier set of peripheral non-Islamic beliefs. It is not a pure unadulterated form of a Little or local Tradition. Instead, it is the form of Islam that Allah or their ancestors (depending upon whether one takes the male interpreters' or the female mediums' perspective) gave to them. From the Laujé perspective *umputé* is a local version of Islam. Yes, we could call this syncretism, but it would presume through objectification of "traditional beliefs" to know what tradition and Islam are and what the hegemonic center and the periphery are (cf. Wagner 1981; Handler 1984; Palmier 1993). From my perspective I believe it is better not to characterize the *umputé* belief as a Little Tradition or as syncretized Islam. Both terms imply that one can identify precisely what Islam and tradition are.

The important issue is how *umputé* became monotheistic. I believe that because *umputé* focussed on the body it became the avenue through which the Laujé, mediums as well as interpreters, could have their cake and eat it too. By focussing on the body and the concomitant rituals associated with healing the body, the Laujé could simultaneously accept and resist the Reformists' attempt to label such ritual blasphemous. They could argue (and believe) they were acting within all the parameters of faithful Islam, at the same time that they could argue (and believe) they were resisting outsiders' attempts to annihilate the beliefs and practices passed down from their ancestors.

This case involving the Laujé points to similar issues which present themselves throughout the world. As people begin to adopt and assimilate notions of monotheism, they often do so by focussing on the human body through rituals of healing. It is important, however, that such healing rituals not be regarded merely as repositories of traditional beliefs passed down unchanged from some historical-mythical past. Instead such healing rituals and the beliefs about the body which are associated with them incorporate complex accommodations and resistances to the religious, political and social powers that be. In other words the body becomes the metaphor through which monotheism, resistance and accommodation are made.



## NOTES

1 According to the Indonesian government census of 1980, the whole Laujé ethnic group numbers no more than 15,000 people (Anema 1983). The term Laujé is one locals use to refer to themselves. It is a linguistic designation, since all Laujé speak Laujé. In the 1980's, however, the term referred more and more often to an ethnic designation rather than a linguistic designation since many of the grade school and middle school "Laujé" children were no longer speaking the language at home, but using the national language Indonesian. My 1991 paper discusses this phenomenon in detail.

2 During the 1950's and 1960's people from South Sulawesi, trying to escape the wars and separatist movements there, moved to Tinombo, knowing it was a safe haven from both the Islamic radicals (Dar ul Islam rebels) and the anti-Marxist separatists (Permesta rebels) (Harvey 1977). Many of these newcomers were followers of the Muhammadiyah sect. By 1962 the Muhammadiyah sect was able to build its first mosque in Tinombo's Gorontalo neighborhood. Once this mosque was erected, it began to attract some Laujé commoners who did not have access to Sufi Islam.

3 Atkinson reminds us that "by an implicit logic of opposites, the official endorsements of religion made those persons who did not (strictly) follow religion, (those who follow *adat* or tradition only) appear to be disloyal national citizens, uncommitted to the values of the Indonesian constitution, not to mention intellectually and morally backward" (Atkinson 1987:2). One of the preambles of the Indonesian constitution states that all citizens must believe in one [monotheistic] God who is omniscient. Many zealous bureaucrats have used this preamble to insist that "animists" following *adat* must convert to one of the four major world religions. Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism are considered world religions and all else is *adat*. In this scheme of things, Hinduism and Buddhism are somehow construed as monotheistic (cf. Acciaioli 1985).

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