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# Javanese Conceptions and Socialisation of Death

## Death Funerals as an Active Orientation of Time and Values

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### OVERVIEW OF THE JAVANESE WAY OF DYING IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ACCOUNTS

Generally speaking, death must be approached as a social event that provokes the gathering and participation of relatives, friends and neighbours. These events involve local conceptions and specific treatment of the corpse. In this period of ideological flux, it is not an easy task for ordinary Javanese to find their way. When dealing with funerary affairs in Java, it is often hard to determine if the practices during the ceremony or the conceptions underpinning them are more Javanist i.e. *kejawèn*<sup>1</sup>—or more Muslim or Christian oriented. Such a determination would require some kind of precise calculation, an exercise native informants might well find neither sensible nor interesting. As a first step in the Javanese funeral

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study, I have chosen to limit my scope to those Javanese who consider themselves essentially—or exclusively—Javanist, subscribing to a Javanese conception of the world and of the way social action must be organised within it.

This does not mean that the Javanist understanding of social relationship and views is homogenous, or lacking any recent external elements. But it does mean that for these Javanese people, being Javanese signifies something at least as substantive as their other identities—Indonesian, Muslim, Christian, and so on—and that the set of conceptions and practices at stake is a coherent one, resilient in the face of ideological competition. In short, the following descriptions will be centred on and drawn from Javanese people putting forward their Javanist understandings for our enlightenment. I have not hesitated to contact other groups and seek conceptual tools outside the Kejawen movement when necessary to understand the wider social context.

The competition between formal religions and *kejawèn* is characterised by several general patterns. Traditionalist Muslim movements usually accept the presence of a Javanist officiant, while modernist Islam do not. Catholics tend to be more tolerant of *kejawèn* than Protestants. In parallel, since the independence of Indonesia in the 1950s, proper *kejawèn* urban trends have developed. Javanist religious groups took the form of mystic groups or factions (*aliran kebatinan*)—among them Subud, Sumarah, Sapta Dharma—studied by Harun Hadiwijono (1967), Niels Mulder (1978), Clifford Geertz (1960) or Paul Stange (1998). They organised themselves more or less formally, regrouping with other organisations or adopting standard doctrines. But the main core of *kejawèn* basically corresponds to a set of rituals and ceremonies directly anchored in society.

One example I will give is the late Mbah Budisuwarno, the main informant of my study on Javanese *kanuragan* ritual initiation. Though he spent time in Yogyakarta city, his base was a small village situated 15 kilometers west of the city where he initiated hundreds of young men from neighbouring villages. He acquired his ritual knowledge from rural ritual masters across the entire island of Java through peregrination and asceticism. This training enabled him to master *kanuragan* initiation at a high level, and at the same time to become a general *kejawèn* master able to perform life cycle rites of passage, including birth, marriage and death.

Having presented this broad socio-cultural picture, I would like to outline more precisely the field of analysis with respect to sources and method. Indeed, I will use different sources of information starting with first-hand data. A first set of data has been collected since 1995 from the aforementioned ritual master, Mbah Budisuwarno, who I have accompanied in all his ritual and ceremonial activities (to be described below). A second set of data has been gathered in recent interviews held with Javanese masters, especially among two who have been caring for people at death for many decades: Pak Moko (interviews in 2012) and Ki Sabdalangit (2017). These three masters have positioned themselves at the vanguard of a growing movement to defend Javanese traditional beliefs from what they see as the hegemonic influence of formal religions. Their observations provide new perspectives

on broader and more specific Javanese conceptions of death as previous researchers—except Robert Hefner—have focused their attention on the ritual pattern.

Before developing into these first-hand data, I will briefly overview the main existing literature on Javanese funerals (Hefner 1985, Koentjaraningrat 1984, Geertz 1960 and Siegel 1983). While the subject matter is the same, the authors offer quite different analyses and interpretations. My own data will enable me to synthesize and comment on these differences.

In the end, these two sources of data will enable me to present elements of interpretation of the Javanese ritual pattern and the Javanese conceptions of life and death, then to put these results in a comparative framework along with broader writings on the same topic of death in order to show differences and similarities between different societies as was shown by Robert Hertz (1907) in his extensive early XX<sup>th</sup> century comparative study and analysis. To this aim, I will consider three questions that can be retained for further comparison. To what extent do the afterlife representations and their concomitant treatment influence human life and give meaning to social life? What kind of social relationships are revealed by the accompaniment practices common to the process of dying and the ritual following death? What is at stake, on the scale of social values, regarding the secular or lay conceptions of relational discontinuity or no continuity between life and the after-life?

### “Affectlessness”, Auspicious Ceremonies and Visits to the Dead

I am always astonished when I am in Java of the easy way close friends or simple acquaintances talk to me of their recently or less recently deceased relatives. A fifty year old mountain woman who had lost her husband and children during the 1994 eruption of the Merapi volcano explained to me calmly: “It’s God’s will.” A seventy years old woman of royal extraction I interviewed in October 2012 offered a similar reaction. She had lost her husband—one of my previous informants—in a car crash, and explained: “It’s quite normal, his heart was sick”. They showed me the way—at least their way—to accept the paths life takes, however challenging, as when losing a close or beloved person.

This Javanese acceptance of life-cycle events like death has been underlined by different Western researchers. Clifford Geertz in his 1950s fieldwork in a small town situated in eastern Central Java, found that “The mode of a Javanese funeral [...] is a calm, undemonstrative, almost languid letting go, a brief ritualized relinquishment of a relationship no longer possible”<sup>2</sup> (Geertz 1960: 72). To characterise such behaviour he used the notion of *iklas*, which he defined as “[...] a state of willed affectlessness, difficult to achieve but always striven for” (Geertz 1960: 73).

In Geertz’s ethnographic descriptions, different elements allow us to understand something of this Javanese attitude. Relying on his informants’ testimonies Geertz (1960: 74-75) shows that, for them, people never can decide the moment of their death so they must adopt a state of *iklas* towards themselves and others.<sup>3</sup> He describes different sequential rites he could observe aiming to signify this attitude

of “letting go” (*iklas*) by the family of the dead. One rite consists of holding or touching the corpse at the moment of cleansing by close relatives and friends, for being able to hold a dead body is considered “courageous” (*tegel*). Another rite is to bear the corpse to the graveyard, to feel the weight of the dead body without its soul (Geertz 1960: 71). As we can see, these are concrete ways of experiencing death and getting used to it.

Koentjaraningrat, himself Javanese, gives us an inside and complementary point of view. According to him, Geertz forgot to pay attention to a very important ritual activity, that of visiting family, ancestors or famous people’s graves, called *nyekar*, “to strew flowers” (Koentjaraningrat 1984: 344), activity which show—I should add—that the relationship with the dead is actually *still* possible, and helps us to understand the position of *iklas* (and the comprehension of *nrima*).

Koentjaraningrat’s remark is part of his general criticism of Geertz’s monograph, that is his over-emphasis on the generic auspicious *slametan* as if this ceremony was the core of communal-private rituals.<sup>4</sup> According to Koentjaraningrat (1984: 364), paying a visit to a dead relative is emotionally important during the first year after his death occurs because the link with the dead is still strong. People visit a family member’s grave when there’s an important event in the family, in which case they come one day before the event, often occurring during Javanese or Muslim celebrations, notably during the week before the fasting month of Ramadhan and the week after it. In a more general way, people come to the graves to ask ancestors for blessings whenever they feel the need: before certain special events or trials in their life, in their work, travelling before a long trip, and so on.

In the villages, people go to the grave of the “founder of the village” (*cakal bakal dhusun*) notably before the main yearly ritual “cleansing of the village” (*bersih dhusun*) scheduled before the first harvest. At that time, they also go to their family members’ graves. People also visit their ancestors’ graves on occasions of genealogical meetings. Large scale *slametan* ritual meals can be held for such meetings (Koentjaraningrat: 364).<sup>5</sup>

Seen through this perspective, relationships with dead relatives do not end when death occurs. They are simply expressed on another level, with a different means of communication<sup>6</sup>, which questions what is at stake on the occasion of this inter-stages passage.

## Death Funerals as an Inversion of Ritual Debt

The night of the burial the family organizes a *slametan* called *sedhekah ngesur siti* where people who have helped prepare the ceremony are invited. In addition to the numerous generic and specific offerings, prayers and *dhikir*,<sup>7</sup> Koentjaraningrat specifies that complementary offerings are placed twice a day for 40 days under the bed where the dead person once slept. These offerings are followed by a number of *slametan*: “of the 3<sup>rd</sup> day” (*sedhekah nigang ndinteni*), “of the 7<sup>th</sup> day” (*mitung ndinteni*), “of the 40<sup>th</sup> day” (*ngawangdasa dinten*), “the 100 days *slametan*” (*sedhekah nyatus*), “the one year *slametan*” (*sedhekah mendhak sepiisan*), “the two

years slametan” (*sedhekah mendhak kaping kalih*), and “the one thousand days slametan” (*sedhekah nyewu*) (ibid.: 362).<sup>8</sup>

For Koentjaraningrat, spreading out the commemoration of death—by almost three years—allows one to express and master emotional and spiritual feelings. This is carried out alongside the practice of flowering relatives and ancestors’ graves (ibid.: 396). Such a practice is also considered important by Hefner (1985) in his Tengger Javano-Hindu ethnography.<sup>9</sup> Some detailed differences arise, such as the position of the dead person’s head, placed to the south in the grave (ibid.: 155) rather than to the north for Islamised Javanese. A more important difference, after the burying there is no other post-mortem commemoration for the dead (ibid.: 157). But there are also many similarities between Tengger and other Javanese peoples, like the use of the *slametan* as their generic auspicious ceremony.<sup>10</sup> The Tengger—as their Javanese regional neighbours—generally do not fear death. Funerals similarly present occasions to familiarize themselves with death: anyone present in the village or the area may view the corpse, and most of the close relatives can touch it.

In the following stage, Hefner underlines another important fact that explains the stoicism of the dead person’s kin. At the end of the rite, kin come and piously bow to the soul of their dead relative; the gesture they make (*sembah bakti*) is the same as the one used in the *entas-entas* and other invocations of the ancestral dead. “Personal loss is thus quickly drawn into ritualised pattern”, underlines Hefner. The author notices that from this moment, the spirit of the deceased—irreversibly distant—will be reachable only through ritual form. “The soul joins the community of other family and village spirits, spirits invited again and again to one’s home for the rest of one’s life. The ritual reciprocity of elder to youth is reversed, as now it is the child who honours parents and insures his elders’ spiritual welfare.” This cycle of social and spiritual interdependence underlines villagers’ conceptions of the nature of the afterlife.

The souls of the dead remain in contact with the living until time has erased their memory and their individual identity is lost. Distant ancestors then join the assembly of guardian spirits concerned with the welfare of the village as a whole. (Hefner 1985: 159.)

## The Question of Ancestor Worship and the Counter-Gift Pattern

Through reading Koentjaraningrat and Hefner, it is surprising that Geertz does not seriously take into account the attention Javanese people pay to their ancestors. In the only brief paragraph dedicated to the question, he speaks of “vague apostrophes to the ancestors”, of simple “decoration of family graves now and again” (Geertz 1960: 76). This is all the more surprising since the focus of Geertz’s ethnographic work should enable him to understand the importance of this attention. When he notices that Javanese funerals occur very quickly after a death (usually the same day or within 24 hours) and that all concerned people immediately leave

whatever occupation they are doing—regardless of when and where—to join the house of the deceased, it indicates that something important is at stake.

He also notices direct components linked to ancestors worship: “the rice-flour pancakes called *apem* and prepared for the funeral *slametan* ceremony are the special food of the dead and of one’s ancestors” (Geertz 1960: 71). About the corpse, which is laid on three banana trunks (ibid.: 69), he might have connected it to the banana trunk of the shadow play ritual linked to valorous ancestor worship (see Rassers 1959). Last but not least he mentions “close relatives who go to strew flowers in his [the dead person’s] grave on each anniversary of his death”, and also one day before the fast, when one dreams of him, or when one feels it necessary to go there (Geertz 1960: 72). Even though Geertz still believes it is the event of death itself which is important, he doesn’t pay proper attention to the two main and joined motivations that underlie the event: the act of meeting together and starting the ancestor making process (ibid.: 68).

Thus, Hefner very significantly underlines that Tengger people do not pay much more attention to reincarnation than the *kejawèn* people of other regions do. Their “core concepts are those related to the community of the living and that of the family dead thought to be directly connected with ancestors.” In this way, conceptions about the afterlife are not “generated in priestly rituals.” Karmic retribution, the location of the heavens, and judgment after death are secondary to the interest paid to ancestors, simply put: “in ritual one meets one’s ancestors” (Hefner 1985: 160-161)<sup>11</sup>, remark which matches Ki Sabda’s descriptions on ancestors in the second part.

Hefner specifies that when they reach a certain age: “parents begin to withdraw from the village exchange circuit so important in village social life”. Hefner further observes that death “finishes an elder’s social limbo” and—as we have seen—“opens a new cycle of ritual reciprocity, as now the parent becomes the object of his child’s ritual blessing” (Hefner 1985: 153). In his view—if I understand correctly—a kind of gift and reciprocal- or counter-gift cycle operates on the scale of the life and afterlife sojourn, socially enacting the circulation of human beings on Earth.<sup>12</sup>

I will come back to the circulation of human beings and the connected temporality it implies through the processes of death and ancestralisation in the next sections. For the moment, through the testimony of three *kejawèn* masters, I propose to examine the main characteristics of general relationships with regard to Javanese funerary practices and conceptions.

### THREE KEJAWÈN MASTERS

Respected elders are called *sesepuh* and addressed as *mbah* if they are old and experienced enough or *ki* if they are younger but already much informed on traditional knowledge. Their experience and knowledge is highly valued; they are consulted to play an active role in the ceremonial rites of passage activities, including birth and death. They are notably called upon to help the dying or newly deceased find a path if they get lost in facing afterlife.

If the common Javanese person understands more or less the Javanese meaning of pre-birth, life and afterlife, the *sesepuh* knows the different things a dead person may encounter or might see along his way to the afterlife: the meaning of different lights, the significance of one colour or another,<sup>13</sup> and also the meaning of the ceremonial ingredients used to communicate with the dead during death rituals, including local food. Thus, the *sesepuh* can interpret the meaning of before and after life signs and he is able to use appropriate formulas to help the dead move ahead in the right direction.

Even if some of them are called far from their homes, sometimes abroad, a *sesepuh*'s network is mainly localised and anchored in the society at large, for the organisation of ceremonial rituals open to the entire neighbourhood. They are not restricted to organised groups closed to non-members, such as the *kebatinan* groups I mentioned earlier, though they may partake in both open and closed groups.

Like deceased Mbah Budisuwarno, who also went by Mbah Budi, the *sesepuh* is usually a man<sup>14</sup> who has learned and acquired his knowledge from one or more other *sesepuh* and developed his own experience. What is important to remember for the following analysis is that his knowledge transmission mode is mainly oral, inducing a concomitant type of social relationship.

## An Old Traditional Master and the Different Ways of Approaching Death

For Mbah Budi, the broad scope of his traditional training led him to integrate a wide variety of socio-cultural elements, including those dealing with death. Mastering *kanuragan* ritual initiation, which is martial in its basic elements, means he dealt directly with death in everyday practice. The initiation itself aimed to transmit entities called *aji* providing invulnerability to the student. The transmission occurred during a ritual where the student was submitted to a killing-like ordeal that would instantly demonstrate his courage and the efficiency of the *aji* (de Grave 2001: 26-36, 2014).

Mbah Budi also used the strength of the “four spirit siblings” (*sadulur papat*) who Javanese believe are born along with any new born baby: one born from the placenta, one from the amnion, one from the umbilical cord and one from the blood. These spirit siblings represent the strength at the core of *kanuragan*. The basic formula (*mantra*) taught by Mbah Budi to his students was an invocation of the four. More broadly speaking, the sentence “my elder sibling the amnion, my younger sibling the placenta” (*kakang kawah, adhi ari-ari*) is well known amongst the Javanese. I will come back to this question with Ki Sabda's information on the subject, but we can already see that elements of birth play a central part in the ritual initiation. As we can see, these elements are present as death components of the process giving birth to the person, or a “life-giving death” process, as Daniel de Coppet (1981) puts it.



Another aspect of Mbah Budi's ritual activity linked to (the prevention of) death was his participation in wedding ceremonies to officiate *ruwatan* rituals designed to harmonise the bride and the groom when their birth dates are incompatible according to the Javanese calendar. The *ruwatan* ritual aims to protect the victims of the god of time Kala, who usually attacks certain categories of children, but may also look for adult victims (about *ruwatan*, see footnote 12).

Mbah Budi was also called on for funeral ceremonies where he stood as a *kejawèn* officiant, usually beside a Muslim or Christian counterpart. In these circumstances he notably pronounced a *mantra* which stipulated that the dead person had to come back to his previous form of air, earth, fire and water before joining his ancestors. An important linked activity to funerals is the pilgrimage to his master's graves, or to Hindu-Buddhist saints' or famous warriors' graves, or to the tomb of Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX, under whom he served during the War of Independence against the Dutch. All of them were considered by Mbah Budi as high valued ancestors thanks to their asceticism and compassion, and particularly their heroic roles as warriors, which brings us back to the ritual initiation.

As I have tried to show in earlier writings (de Grave 2001, 2008, 2014, 2017), the traditional initiation constitutes the core of the numerous subsequent initiations we find in the Javanese context, be they religiously or secularly oriented. If we add the process of ascetic preparation preceding the initiatory ceremony, this ritual appears to be an explicit preparation for the ultimate rite of passage we call death. On that subject, the *ayam ingkung* offering—a chicken prepared by the master's wife with spices, coconut milk and special ingredients—is made as a counter gift by the students to the master and the elders. It symbolises the purity of the person succeeding the rite of passage and, as we shall see, it is also used on the last funeral commemoration.

Being involved in such a complex set of rituals, Mbah Budi also referred to socio-cultural ways of representing war and death such as the puppet theatre of *wayang purwa*. The most powerful *aji* Mbah Budi used—the *aji gineng*—is represented in the *wayang* play called *Arjunawiwaha* (de Grave 2001: 100-103) in which Arjuna is the champion of the gods to fight the giant Niwatakawaca who wants to conquer the gods' celestial city. Both Arjuna and the giant have reached the highest state of Shiva tantric yoga which enables them to reach the process of deliverance, called *moksa*, from the cycle of reincarnations. Arjuna renounces *moksa* in order to continue serving and defending the kingdom and the equilibrium of the universe. Niwatakawaca for his part is still overwhelmed by ambition and desire. Both of them hold the *aji gineng* but thanks to a trick Arjuna ultimately wins. The *aji gineng* is also used in the end to care for injured soldiers or even resuscitate the dead. In the same way, Mbah Budi transmitted *aji gineng* for protection of high level students or used it for curing the ill not following his teaching (ibid.: 69-70).

In my first book (ibid.: 116-120), I compared this story with Aji Saka's legend of the creation of the Javanese alphabet. After having won a battle, the future first king of Java, Aji Saka, gave contradictory orders to his two servants, Dara and Sembada, resulting in them fighting and killing each other. Sad but inspired

by his mistake, Aji Saka creates a syllabary which recounts the event: “There are two envoys. They do not oppose [the orders]. They are of equal strength. Here are their corpses.” This story is broadly known in Java, notably because it is recounted during the apprenticeship of the syllabary in school or out, but also because it stimulates neverending discussions among adults over its esoteric meaning. According to our subject, we may just note here that death stands at the centre of the story, but it is not a random death, it is a death caused by a faithful service to the king as guarantor of the equilibrium of the community and the universe (like Arjuna). From my fieldwork, the two main lessons the event teaches are: 1) one should discuss intelligently before resorting to violence; and 2) when an untimely event such as death occurs, one should find a way to make it positive.

These general considerations now clarified, I will outline the conceptions of two other ritual masters specialized on death questions.

## Two Younger Masters Specialised in Accompanying the Dead

Pak Moko—Agus Moko Pramusanto—is a ritual master and healer accompanying those close to death. Founder of the Institute for the Apprenticeship of Eastern Healing Practices (Lembaga Pendidikan Khusus Seni Pengobatan Timur) in Yogyakarta, he was 45 years old when I interviewed him in 2012. He is from a social environment he himself calls “still very much *kejawèn*” where he could start to learn very early, at primary school age, from his father and from Javanese almanacs including *primbon betaljemur* or Javanese philosophical writings.

Ki Sabdalangit was living near the Yogyakarta royal palace (*kraton*) and 51 years old in 2012 when first interviewed. He and his spouse—Roro Dewi Untari, descendant of the king Mangkunegara IV—own a traditional Javanese restaurant. Though he used to work as a forest engineer in Kalimantan, for the last nine years and up until our last interview in 2017 he has been exclusively focusing on *kejawèn* ritual activities and activism.

Pak Moko and Ki Sabdalangit both share a marked *kejawèn* orientation. Comparing their approaches is useful for understanding *kejawèn* as a whole. While Pak Moko emphasizes a philosophical understanding, Ki Sabda focuses on the intergenerational link and the ancestral process, including cycles of rebirth and reincarnation. Pak Moko is including his action in the dialogue between religions, notably through the interreligious Forum Komunikasi Antar Agama (FKAA) created by the Catholic Father Rama Yatna, but also through the active participation of traditionalist NU members and Catholics. Meanwhile Ki Sabda—though open minded to other religious currents—is willing to assert the prominent consistency and value of *kejawèn* conceptions based on “active and factual approach” (*ngelmu kasunyatan*) inside rather endogenous networks.

Both approaches remind us that the *kejawèn* set of communal rituals described above and called *slametan* is still ensuring social unity through religious diversity because entire neighbourhoods attend it irrespective of their religion. This has been noted by Andrew Beatty (1999) and confirmed by Pak Moko in his statement

that all rituals from the first day to the 1000 day funerary commemoration are attended by non *kejawèn* people,<sup>15</sup> heeding the duty to fulfil one's obligation to attend funerary commemorations at the risk of social disapproval.

This clearly shows that *kejawèn* social practices, beyond their use of Javanese language (a regional language broadly used in everyday life), represent an inescapable basis for broad social cohesion. As alluded to earlier, Ki Sabda's firm defence faced with other religious trends shows how much pressure he is under, notably the fundamentalist and radical trends of Islam. One aspect of Javanism that provokes indignation by outsiders, says Pak Moko, is the exclusive use by *kebatinan* organisation members<sup>16</sup> of *kejawèn* rituals and their not partaking in formal religions. This fact may shock persons following mainstream monotheist religious orthodoxy, such as we see in everyday religious confrontation.<sup>17</sup>

## Conceptions around Death: Micro/Macrocosmos Relation Cycles, Empathy, Ancestry, Rites of Passage

Both Pak Moko and Ki Sabda consider death as a step in a wider expression of being expressed in the broadly well-known Javanese expression and concept of the "origin and becoming of the being" (*sangkan paraning dumadi*). It is explored further through Ki Sabdalangit's statement that awareness means to exercise one's intention again and again to make clear what one wants and why; this will keep self and community safe.

Ki Sabda details information on the "circular movement" called *cakra manggilingan* of "continuous renewal", and the different phases of pre-conception from the eternal dimension of Kelanggenan to pro-conception in Tirtoyuga ("place and period of water") and conception in Dwaparayuga ("strange period and place") when and where the soul (*sukma*) unites with the physical body (*raga*). In his description, before rebirth, the "hot destructive place" of Merkapada corresponds to the earthly sojourn and cycle, and functions as a school. It is situated between "father cosmos" and "mother earth" the womb of cosmos where we are born and die, and where we learn about the origin of life and its destiny.

Such a "quest for true knowledge" (*ngelmu sejati*) allows one to "see beyond appearances", to "reach consciousness close to the essence of life" and can only produce tolerance. Life on Earth itself is divided between "young" (*kaenoman*) inexperienced people and those who are "experienced" (*kasepuhan*); only the latter can reach high levels of comprehension of the "existential becoming" and help others to prepare for the transitional birth to the "real vital dimension" according to their worldly performance.

This broad philosophical conception sometimes tinted with Hindu-Buddhist elements is accompanied by a complex description of elementary human components. Insofar as the physical components are concerned, Pak Moko explicitly insists on the link between the "decay" of the corpse (skin, blood, flesh, hair, nails, bones and marrow) and the set of rituals up to the 1000-days peak and

final commemoration, as expressing the process to “perfection” (*kasampurnan*) including “forgiveness of the deceased’s mistakes”. Pak Sabda also explains that these steps correspond to a general process. Around the 40<sup>th</sup> day, the spirit (*roh*) begins to leave the house to go to the eternal world. During this time, he also returns episodically, but from 100 days he goes even further. It is from 1000 days that the deceased enters the eternal dimension if his global action during his worldly sojourn has been sufficiently meritorious. These parallel conceptions of the corpse’s decay and the evolution of the spirit fits with Robert Hertz’s analysis (1907) of the ancestralisation process that needs at least two funeral rites to be completed: one when death occurs and the last and most important one (the so called “second funeral”) when the decay of flesh is completed, whatever be the contextual treatment of the corpse or the bones.

In the same way, the final 1000 days commemoration featured by the *ayam ingkung* offering symbolizing the purity of the person succeeding the rite of passage—as we have seen is common in Javanese ritual initiation—is also matching with Hertz’s seminal observation on the explicit relationship occurring between the different rites of passage, notably initiation to enter the adult age class.

Death is the passage from visible society to the invisible society, exactly analogous to the operation by which the young man is extracted from the society of women and children and introduced into that of adult men, a new integration that gives access to the sacred mysteries of the tribe and implies a profound change of his person, renewing his body and his soul. This similarity is so fundamental that this change takes place through the featured death of the aspirant, followed by his rebirth to a higher life, characteristic of the initiation of passage into adulthood and the world of the ancestors. [...] in rejoining his fathers, the dead man is reborn transfigured, raised to a higher power and dignity; in other words, death is an initiation. (Hertz 1907: 72.)

Hertz also widens his observations on the funerary sacrifice to birth and wedding, to find that in all cases it may “change the state of people (or things) to enable them to enter a new phase of their lives” (Hertz 1907: 56), underlining that this profound modification is gradual and requires time. Thus, for him, death is part of a general phenomenon which induces a transitory state. Doing so he appears to be a precursor of Van Gennep’s rites of passage (1909) but he goes further by explicating the way each passage implies in the same movement the death of the person to his previous group or class age and his rebirth to the new one (Hertz 1907: 73-74), announcing the funeral ending the earthly cycle.

But it must be specified, as shown in the Javanese example, that death passage is explicitly a special one as it is reflected in the special treatment of the offerings described by both masters: the *tumpeng* “[mountain form] rice offering”—served at generic *slametan* ceremonies – in that context is called *tumpeng pungkur*, from *pungkur* (“back”), done with a normal *tumpeng kerucut* (“conical”) that is cut at its centre, then the two halves are turned back to back so that they are placed “inside out” to show the inversion – and at the same time the end—of a cycle,

and vegetables must be cut into small pieces to say it's over, at the difference of the other *slametan* life cycle offerings. As notably asserted by Daniel de Coppet et al. (1984: 429), in ancestrality-based conceptions it is necessary to understand “the exchanges practiced by the living in the midst of acts performed by the dead, since these give disease and death, prepare marriages and give their names to newborns.”

Coming back to the Javanese physical body components, Ki Sabda outlines that during life they are accompanied with important other “invisible” entities such as the “four spirit siblings” (*sadulur papat*)—linked to the four cardinal points and the four elements of air, fire, water and earth, constitutive of the human body so that the cosmos is part of human body—and more especially the placenta (*ari-ari*), playing a very important role in the ritual process of birth, life cycle and ritual initiation, as we have started to see with Mbah Budi. This four-term classification, still according to Ki Sabda, induces a fifth asymmetric central one which is our “true guardian” (*guru sejati*) or *sukma*, who may advise us to master our “thin constituents,” such as “attachments” (*nafsu*) and “desires”.

Ki Sabda also include “deep” constituent such as “reason, mind, judgement and thought” before the deepest ones of “soul” (*sukma*), “spirit” (*jiwa*) (part of soul), “true feeling” (*rasa sejati*), and the final one of “vital energy” (*atma sejati*) that gives life just before “The Great Sublime” (Kang Maha Mulya) enabling one to join the soul of the macrocosm. A special attention is paid to the “true feeling” (around which many traditional initiatory formations are taught, emphasizes Ki Sabda, like *pencak*, *tenaga dalam*, *kanuragan*) for it plays a central role in strengthening the capacity of “resistance”, “consciousness” and the “vital link” (*nyawa*), and help to “decide the moment of our death”.

Sanskrit notions like *moksa*—“deliverance” of the cycle of reincarnation—used by Ki Sabda might lead us to think that these conceptions are linked to Indianisation, but the question of reincarnation is also present in many traditional groups following an explicit process of second funerals. It has notably been shown by Hertz (1907) concerning Austronesian Dayak groups present in the same Malayo-Austronesian area as the Javanese. Another important linked element is the continuous reference to ancestors done by both masters and Mbah Budi—and more broadly by Javanese people less formally attached to orthodox religious conceptions—which do not match with Indian conceptions on reincarnation, but rather with observations we have already seen done by Hefner, Koentjaraningrat, Headley, Jay and Rassers. Ki Sabda maintains that the more someone's action is empathetic and focuses on helping other living creatures, the more this person will be given the opportunity to help his close family members, ultimately by reaching the “true glorious world” after death, something not possible for other ancestors.

## Status and Treatment of the Dead: Eight Javanese Varieties of Death

Thus, Ki Sabda establishes a distinction between two species of ancestors: those entering the simple “glorious world” (*alam kamulyan*) and those entering the “true glorious world” (*alam kamulyan sejati*). This distinction reveals different ancestral status, as already shown by Sophie Chave (2018: 15) in a comparative approach. In Java, this difference of status explicitly depends on the action of the dead during their worldly sojourn. The more this action is valued by the ancestors, the more they are considered able to help the living. This fact explains why the set of funeral ceremonies is characterised by a collective aspect, noted by Hertz (1907: 44, 64) and Condominas (2018: 177), as the whole community is potentially concerned by the action of the dead, be it good or bad.

Besides the status of simple and illustrious ancestor, other kinds of post-mortem status are evoked through Ki Sabda’s explanations which help us understand why not everyone can become an ancestor. He and Pak Moko give us keys for understanding the linkage between ritual commemorations and the path taken by the spirit of the dead person from the time he leaves his house and family to the point when he becomes an ancestor. This path is inhabited by malevolent spirits or spirits in limbo.<sup>18</sup>

As a passage, death requires protection and normally the set of 7 commemorations (3, 7, 40, 100 days, then 1 year, 2 years, then 1000 days).<sup>19</sup> This process also requires specific protections such as “sweet grass” (*dlingo bengle* or *Acorus calamus*) that we also find at birth ceremonies, which is also surrounded with attentive protections planned during the whole duration of the gestation, birth and post-birth.<sup>20</sup> People also must shower after the death ceremony to evacuate “bad influences”; protective actions towards such influences are also described in all Hertz (1907) examples.

For families of dead people having difficulties accepting their new condition (“in need of help”) a complementary *bancakan* ceremony must be held according to the birthday of the dead person—her *weton* not her death day—so that this person is assimilated to a special category of dead that will require more care from her close family and friends. We might consider that it is because such a person has not objectivised yet her social action so that she is still lost in individual concerns determined by the *bancakan* category, which is more oriented towards personal matters.

Another category concerns the malemort. They need additional ceremonial treatment like adding flowers and money to prevent them from eating each other. The example of road accidents is given several times by the two masters but more inauspicious deaths are caused by witchcraft and impending marriages or births,<sup>21</sup> necessitating specific protections depending on the circumstances, including quarantine and/or protective objects or measures.<sup>22</sup>

Facing all these dangers requires, as underlined by Hertz (1907: 50), the office of a strong individual able to drive and protect the spirit in the other world. This care

is similar to that given a newborn or an initiation candidate, both of which require the help of community members and a ritual specialist. Pak Moko has helped his people in various ways. He convinced one not to feel guilty for not fulfilling a social duty and helped a man to gain two days of life to be able to attend his daughter's wedding. Ki Sabda helped an old woman meet her son before she died and promised another woman that if she dies he would take care of her daughter.

These examples clearly show that death does not introduce any separation with others and with ancestors who, as explained by Ki Sabda, consider our death as a birth from the earthly matrix to their world. Just as we know when a baby is about to be born, the Javanese also know when we shall be born into the "eternal world". Relationships are maintained and these family links constitute the main theme of the funeral process, as both masters describe.

Finally, Hertz (1907: 77, note 3) gives examples of societies where complex ritual treatment is unnecessary, such as among the Dayak and Indians, where a sole funeral is sufficient to introduce deceased into the next world. These examples fit with the Javanese case of death by *moksa* described by Ki Sabda and for Javanese theatre by Mbah Budi. Hertz also mentioned that young children do not need second funerals either, as Koentjaraningrat has described for Java (see footnote 12). According to the logic behind these ancestor cults, two categories of individuals did not have the opportunity to develop significant social boundaries during their lives: ascetics because they renounce temporal social relations and children because they lack enough time to build them.

## Death Distinction and Synchronic Temporality

According to Ki Sabda and Pak Moko's descriptions, Javanese ways of dying fall into one of the following eight categories: 1) people without benefit of ritual treatment (those living and dying alone, those lost or disappeared); 2) the cruel and wicked, whom no ritual treatment can reincarnate in a human form; 3) the malemort, who require complex treatment from their relatives; 4) people who took little care of others, thus need a purgatory treatment after death; 5) individuals living a simple life but concerned of what they did or did not do and need to be accompanied to overcome their fears during their "passage"; 6) those who live a simple and honest life, often helping others, and are thus likely to access the status of simple ancestor; 7) those whose lives revolve around helping others, qualifying them to become illustrious ancestors in the afterlife; and 8) individuals who directly access the "true glorious world" without any ritual treatment. These eight categories show a variety of distinctive ways of dying, a comprehensive socio-cultural understanding of death and of accompanying the dead, which mirror the distinction of social relationship and social values.

In a somewhat different way Sophie Chave discerns elements of gradation that classify the living as a function of the dead through a logic of relations transcending the boundary between life and death. These elements of gradation induce distinctions of status relative to the succession of generations established through

the action of prestigious ancestors and establish a recognised genealogical link, upon which is established a status scale for the dead and the living. This gradation in status is at the foundation of the dynamic order of society (Chave 2018: 37).

The nature of prestige, as it refers to ultimate values, varies from one community to another in Javanese society, embedded as it is in the broader Indonesian nation-state. According to Hertz, the way families, villages and the nation in its entirety accept to submit their dead to a common treatment is political: “by constituting the society of the dead, the society of the living recreates itself in a regular way” (Hertz 1907: 57). It should be underlined here, too, that the so called “common treatment” may raise problems between communities not sharing common values and perspectives, including religious ones.

I will come back to this point later. For the moment, as the notions of “generational succession” (the process of access to ancestrality, the different statuses of ancestors and dead, their periodic return to life on earth) and “re-creation” (the community dimension of funerals and the relationship with the dead) suggest a strong temporal aspect, which requires us to consider the implications for Javanese conceptions of time.

Past and future are often intertwined. Ki Sabda refers to Sabdo Palon’s fifteenth century prophecy<sup>23</sup> where the Javanese *anak duraka* (“rebellious child”) abandon their own knowledge. For this “treason” the ancestors have put them to the test through catastrophes and atrocities for five hundred years. According to Ki Sabda, the key to remaining faithful to one’s ancestors and benefit from their support is to perpetuate their ethical teaching and value their intangible and material heritage. Sabdo Palon announced he would return in 500 years to render their Javanity to the Javanese so that they could find their “true being” (*jati diri*) and restore social harmony. In this example, we see a figure from the past predicting our future and announcing his imminent return.

Ki Sabda is aware that ancestors know when someone will die. If he catches sight of an ancestor when he is accompanying a dying person, or sees one in the old or sick person’s bedroom, he will know their time has come. These signs illustrate the temporal bonds linking humans with ancestors who see the future of their descendants. In this way, people from the past communicate in the present through ritual activity, and they signpost the future.

Moreover, as underlined by Sophie Chave, ancestrality is a state and a status to which the living can eventually access, with this particularity of societies animated by the principle of reincarnation where the future comes from the ancestors since the dead can come back to life as newborns (Chave 2018: 14). Far from limited to a relationship between past ancestors and living individuals, the world of ancestry encompasses all dimensions of time.<sup>24</sup>

It is appropriate to recall here Robert Hefner’s central remark on the inversion of ritual debt: the parents have ritual obligations towards their children from birth until marriage, but when comes the moment of death it is the children who must carry the debt for their parents. This inversion is effectively possible in a



consanguineous kinship system but it is also possible in a broad parent-child classificatory system.

My comment is that in both cases, it explains why Ki Sabda insists on such a system when he speaks of the Javanese process of ancestralisation, which can easily lead to spiritual kinship if the intergenerational conditions are fulfilled. The inversion also explains why deceased who do not enter the parent-child classification may not enter the process of ancestralisation (people living and dying alone, lost people, people rejected by the living) or at least may encounter great difficulties gaining access (the malemort, those who did not take care of others, those who put their own interests before the care of others), and why banishment may be a punishment nearly as severe as physical death.

It means that those who are *future*-oriented through the support of their ascendants and elders at their birth, initiation and marriage, are likely to proceed through life somewhat in parallel fashion aside the *past* worldly sojourns of their ascendants, reaching the moment of death, having to bear the latter's social past and spiritual debts in their post-mortem becoming. This ritual inversion is announced by the initiation passage when the initiated have to consider their past youth from the point of view of adulthood: as ancestors the ascendants who consider the future of the living from their own point of view face a similar situation.

Thus, the inversion of the ceremonial status of the living becoming ritually responsible for the passage of their parents—probably because of the intense nature of death—represents the apogee of an outlook towards a past becoming a future. It starts with the birth passage, which involves little of the alternated past-future combination, then initiation to adulthood and marriage, which involves it much more, before the final climax of death.

## The Implementation of Ultimate Values

If we follow the explanations of Ki Sabda, ancestors of the “true glorious world” are most able to master the complexion of time outlined above. They may disappear from the present through *moksa* if felt necessary or they may stay. This mastery means that they come from a long succession of lives through which they have learned to perfect themselves. As members of the “true glorious dimension”, they can pay visit to the living to help them to accomplish their tasks involving their future, or even be reborn to act directly, so that their previous existences inform the future of their new lives.

In this scheme it appears that this mastery of temporality found among the higher ranks of ancestors is also promoting the highest social values. In light of Ki Sabda's information, these higher ancestors can fluently communicate with the living because their terrestrial lives have been dedicated to helping others in a consistent way. The result is that ultimate values are fundamentally social values expressed through relational behaviour focused on common group interest.

Among the Mono-Alu (Salomon Islands), a Melanesian society with Austronesian socio-cultural features, Denis Monnerie (1995, 1996: 240-241, 309-313)

identified recurring phenomena according to which the fundamental values of society as a whole, and the dynamics that ensure its renewal, ultimately reside in the tension between, on the one hand a vast and mostly anonymous category of “original” ancestors (*nitu alu*) and, on the other hand recent ancestors (*nitu*), personally named. It is the propensity of the former to always integrate the latter that ensures the proper movement of the ritual system, the cycle of life and the renewal of generations.

This also appears in the Javanese case between *kamulyan sejati* ancestors and (simple) *kamulyan* ones. In Robert Hefner’s descriptions of the Javanese Tengger: “Distant ancestors [...] join the assembly of guardian spirits concerned with the welfare of the village as a whole. The individual tie gives way to a more anonymous and collective relationship”. Thus, in these Javanese cases, we also obtain in practice what Denis Monnerie calls the “transformation chains” through the complex funeral ritual treatment leading the dead person in Mono Alu to the status of recent ancestor (Monnerie 1996: 312).

As evidenced in the funeral treatment of the “image” (*nunu*) of the dead person,<sup>25</sup> a key to funeral transformations into ancestors is that, for Monnerie, it sums up the degree of completeness of the relations established by the person during life (ibid.<sup>26</sup>). This completeness is echoing the qualitative actions during life (or during the succession of different lives) Ki Sabda listed in the above enumerations.

Another interesting shared element is the fact that macrocosmic elements are part of the living and the dead, so that human society is not construed as distinct from the universe but as part of it. For instance, this reflects in the heart of the living being called *nitu*, the word used for ancestors, in Mono Alu, and the four spirit siblings originating from the four basic elements constitutive of the cosmos in Java. It also is found in the circulation of ceremonial meals made up of contrasted elements from the ecological environment (ibid.: 313) and in the different descriptions of the Javanese context in this article.

As a consequence, in both cases (Java and Mono Alu), high level ancestors are linked to valued societal knowledge—be it technical, ecological, empirical or conceptual—accorded the level of certainty. This is another reason why they are considered the main source of social stability in society and the world (ibid.: 240-241).

The Javanese system appears more open since the place of the individual within social organisation means one’s own action carries weight. This relative openness, which is mainly orientated towards ancestrality at the conceptual and empirical ceremonial level, is marked by Hindu-Buddhist conceptions, but is also influenced by the competition and even the threat to Javanism posed by fundamentally universalist religions as we shall see in the following sections.

## Comparison with and Influence of Normative Religions

Hertz (1907: 71, 72) compares conceptions of death in ancestor’s cults and in Christianity. He finds interesting parallels in both: the treatment of the body and the evolution of the soul, the notion of “passage” (from the terrestrial city to

the divine one) and of “initiation”, with a promise of resurrection in the future. But he underlines an ontological difference with the main role played by the intercession of the Son of God—Jesus—in the process of resurrection, in place of a ritual process involving the community of the concerned group. In the second case, the resurrection is occurring after the second funerals; in the Christian case the duration is not a set one.

The absence of second funerals or the indeterminacy of [the soul’s] resurrection may appear slight, however they may be socially fundamental if they result in a restriction of the active social role of close relatives and community members of the dead, conferring a more abstract dimension to the death itself. A question then arises whether this conceptual and empirical abstraction is coupled with increased abstraction in terms of social relationships.

If we follow Hertz (1907: 44), the final ceremony of the funerals has a triple objective: to give final burial to the remains of the deceased, ensure stillness to the soul and access to the land of the dead, and lift the burden of mourning from the living. In the Christian conception Hertz depicts, the vagueness introduced regarding how the soul can reach stillness and when and how it will reach the world of the dead introduces elements of uncertainty. Uncertainty in turn has an impact on the ability to manage grief. In the ancestral conceptual scheme, the dead come back occasionally, or through rebirth, the process is marked out, the relationship with the dead is conceptually clearer, the reasons to grieve less clear and compelling.

Here too the link to time is concerned. The Christian conception of time is not only linear and oriented from the past to the future; it is comparatively cumulative as it induces an exponential accumulation of the dead, including valorous dead with whom one has had no direct relationship as one might have with valorous ancestral kinship ascendants. The cult of saints appears to be an intermediary way between both conceptual poles, as it has been analysed, for instance, by Henri Chambert-Loir (2002). But due to the principle of accumulation because of the impossibility for the dead to return to social life one way (interaction) or another (reincarnation), the future is no longer linked to the present through the past. It is the sole past of the saints or of the glorious founders that becomes the norm on which ultimate values will be constructed through social action.

These elements reflect the temporal link with extraordinary ancestors Ki Sabda identifies, such as Sabda Palon, who can see the future social world cut off from its relationship with its ascendants and descendants. Thus, we may have a better understanding of why in the eyes of these ancestors, not respecting the material and immaterial socio-cultural heritage is a “treason” worthy of condemnation. It is not simply a question of local genius in its knowledge and material dimensions which is at stake, it is also a question of balance, between past, present and future, according to a contextual mode of social relationship where death plays a central role. The new question arising is what happens when norms of emerging ultimate values and the link to time and death change?

## JAVANESE CONCEPTIONS OF DYING FACED WITH INDONESIAN MODERNIZATION FORCES AND THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

### Communitarianism and Holism

When he says that “there can be no metaphysical retribution just for going to Mass or to the mosque” Ki Sabda repeats the broad Javanese consensus that the spirit is more important than the letter. This consensus flows from the concepts of “origin and becoming of the being” and “quest for true knowledge” which allow one to exercise one’s intention to “see beyond appearances” and ultimately “reach consciousness close to the essence of life”. For centuries, the tenants of orthodox religious views had to grapple with this philosophy of life which transcends normative teaching (see Ricklefs 2006, 2007, 2012). As tolerance is the basic concept of Javanism, and as formal religions teach tolerance, open conflicts rarely occur in diverse everyday Javanese contexts.

Nevertheless, the turn of events over the last twenty years, with increasing communitarianism, neoliberalism and religious radicalism, makes it harder to accept additional coercive pressure from government and formal religious organisations. The subject is a sensitive one and the question of the recognition of local cults is currently the object of contentious court proceedings in Indonesia.

Meanwhile, the only way for one’s corpse to be ritually treated is to include one’s local practice in an officially recognised cult such as Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism or Buddhism. In such a context, the long process including second funerals and progressive ancestralisation can hardly be maintained. Somewhere the various statuses, distinctions and categories of ancestors will be lost, then the categories of death, in the end resulting in a uniform ceremonial operation for the dead without adapted treatment for each case.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, local conceptions and ritual practices regarding death are caught up in the secularisation process of the vast archipelago. With hundreds of ethnic minorities and cults to manage, all holding increasingly divergent interests on religious, political, cultural and economic questions, Indonesia and its republican government is in a quandry, strapped by the game of lobbies and networks whose members are often judge and jury (see de Grave 2016).

Nevertheless, despite increasing communitarianism, the sense of belonging inside each group and inside Indonesia as a whole still remain strong. From what I have seen and written ethnography about—ritual masters, high schools students and martial arts schools—the consistency of this holist mode of social organisation can be observed in the systematic initiation tests we find in modern youth contexts, and the broadly accepted privileges in modern adult contexts, both of them having their logical *raison-d’être* in this acute sense of belonging.

## Secularism and Social Fragmentation

A comparative social analysis of the sense of belonging can be precisely understood through analysing the different ways of dying. Beyond the modern conception that the completion of death occurs when the heart stops beating, and the Javanese belief that death occurs after the second funerals are ritually held, many other kinds of dying also exist. An important one is social death (Hertz 1907): temporary during ritual initiation or shamanic trance, or definitive through banishment. To these ancient or traditional modes, we might add our modern modes of social death: incarceration, forced exile, forced migration, employment redundancy or even various forms of identity-based discrimination and harassment.

A death which is more and more rife is economic death, unemployment. If we consider the fact that economic values are put forward by governments and have become an inescapable norm for the exchange of goods, services and human resources, this death is practically comparable to social death. In *The Gift*, Marcel Mauss (1990: 98) refused to see Man as a simple *Homo oeconomicus*, and it would be simplistic to reduce human life to one dimension. Nevertheless, it is clear that the separation of economics, politics and the religious is increasing apace within each Javanese and is expressed in the growing impossibility of continuing local funerary practices, which in turn make it more difficult to put into practice a ritualized conception of life cycles.

The less distinction is made between stages of the life cycle and death, the more the distinction becomes part and parcel of the way the social person decomposes into plural belongings: his family, neighbourhood, ethics, politics, all of which is often encompassed by his professional economics or religion. Each of these segments can be reduced or can disappear as a part of a whole complete being, amputating him of a part of himself. If all of a sudden the person could through banishment watch his social being die, but not his organic being, he would then see his socio-economic, socio-political, socio-religious or socio-ethnic being die without relatives having the opportunity to provide him consistent assistance. The relational isolation that modern lifestyles impose in divided domains weaken or kills contextual relationships.

If I return to the question of the cumulative Christian time, which denies ancestral renewal in favour of an exponential accumulation of valorous dead, it remains that a return movement of the post-death world, something somewhat similar to the ancestral one, exists through the saints, the Son of God and God himself. In a secular or lay context, this return is abstract or non-existent; the comparatively indirect character of the relationship with the saints is in this case further increased. This simplification leads to a relative disempowerment on the part of those close to the deceased who are relying more and more either on the office of a corporate clergy acting in the name of an unrelated God who is not (or not much) anchored in the locality, or on the partly-religious/partly-secular body, a Department of Religion joint venture of sorts, as in Indonesia, or entirely secular in places like France where that system prevails.

The relatives of the deceased in this modern system contribute comparatively little, do so rather sparingly and succinctly, to advance the future destiny of the deceased, letting him progress to generational oblivion, to an uncertain future that reflects in a way that of those who remain. The relationship with the future is all the more reduced since cumulative death does not provide for a return towards the living. Man find himself isolated in an uncertain present where one treats the relationship with the dead as quickly as possible, abstracting it from social, conceptual and practical reality. One might predict that like recent steps the next will bring added anomie, denial of roots and even less concern for the future of the community of belonging.

## Notes

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1. *Kejawèn* designates the whole set of Javanese exoteric and esoteric activities and conceptions.
2. As we shall see in the present study, “a relationship no longer possible” may not be the right expression.
3. The word *nrima*, Robert Hefner (1985: 154) found in his fieldwork and defines as “the mute or non-protesting acceptance of things over which, one has no control”, seems more appropriate and more encompassing than *iklas* as it centres on an objective personal decision coined with one’s interaction as a social being conscious of cosmic cycles. Hefner expresses there the right conception that guides social orientation in everyday life: to be able to recognise one’s own limit and not to force oneself to try to control what’s beyond control (on the semantic derivation of death interpretation, see Coppet [1992]).
4. On this point, see also Bachtiar (1973).
5. About the phenomenon of genealogical meetings in the 1980s and before, see Sairin (1982).
6. Using his own data and that of Ann Stoler (1977), Koentjaraningrat (1984: 348) also shows that—unlike what Geertz states about the main role of men—women also play a very important role in the preparation of *slametan* ceremonies: in the decision to hold (or not) the *slametan*, by determining the date and the day, who to invite, to which people in the neighbourhood consecrated meals in the neighborhood should be delivered, and the preparation of the meals itself. Koentjaraningrat also states that Geertz failed to distinguish religious *slametan*—or even “sacred” (*kramat*) *slametan*—from simple *slametan* that aim to nourish good social relationships through sharing fortune and misfortune. According to Koentjaraningrat, funeral commemoration ceremonies of the 7<sup>th</sup> day, 40<sup>th</sup> day, 100<sup>th</sup> day, and 1000<sup>th</sup> day, are among those which arouse a strong sacral feeling amongst participants, so that they are definitely *kramat* (ibid.: 347).
7. Praising Allah together by spelling His name repetitively.
8. The author also stipulates that orthodox Muslims, or *santri*, who do not partake in *slametan* ceremonies for funerals nevertheless used to commemorate their dead with *sedhekah* (Javanese term expressing the ceremonial meal and its purifying action) on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup>, 100<sup>th</sup>, 1000<sup>th</sup> days (Koentjaraningrat 1984: 363 and 396). Geertz

- noted the central stages of commemoration for the Javanese in general, but not for the *santri* people.
9. Hefner's work deals with a group of Javanese who have not been Islamised until now, the Tengger, living on the slopes of the Bromo volcano in East Java.
  10. Another similarity we find in Geertz and Hefner's case studies is that the dead body is not considered polluting or dangerous. What are dangerous are the spirits attracted to it, hence the necessity to make it fast and to avoid showing any pain or sadness (Hefner 1985: 158; Geertz 1960: 70). In this perspective, the Tengger have "the most elaborate of the household rites, the *entas-entas* purification of the family's dead. Villagers explain that the rite is intended to remove impurities from the souls of the dead, so that those spirits may rise (*mentas*) to the heavens" (Hefner 1985: 16).
  11. Regarding the Javanese's tie to their ancestors, see also Headley (2004: 361): "Generally speaking, *agama luri* [ancestor cult] existed in the countryside and continued to flourish during and after the widespread acceptance of Islam. Indeed, there are ample witnesses to its vitality today in rural regions of Java." About the ancestor cult and "potent dead" in Indonesia, see also Chambert-Loir (2002).
  12. Let's also notice that when they die young children are given only one *slametan* commemoration, the *sedhekah ngesah* (Koentjaraningrat 1984: 396); this fact contributes to show the gift-counter gift logic emanating from the dead adults *slametan*. Regarding children, an important preservation ritual called *ruwatan* is held to protect some categories of siblings classified as *sukerta*, potential victims of the god Kala (see Headley 2000; de Grave 2001: 35, 75, 82).
  13. According to the *sesepuh* Mas Antha (interview held in March 2015), the ability to distinguish these signs should have been developed over a lifetime. The level of such abilities depends on one's worldly experience: beginners may see soft light or misty forms, while advanced practitioners perceive ancestors or other important persons.
  14. I have not yet had the opportunity to meet women *sesepuh*, but I have heard of their existence.
  15. Echoing Pak Moko and also Koentjaraningrat (footnote 8), Robert Jay (1969: 111-112) also underlines a continuous relationship between the living members and the dead through frequent visits, offerings, prayers and discussions at their graves, and "their high-level conception of the parent-child strong and real bond extending beyond death". Like them, he also remarks that "Even those with doubts about other features of traditional religious beliefs [i.e. Muslims and Christians] accepted the validity of this conception and its practice."
  16. He gives the example of Sapta Dharma where one uses white clothes and a meditation called *sujud*. Such ceremonies may draw hundreds of people, all the more in the community of the royal palace. Those organisations are more or less 1000 in Yogyakarta, some of them are members of this Inter-religious Communication Forum (FKAA). According to Pak Moko, before the fall of Suharto's regime, *aliran kebatinan*'s members were much more numerous; in the 1980s and the 1990s people could put their *kebatinan* belonging as official religion on their identity card, then it was not authorized for a period, but now it is again.
  17. The Indonesian press regularly reports related events. Regarding *kebatinan* organizations, see for example the harassment of the Sapta Dharma group: <https://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/sebelum-dibakar-tempat-ibadah-sapta-darma-didatangi-8-orang.html>. Families following *kebatinan* and ancestry can be accused

- of religious non-conformity and prevented from burying their dead: <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20170106084635-20-184477/hantu-aksi-intoleran-di-tahun-ayam-api> (both links consulted on 11-4-18).
18. Sophie Chave (2018) also states that “All the deceased do not become ancestors: the foreigners, the malemorts are often classified separately and, kept at a distance, form generally dreaded wandering and vindictive entities. Others, sinking into a definitive oblivion, become perfectly insignificant, thus obtaining a real disappearance”.
  19. We can find a similar process on Madura Island, off the North-East coast of Java. Glenn Smith (2011: 161-162) reports a ritual process also ending on the 1000 days final commemoration.
  20. See Hertz (1907: 20-21): “At certain times the body is delivered to the attacks of evil spirits, to all the harmful influences that threaten the man or the body of the child for a certain time after birth or the woman during gestation”.
  21. According to Ki Sabda, such circumstances can provoke *arwah penasaran* which means “wandering spirit”. One of the most perverse phenomenon is *pesugihan* [from “rich” *sugih*], a witchcraft practiced to create wealth through human sacrifice. Some will sacrifice members of their family, but it is thought that optimal effect is had by taking the life of someone who is about to live a situation of intense happiness, for example one who is about to be married. A taboo called *paugeran* requiring brides to remain indoors for forty days before the marriage probably exists to shelter the woman from *pesugihan*.
  22. See Hertz (1907: 72-73): “Links between funeral rites, rites of birth or marriage: to get protection against perils and to carry out rites of purification. [...] This transition from one group to another presupposes a profound renewal of the individual, which is marked by rites such as the imposition of a new name [...]. Operation conceived as full of risks, involving the bringing into play of necessary but dangerous forces.”
  23. Sabda Palon is regarded as the advisor of the last ruler of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom of Majapahit, Brawijaya V.
  24. Relationship to ancestry and time should also be considered through personal names which notably refer to illustrious dead of the past, and often express the distinction of social status or age class. On that point, see de Grave (2011a, 2012c) on the question of Javanese names, and Chave (2018: 22-27) for a general analysis of names as reference of distinction and ritual operator.
  25. On the question of “image” in ritual funeral context, see Coppet (1992).
  26. Monnerie (personal communication 2018) finds the same general principle to be at work in the funeral ceremonies of the Kanak of Northern New Caledonia.
  27. Thanks to their frugal Spartan mode of existence, an interesting parallel can be made with the way ascetics can directly access the final steps of funerals due to their having already reached the highest status of ancestors. In the perspective of Louis Dumont (1986) on individualism, this process may be interpreted as bestowing on them the highest status of holiness, focusing in this way on their individual person rather than their social person.



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**Abstract:** This article reflects on the Javanese view of death, based notably on first-hand accounts of ritual masters, their conceptions and ritual practices. Existing ethnographic literature on Javanese funerary rituals is largely descriptive and delves little into conceptual issues. A comparative analysis of the literature and first-hand data reveals that death must ultimately be understood in relation to the social action of ancestors called to be reborn or not. Considered from this angle, it is possible to define various types of action that do not lead to ancestralisation as well as define various categories of death. Ultimately, these categories induce the different types of action and social relations of the living. The perspective is notably based on Robert Hertz's observations on funerary rites and the central role and unique configuration of second funerals in Java.

### *Conceptions et socialisation javanaises de la mort. Les funérailles comme orientation active du rapport au temps et des valeurs*

**Résumé:** Cet article propose une réflexion sur la façon dont les Javanais considèrent la mort. Des témoignages de première main de maîtres rituels sont rapportés. Ils concernent les conceptions auxquelles ces maîtres se réfèrent ainsi que les pratiques rituelles qu'ils utilisent. Ces témoignages sont précédés d'une synthèse des descriptions de rituels funéraires javanais par différents ethnographes qui ont très peu traité de l'arrière-plan conceptuel. L'analyse comparée qui découle de ces deux corpus révèle que la mort doit être comprise ici de façon ultime en lien à l'action sociale des ancêtres appelés à renaître ou non. C'est à partir de ce référent que se déclinent les différents types d'action qui ne conduisent pas à l'ancestralisation, donc les autres différentes catégories de morts. In fine, ces catégories induisent les différents types d'action et de relations sociales des vivants. La mise en perspective s'appuie notamment sur les observations de Robert Hertz sur les rites funéraires et le rôle central des secondes funérailles qui prennent un tour particulier à Java.

**Keywords:** Javanese society, funerary rituals, death, social anthropology, comparative analysis.

**Mots-clés:** Société javanaise, rituels funéraires, conceptions sur la mort, anthropologie sociale, comparaison.