This chapter discusses representations of authority and religiosity in Acehnese works of epic poetry (hikayat) from the early seventeenth to the late nineteenth century. As I will try to show, up until the seventeenth century notions of Islamic religiosity were presented primarily in terms of ritualistic practice, based in turn on the political and cosmological concept of divine kingship. From the eighteenth century onwards, the idea of divine kingship declined as an organizational principle for accumulating and disseminating religious knowledge. This was closely connected to two structural processes, namely the accelerating integration of the rural interior in the global economy through cash cropping, and the simultaneous emergence in the Acehnese countryside of the ulama as a new and influential social group. In this chapter I investigate the impact of these changes on representations of ‘individual’ and ‘communal’ religious formation.

Hikayat is a word of Arabic origin, which is commonly translated into English as ‘story’, or ‘romance’. Containing myths and stories about prophets, kings, and heroes, the hikayat constitute a specific subgenre within the Malay-Indonesian literary tradition. Typically, epic hikayat originated in the context of courts, after which they were disseminated more widely in society. Unlike the kitab, the theological tracts written by and for a specialised scholarly elite, the hikayat were not meant to be read or studied. They were sung or recited, requiring a narrative structure, and (often but not always) a meter. In Aceh, the genre has covered a somewhat larger terrain, however, incorporating not just worldly romances and religious legends but also down-to-earth moral lessons and manuals. Another feature distinguishing Acehnese language hikayat is the sanja, a meter unique to the Acehnese poetic tradition (Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:II.79). Unsurprisingly, scholarly attention for these works has come mostly from the fields of philology and literary studies.1 In response, Anthony Reid (1980:668) and Michael Feener (2011:14) have emphasised the unfulfilled potential of the Acehnese hikayat as a historical source. To a very modest extent, this chapter may be seen as an answer to their call. Rather than to engage in a systematic historical analysis of a literary corpus, or to stage the hikayat as offering a particular version of Acehnese history, however, I will be concerned with scrutinising some of these works on their visions of the future. Thus, I hope to describe some aspects of the ‘aspirational’ agency modelled in Chapter 1, in close connection to the historical context.

From the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, many coastal polities in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago experienced a gradual, but significant political decline, as a result of the incursions of the Dutch East Indies Trading Company (VOC), as well as a climatic downturn that caused droughts, famines, inflation, and economic stagnation.2

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1 The most conspicuous exception is James Siegel’s Shadow and sound (1979). This work, which contains a full translation of the Hikayat Pocut Muhamad, considers the importance of the Acehnese hikayat and the relation between written and spoken text, with regard to the formation of specifically ‘Acehnese’ ideas and values.

2 See Boomgaard 2001; Reid 1993, 1990. Besides of course the VOC itself, other indigenous polities (such as Johor and Makassar) benefited from their rivals’ decline, especially in the first half of the seventeenth century.
the same time, however, the integration in the global economy of (agricultural, forest and highland) interiors accelerated, as growing European and Chinese demand stimulated the production of cash crops (particularly pepper, coffee and tea) and raw materials (such as tin and gold) across the archipelago. In effect, small and intermediate-sized ports and trading towns and their hinterlands experienced a number of significant social transformations. One of these was the increasing significance of the ulama as a distinct source of moral authority. The establishment of a class of ‘professionally religious’ in the eighteenth and nineteenth century inspired an expansion in ‘public’ debates about role of Islam in the constitution of society and politics. Particularly important, in this respect, was the relationship between Islamic beliefs and ‘pre-Islamic’, adat-centred, or ‘syncretic’ practices. As Milner has argued, up until the early eighteenth century ‘public’ manifestations of Islam were primarily ‘state’, or ‘raja-centred’ (Milner 1982). From the eighteenth century onwards, local reformist Islamic movements also started to engage on a systematic basis with the morals and ‘private’ lives of ordinary villagers, directing commands and fatwa’s (legal opinions) at ‘issues of family life, of sex, of appropriate conduct’ (Hadler 2008:20).

This chapter consists of five sections. It starts with a brief consideration of the place of epic poetry in Southeast Asian historiography, and the way in which these works may be read as representing views of the past and visions of the future. Three consecutive parts then discuss the major known epics from Aceh. The *Hikayat Aceh*, a Malay language poem composed in the middle of the seventeenth century, is the hagiographic description of the life of Sultan Iskandar Muda, the king who ruled over Aceh when the sultanate was at its most powerful. In the eighteenth century Aceh had lost its position of political and cultural leadership in the Malay world. This shift is reflected in the content of the two major Acehnese language works to emerge in this period, the *Hikayat Malem Dagang* and the *Hikayat Pucat Muhamad*. This is followed by a discussion of the Acehnese war literature of the late nineteenth century, focused on the *Hikayat Teungku Meuké* and the *Hikayat Prang Kompeuni* (‘Story of the War against the Dutch’). The chapter ends with a brief comparative section about social and political tensions in Aceh, West Sumatra and Java, and the impact of Dutch colonialism on the development of religious ideas in the late nineteenth century.

**Versions of the past, visions of the future**

Islamic conversion in pre-modern Southeast Asia was driven by the gradual economic and cultural integration of the Indian Ocean littoral and the role in this process of networks of Muslim traders. Particularly important groups were Arabs, and the Indian Muslims grouped together in Asian and European sources as Klings, Chuliahs, or Moors. Southeast Asian ports connected the greater trading zones of the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea both because of their strategic location and because their hinterlands produced commodities which were increasingly in demand in China, the Middle East, and Europe. Contingent on these connections, from the fifteenth century onwards a Malay-Muslim identity emerged in the archipelago, ranging from Aceh in the West to Maluku in the east. This identity was based on the Malay language as a lingua franca of trade and literature, a

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4 Arasaratnam 1987; Hall 2004; Prakash 1998; Prange 2009. The Keling were Tamil Muslim traders from South India (Andaya 2010:113). Chuliahs were also Tamils, venturing more specifically from the Coromandel Coast. Moor was a more general terms used for South Asian Muslims.
fusion of Islamic traditions with local customs (adat), and a form of cultural cosmopolitanism as a defining characteristic of social life in port cities (see Reid 1980a; 1993).

Recently, historians have questioned the old idea that the social and cultural history of insular Southeast Asian society was shaped by processes of Indianisation’ and ‘Islamisation’, as being fundamentally ‘external’, progressive, and unidirectional forces of cultural change. Instead, attention has shifted toward the role of ‘networks’, ‘nodes’, and ‘circulations’ of knowledge and practice, as well as the role of agency in processes of conversion.5 One implication of this shift is that, in this part of the Indian Ocean ‘world system’ (Abu-Lughod 1989), religious change is increasingly regarded as a multifaceted and gradual process (Daud Ali 2009). In the words of Sebastian Prange, the important question is not ‘whether traders, Sufis, or the ulama were decisive in the Islamisation of Southeast Asia, but rather how these various actors fitted into the networks that connected the region to the commercial, cultural, and intellectual currents of the Indian Ocean’ (Prange 2009:38).

Between the tenth and the thirteenth century, Asian maritime trade experienced a sharp increase in volume, resulting from rising demands on both ends of the Indian Ocean (Chaudhuri 1990) and the decreasing importance of land-based trading routes due to the collapse of the Pax Mongolica.6 In the wake of this trading boom, the rulers of polities lining the Straits of Malacca adopted Islam as a ‘religion of state’. The oldest archaeological and textual evidence of formal conversion comes from the thirteenth century, and refers to the king of Pasai, a polity located on the North coast of Sumatra (present day Aceh) (Feener 2011:3). The trend accelerated again in the fifteenth century onward, during the period termed by Anthony Reid as the ‘Age of Commerce’ (Reid 1980a, 1993). From North Sumatra, along the north coast of Java, all the way East to the southern Philippines, indigenous rulers of coastal polities (negeri) converted to Islam, both because of the economic advantages it offered them in a maritime economic system dominated by Muslim traders, and because of the domestic legitimacy Islamic legal traditions were able to bestow on themselves and on their courts. In some ports, such as Aceh and Melaka, sophisticated codes of law incorporated Islamic elements in indigenous administrative systems.

These negeri did not exert strong territorial claims. An important question, then, is how Muslim subjectivities were formed, and transformed, beyond the direct confines of courts, ports, and the elites controlling these places. Up until quite recently, historians of Islam in Southeast Asia emphasized the role of tarekat networks in the historical process of conversion, but this view has come under pressure.7 Michael Laffan, for example,

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6 See Hall 2001:225. Principal commodities traded in the Western part of the Indonesian archipelago were pepper, and, from the fourteenth century onwards, gold (Dobbin 1984:60-71). Pepper was indigenous to the Malabar Coast of India, and successfully introduced in Sumatra perhaps as early as the twelfth century (Prange 2009:32; see also McRoberts 1991). Reid (2006:106) has speculated that Chinese merchants, in response to the near-insatiable thirst for pepper in China, and the sudden abolishment of Chinese voyages to India by the emperor in 1439, were among the first to encourage pepper growing in North Sumatra. One of the first Southeast Asian kingdoms to take advantage from this development was Jambi, in Southeast Sumatra, where, in the seventeenth century, European as well as Chinese merchants ventured to buy pepper from upstream areas (see B.W. Andaya 1993).

7 The term tariqa, which is commonly translated as Sufi, of ‘mystical’, orders or brotherhoods, refers to particular complexes of doctrine, mystic practices, and bonds between students and teachers based on
emphasized that indigenous scholars such as ‘Abd al-Ra’uf (in Aceh), or Yusuf al-Maqassari (in South Sulawesi), ventured directly to South Asia and the Middle East, and returned to the archipelago with reformist ideals (Azra 2004; Laffan 2011). These figures, Laffan writes, may be the ‘key to the final transmission and elaboration of the ascend ant “Meccan” complex of Islamic institutions under Ottoman rule, institutions that included tariqa practice’. Through these connections, Malay rulers ‘sought validation from beyond their shores, most preferably from the person of the Prophet’s lineal descendents in Mecca and the scholars associated with them’, an attitude involving ‘the latest form of orthodoxy as embodied by Sufi praxis’ (Laffan 2011:18-24). There is little evidence, however, that Sufi networks engaged in developing (higher) Islamic knowledge among small traders or peasants. Far from being a mechanism of conversion, Sufism was ‘formally restricted to the regal elite, while adherence to the Shari’a was commended to their subjects’ (Ibid:18-24). Only in the eighteenth century did a gradual change start to take place, as ‘a prominent minority [was] pledging their allegiance to one Sufi shaikh or another, depending on the shaikh’s perceived claims of orthodoxy and links to Mecca’.

In fact, one may even question the relevance of the exact origins of Islamic proselytizers, for by the fifteenth century, ‘the whole Indian Ocean region had become so culturally fused, its port cities so saturated with overriding Islamic values, that the ethnic identity of particular maritime travellers mattered little’ (Hall 2001:225-26). More than the act of proselytisation, then, it was processes of ‘internal networking’ between ports and hinterlands which drove processes of religious conversion. These networks included countless forms of economic, cultural and ideological exchange which included (but were not limited to) the movements of Islamic scholars, preachers, and mystics, some of whom were given important positions at the courts.

The orally disseminated tradition of Malay literature was an important element in this exchange. In recent decades, several historians have advanced the hikayat tradition – as a source alternative to the more commonly studied chronicles and scholarly literature – to investigate the formation of communal identities. Virginia Matheson (1979) was one of the first to ask how indigenous Malay writings represented the changing meaning of ‘being Malay’. More recently, Leonard Andaya (2008) used indigenous literary expressions (alongside other sources) to trace the construction of, and relationship between, a variety of Southeast Asian ethnic identities. Earlier, Kenneth Hall (2001) considered the fifteenth century Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai (Story of the Kings of Pasai) to scrutinise the sense of religious community in the first Muslim polity in Southeast Asia. Important questions in this respect include the function of such literary works, and the context in which they were produced. Vladimir Braginsky (2004), in his groundbreaking work on the classification of Malay literature, distinguished three ‘functional spheres’, namely beauty, benefit, and spiritual perfection (Ibid.:301). The hikayat are a particularly powerful genre, he writes, because it incorporated (like the genre of syair, narrative poetry) all three of these functions.

detailed genealogies of religious knowledge passed down from Prophet. Some scholars have argued that Indonesian societies are intrinsically ‘moderate’, ‘syncretistic or ‘tolerant’ (as compared to the more ‘puritanical’ beliefs of Muslims in the Middle East) because of the role of Sufis in the conversion process. This view was famously posited by Anthony Johns (1961; 1993), and reinvigorated, at least in part, by the work of Azyumardi Azra (2004). This view has been complicated by scholars such as Michael Feener (2009), Michael Laffan (2003; 2011) and Merle Ricklefs (2007), who have called for a move beyond locally and regionally determined historiographies, and focus instead on the connections and networks inspiring the multidirectional process of ‘Islamisation’.
At the same time, these functional spheres interacted with what other authors have identified as the moral, or 'edifying' component of the hikayat genre. For example, Timothy Barnard referred to the Hikayat Siak as a source that demonstrates how a particular group of Minangkabau migrants came to identify themselves both as 'orang Siak', and as part of the broader paradigm of maritime Malay identity. In Barnard's view, then, the poem functioned as a 'manual' for a new identity, providing 'lessons for the listener/reader on how to become an eighteenth-century Malay' (Barnard 2001:336). In fact, the edifying function of the genre was so powerful, that it was even recognised as instrumental by some European rulers. The Hikayat Panglima Nikosa, published in Sarawak in 1876, was an educational text composed by a progressive official of Minangkabau descent, and intended to advance the Western-style civilising offensive launched by the Brooke government (J.H. Walker 2005). The Hikayat Abdullah (partly chronicle, partly autobiography), published in 1849 by the famous Malay literator Abdullah Munsyi, was equally intended as a 'lesson' for Malays (Carroll 1999).

It is important to read these moral lessons in their social and political context. An interesting example of such a reading is Francis Bradley's discussion of the Hikayat Patani, a text composed against the backdrop of a social and economic crisis around the turn of the eighteenth century. According to Bradley, the collapse of the Patani economy caused the local elite (orangkaya) to retreat 'from the market to the court as the main arena of social competition' (Bradley 2009:285). In this atmosphere of vicious rivalry, the king became increasingly dependent on the support of factions. As the situation was gradually spiralling into a total 'breakdown of social order', court intellectuals commissioned the Hikayat Patani in 'the hope that their world might be restored' (Ibid.:285-88).

The authors [of the Hikayat Patani] chiefly concerned themselves with aspects of the past that told of the glory of the raja during the period of prosperity, i.e. before 1650, and pointed to various problems that arose after that time that led to increasing turmoil. In doing so, they constructed a new moral authority in the form of the Hikayat Patani which served as a handbook of proper rule and a guide for proper court etiquette. Together these stories and rules provided future generations with guidelines for an ordered and prosperous society, though one that remained unrealised through the course of the eighteenth century.

The poem thus represented a conservative message, directed chiefly at preserving the moral integrity of generations to come.

Bradley's argument connects to another important point, namely the relationship between elites and local populations more broadly. Although it is common to speak of 'court literature', Southeast Asian oral traditions did not just serve royal elites. In fact, it is quite probable that audiences in early modern Southeast Asia included a wide range of social classes, from workers in court environments to ordinary villagers. These audiences, although 'illiterate' in the technical sense of the term, were all practiced listeners (Florida 1995:10-17; Sweeney 1980:13-16). In Java, the recitation of poetic works was a common feature of village ritual events, a practice facilitated by the literate environments of the pesantren (Florida 1995:15). We know less about Aceh, but it is plausible that the climate of learning centred on rural networks of dayah – probably emerging in the eighteenth century – contributed to the dissemination of popular literature at the level of the village. More generally, the performance of poetic literature can be seen as part of a process, in which institutions of Islamic religious training came to act as a link between court nobilities and village life from the eighteenth century onwards (Laffan 2011:25-32).
Little information is available about the dissemination of the Acehnese hikayat in the pre-modern period, but from the observations of Snouck Hurgronje (1893-95:II.276) we know that, in the late nineteenth century, the recitation of hikayat was one of the most common forms of group relaxation, appreciated both for its educational value and as popular entertainment. The poems were enjoyed ‘by the chiefs and by the petty people, by old and young of both sexes’. Snouck Hurgronje particularly mentioned the role of women, ‘whose interest in and knowledge of the literature is by no means surpassed by that of men’, and who thus ‘regularly entertain their female, and sometimes male, guests with the recital of a hikayat. Performing hikayat remained a highly popular practice, both in lowland Aceh and in the Gayo highlands, at least until deep in the twentieth century.

Of course, it is impossible to assess the correspondence between the moral messages contained in the hikayat and the life worlds of ordinary Acehnese. Yet, style and content do give us some information about the moral repertoires that were available and interesting to people in different periods. My main conceptual guide, in this respect, is Nancy Florida’s monumental Writing the past, inscribing the future (1995), which is based on the translation and analysis of a long ‘forgotten’ Javanese epic history, the Babad Jaka Tingkir (‘The Story of Jaka Tingkir’). This poem was composed in the nineteenth century by an anonymous author residing at the court of Surakarta (Solo), in Central Java. Like the Acehnese hikayat, it was set in an indigenous sung meter. Essentially a work of history (providing a description and interpretation of Java around the turn of the sixteenth century) Florida referred to this poem as a ‘prophetic script for the future’, that was produced ‘with an eye toward its own potential future readings’, and suggests ‘alternative futures’ for the present. She states:

Rather than focus on the genetic antecedents of the ruling elite of his or her present-day Java, the poet writes, in a series of episodes, the stories of a handful of peculiar characters on the margins of the dominant literary, historical, and cultural traditions. These episodes (...) engender a new historical force which would emerge through contestations, rather than merely descend along royal bloodlines. Inscribing a new future out of a traditional past, the epic discloses a novel history whose effectiveness is self-consciously projected onto suggested tomorrows (Florida 1995:4-6).

My purposes are not the same as Florida’s, nor do I have the necessary expertise. Rather, her work informs my attempts to read against the grain of popular, sometimes highly politicised, indigenous interpretations of Acehnese history, as well as the western historiography that tends to reify these representations. Like Florida, I do not intend to reproduce, on basis of the hikayat, a particular period or episode in Acehnese history. Instead, I have looked for clues about the relationship between religious authority and religious experience, and the connections between contemporary changes and morally inspired views of the future.

8 Bowen 1991; Siapno 2002; Siegel 1979.
9 Florida set herself to the task ‘to reinscribe, through dialogue, [the text’s] apparent future intentions’ (Florida 1995:6). She explains that, for her, the practice of translation constituted the substance for this dialogue. Her purpose as a translator was not to reconstruct a particular version of the history of Java, but rather ‘to engage [the poem] in an extended historical conversation in order to follow up on that text’s own prophetic tendencies and to imagine with it a historical space for the future’. 
The *Hikayat Aceh*: affirmation of a moral order

Before 1511, the year of the Portuguese conquest of Melaka, the Malay archipelago was politically fragmented. By the seventeenth century, however, five major coastal polities had emerged: Aceh, Johor, Banten, Makassar, and Maluku. In these realms, trade was increasingly regulated, and the construction of ships and arms was strengthened and improved (Lieberman 2009:837-57). Aceh’s rise to power was connected to three interrelated developments: a revival of trade with South and Central Asia; control over pepper producing areas and the introduction of pepper cultivation in the territories it controlled (particularly Perlis on the Malay peninsula); and the conquest of rivals (particularly Johor in 1564) (Andaya 2008:118; Reid 2006b:55-7). In the sixteenth century, Aceh came to be seen as the political and cultural leader of the 'Malay world' (*alam Melayu*), both superior in a military sense and authoritative with regard to the production of texts, including works of history, theology, and literature.

The origin of the name 'Aceh' is unknown. According to one legend, 'Atji' was the name of a Hindu princess who got lost, and was found again by her brother in Sumatra. After this, she was made queen of that land. About the region’s pre-Islamic history, very little is known. One of the most important indigenous sources, Nur ad-Din ar-Raniri’s chronicle *Bustan as-Salatin* (1636), the first ruler of Aceh to convert to Islam was ‘Ali Mughayat Syah (1507-1521) (Nuru’d-din ar-Raniri 1966:31). This may, or may not be the same ruler who was responsible for the conquest of Pasai in 1524, and who was known in contemporary Portuguese sources as ‘Raja Ibrahim’ (Djajadiningrat 1911:144-53). From Tomé Pires’ *Suma Oriental* (1967), written between 1512-1515, we learn that the 'kingdom of Achin' was on the rise in the early sixteenth century, but that the kingdoms of Pidie and Pasai, on the North coast of Sumatra, were more powerful, populous, and prosperous. Their main source of wealth was the pepper trade, especially after the conquest of Melaka in 1511 made Indian and Chinese Muslim merchants redirect their routes to other ports in the Straits.

Pasai appears to have been particularly important. According to Pires, its inhabitants were mostly Bengalese, while the ‘natives’ in the interior were also descendents ‘from this stock’. The port was frequented by ‘Rumes, Turks, Arabs, Persians, Gujeratees, Kling, Malay, Javanese and Siamese’. It was quite large, while there were also ‘large towns with many inhabitants to the interior’. Its ruler was a Muslim, although this may not have been true for all, or even most, of its subjects. According to Pires, ‘up till now [the kings of Pasai] have been unable to convert the people of the interior; and yet in these kingdoms there are in the island of Sumatra, those on the sea coast are all Moors on the side of the Malacca Channel, and those who are not yet Moors are being made so every day, and no heathen among them is held in any esteem unless he is a merchant’ (Pires 1967:135-145). In 1524 Pasai was incorporated by Aceh. This was a significant event. Although Aceh was already a Muslim kingdom, Pasai had converted to Islam centuries earlier, and had integrated Islamic administrative elements much more vigorously. By appropriating the fame of the Sultanate of Pasai, the kings of Aceh deliberately legitimised their position on the basis of an Islamic model of kingship, fashioned in turn after the Islamic empires in India, Central Asia, and the Middle East.

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10 This legend was related by G.P. Tolson in the *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (June 1880), quoted in Djajadiningrat 1911:145-46.
11 These ports included Johor, Patani, Banten, and Brunei. The redirection of the pepper trade by Muslim traders gave these ports incentives both to a growing prosperity, and to the local attachment to Islam (see Laffan 2011:10; Lieberman 2009:845-857; Prakash 1998:34; Reid 2006:106).
After the conquest of Pasai and a number of other ports on the North coast of Sumatra (such as Pidie and Aru), the sultanate of Aceh developed into an increasingly centralised political system, revolving around an intricate court bureaucracy, and with Islamic doctrine as a central ideological principle. State revenues were used to build and uphold the court, which was supposed to mirror those of the great Muslim kings in the West. The sultan was a principal amongst equals, emanating from the class of rich traders known as orangkaya (literally 'rich men'). The orangkaya were responsible for the relationship between the centre and the interior. They operated from Banda Aceh and from other, smaller ports. Some of them held military titles, such as uleebalang or panglima, a practice also modelled on examples in the western Muslim world (Andaya 2008:132). From the seventeenth century onwards, the orangkaya came to be integrated more formally in the administrative structure of the state through a royal seal, the sarakata, which legitimised their privileged position, but also tied them to the sultan as vassals, obliging them to pay revenues in times of peace, military service in times of war, and, increasingly, services as officers of the state (Snouck Hurgronje 1893-5:199-200). The relationship between the sultan and the orangkaya was ambiguous, however. Although the sultan depended on the nobility to rule over his realm, he also had to compete with them over commercial interests. This was not a 'fair' competition, for the sultan was able to use his military power to create monopolies, particularly in the lucrative pepper trade. This situation caused perpetual friction. Although there were strong sultans, such as Ala'ad-din al-Qahhar ibn Ali (r. 1537-68), Iskandar Muda (r. 1607-1636), and Taj al-Alam Safiyat ad-Din (r. 1641-1675), in between periods of stability there were considerable periods of unrest (for example, in the 39 years between 1568 and 1607 Aceh was ruled by eight consecutive sultans).

The most powerful figures at the royal court were the Syaikh al-Islam (the sultan's religious advisor and reportedly the highest ranking dignitary), the Kadi Malik al-Adil ('Chief Judge'), the Orang Kaya Maharaja Sri Maharaja ('Chief Minister of State Affairs'), and the Orang Kaya Laksamana Perdana Menteri ('Chief Minister of Domestic Affairs'). These officials were responsible for the administration of law, the education of nobles, and the performance of elaborate court and mosque rituals. European accounts state that Banda Aceh in the early seventeenth century was one of the largest cities in the region, comprising different quarters and several thousand houses. Like many other large ports, it was a cosmopolitan town, inhabited by traders from different parts of the world. Another segment was formed by peasants, who grew rice, and engaged in cattle breeding, hunting, ship building, and iron-, copper- and woodworks. The French commander Beaulieu, who authored the most detailed seventeenth century account of the port, called the native inhabitants of Aceh a proud people, eloquent in their own language, and skilled in the composition of poems and songs.

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13 This included the Friday prayers and the yearly Islamic fasting and sacrifice festivals. The most important indigenous source containing details about these rituals is a compilation of Malay-language texts known as the Adat Atjeh. This text, which reached its final form in the 1810s and was kept by the British in Penang, served as an important source of background information for the coming about of the Anglo-Acehnese treaty. See Adat Atjeh 1958. A detailed discussion of this text can be found in the PhD thesis by Ito Takeshi (1984).

14 The first European descriptions of Banda Aceh date from the start of the seventeenth century. See, e.g., Davis 1880; De Houtman 1880; Spilbergen 1933; De Vitré 1602. Beaulieu visited Aceh in 1621. His account was published in Melchisedech Thevenot's (1672) famous collection of overseas voyages. An English translation (of which I made use) can be found in Beaulieu [Harris] 1744-48:730-49. Abridged versions of these narrations have been published (alongside a large number of other texts) in Reid 1995.
Unfortunately, we know much less about the social organisation in rural areas. It is sometimes assumed that, once Aceh had appropriated the cultural and political leadership over the Malay world, it imprinted on its inhabitants a strict Islamic normative code, upheld by a system of Islamic laws, legal institutions, and punishments. At the court, Islamic norms may have been taken quite seriously in some periods. For example, the *Bustan* states about Sultan Ala’ad-din Riayat Syah (r. 1588-1604) that he was just and God-fearing, received many *ulama*, told his subjects to keep to God’s law, and prescribed the nobles at his court to dress in Arabic-style clothes. More importantly, a sophisticated system of Islamic law did indeed exist in the seventeenth century port-city. According to Beaulieu, the judicial system under Sultan Iskandar Muda was comprised of no less than four separate courts, which dealt with criminal offences in the city, brought before the court by citizens and by ‘guards’ (*panghulu kawal*) who patrolled the four city quarters. However, the only reference to the interior is that ‘principal orangkaya’ were responsible for ‘[ordering] a watch of two hundred horse that patrols every night in the country and along the shore’. It is unclear to what extent the Sultan and the orangkaya controlled activities in smaller port cities, let alone the interior. Beaulieu mentioned that the orangkaya presided personally over their province or country-district, ‘where [they] give orders, and [administer] justice to the inhabitants’ (Beaulieu 1744-8:744), but there are no other sources to confirm or elaborate this point. While the judicial system thus functioned to maintain order in a bustling and undoubtedly increasingly complex confluence of people and commodities, there is neither evidence to support that this system reached far beyond the confines of the city, nor reason to believe that its establishment caused a uniform, or evenly spread process of ‘Islamisation’.

Indigenous sources present the Acehnese sultans as patrons of a just (adil) society, who presided over a system of laws and norms based on an amalgam of Islamic (scriptural) law and *adat*, and actively promoted Islam by upholding a relationship with the wider Islamic world (including Turkey, see Göksoy 2011; Reid 2010). From the sixteenth century onwards, the Sultanate actively attracted scholars from South Asia and the Middle East to study and teach Islamic subjects, such as law, jurisprudence, and mysticism. A central element in this culture of learning was the attachment to an ideal of divine kingship, infused by a dominant strand of Islamic mysticism commonly referred to by scholars of Southeast Asian Islam as ‘monistic theosophy’, or the model of the ‘Perfect Man’ (*al-insan al-kamil*). The most important representatives of this tradition were

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15 These included a ‘civil’ and a ‘criminal’ court in which leading orangkaya acted as judges, a ‘religious’ court led by the *Qadi Malik al-Adil,* and a separate court dealing with disputes between merchants; see Beaulieu 1744-8:743-4. For an elaborate description of the administration of these courts and the types of punishment employed, see Amirul Hadi 2004:147-83. According to Ito Takeshi (1984:156, 160), some sources suggest that these courts were already in place before the reign of Iskandar Muda, who may have expanded and strengthened the existing system.

16 Reid 2005:107. It is possible that this inconsistency relates to an ambiguity within the sultanate’s administration itself, in which the process of expansion state centralisation was never completely reconciled with the orang kaya’s own growing wealth and concomitant power. See Ito Takeshi 1984:78-121.

17 See Riddell 2001:101-38. The Bustan as-Salatin mentions a scholar from Gujarat, Syaikh Muhamad Jallani bin Hasan bin Muhamad Hamid, who came to Aceh to teach logic, rhetoric, jurisprudence, and mysticism, then went to Mecca in order to undergo more training, and came back to Aceh during the reign of a different sultan (Djajadiningrat 1911:160-61).

18 Laffan 2011:11-13; Riddell 2001:104-16; 2006:44-46. One of the first to elaborate the doctrine of the ‘Perfect Man’, which may have origins in early Christianity, was the great Spanish mystic Ibn al-‘Arabi (d. 1240). (For a detailed discussion of the influence of his writings in a Southeast Asian context, see
Hamzah Fansuri and Shams al-Din al-Sumatrani, both of whom resided at the Acehnese court.

Unfortunately, little is known about the lives of these two scholars. According to his name, Hamzah Fansuri was born in Fansur (also known as Barus), a port located on the West coast of Sumatra, probably in the early sixteenth century. Hamzah seems to have travelled widely during his life, receiving his training as an Islamic scholar in the Malay Peninsula, Siam, and Arabia. After these travels, he returned to Sumatra, where he gained entry to the Acehnese court as a religious adviser. His legacy consists of a collection of scholarly, mystical, and poetic works, which are 'suffused by Sufi images resonant with the maritime world of the Malays' (Riddell 2001:104-06). The date and place of his death are unclear. He may have died in Aceh, or perhaps, as recently suggested, in Mecca in 1527.19 Shams al-Din al-Sumatrani (d. 1630) might have been a student of Hamzah. He functioned as Shaykh al-Islam (spiritual adviser) at the Acehnese court in the early seventeenth century. Riddell characterised both these scholars as transmitters, who drew upon famous Sufi teachings from the Arab world and India, and then 'cast them in a Malay mould for the benefit of Malay Muslims' (Ibid:115).

Hamzah Fansuri and Shams al-Din al-Sumatrani formulated important monistic doctrines.20 According to Hamzah's theology, God was not fully transcendent, but approachable for the pious through the gradual understanding of a series of 'determinations', leading, eventually, to the realisation of God as true Reality and 'materialisation of all created things'. This idea became central to an Islamic divine kingship model, which presented the king as a magical figure, positioned at the centre of a divine cosmological order, and commanded the right, power, and moral qualities to govern his subjects as an absolute ruler.21 The development of this model built on the 'intermixing of religious and literary traditions', which became characteristic in the early Islamic period, but was also a continuation of the pre-Islamic past (Riddell 2001:101-103). The idea of 'divine kingship' existed well before the seventeenth century. As Thomas Gibson has shown with compelling detail, Southeast Asian rulers, before converting to Islam, based their authority on a combination of Austronesian and (in origin Indian) Hindu myths and rituals (Gibson 2005), but '[t]he combination of Islamic hegemony over the sea-lanes and a form of Islam that reinforced the authority of existing royal houses proved irresistible' (Gibson 2007:39). It was, Gibson continues, 'relatively easy for them to transform the existing Indo-Austronesian model of the king as descendent of the divine ancestors into the Islamic model of the king as the Perfect Man.'22

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Zoetmulder 1995). Another important scholar is 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili (d. ca. 1410), who centralised the concept in his treatise entitled 'The Perfect Man' (Riddell 2001:75).

19 Drewes and Brakel (1986) have argued that Hamzah Fansuri died in Aceh in 1590, while others have extended his stay to the reign of Iskandar Muda between 1607 and 1637. A recently discovered funerary suggests that he was buried in Mecca in 1527 (Laffan 2011:11).

20 While the names of Hamzah Fansuri and Shams al-Din al-Sumatrani are often mentioned in pair (as I do here), their doctrinal approaches were not identical. Riddell (2001:105) explains: 'Hamzah drew on Ibn al-'Arabi's five grades of being between the pluriformity of creation and Absolute Unity, whereas Shams al-Din's teachings were based on a doctrine of seven grades, and were influenced by al-Burhanpur'i's al-Tuhfat al-mursala ila ruh al-nabi (The Gift addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet).'

21 In sixteenth and seventeenth century court chronicles, the concept of the ruler's 'sovereignty' (daulat) took a central position. 'While a just (adil) society is the ideal, it is never promoted at the expense of the ruler's daulat. Order represented by the ruler, no matter how evil, is preferable over chaos' (Andaya 2008:109; cf. Gibson 2007:27-54; Laffan 2011:12-22; Reid 2005:112-35; Riddell 2001:111-1; Schrieke 1955-57:II.251-3.

22 Gibson drew particular attention to the 'charismatic authority of cosmopolitan Sufi shaikhs', who ventured mainly from India and other parts of South and Central Asia (Gibson 2007:39). It is important
Adherence to the divine kingship model was meant as a way to increase the Sultan’s legitimacy as a ruler. Although most rulers came from the powerful circle of orangkaya, they did not emanate from a ‘ruling class’ in a rigid sense of the term. Of Sultan Ala’ad-din Riayat Syah, who ruled around the turn of the seventeenth century, it was written that he was originally a fisherman who, after distinguishing himself in war, was promoted to a high position in the army, and subsequently allowed to marry a relative of the Sultan. The model thus served a practical goal, bestowing instant legitimacy on the ruler, regardless of his social background or the way in which his power was acquired. A defining characteristic of Iskandar Muda’s rule was that he officially sanctioned the theosophical doctrines formulated by Shams al-Din, perhaps, as Denys Lombard has suggested, because he was already touched by a sense of destiny at the moment that he was installed as Sultan.

The hikayat formed an important medium for the reproduction and dissemination of the divine kingship model. Early known hikayat from Aceh are the fourteenth century court chronicles Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai (“The Story of the Kings of Pasai”), the Taj al-Salatin, and the Hikayat Aceh. In the remainder of this section I will concentrate on the latter text, which was written at the Acehnese court sometime after 1612. It is different from the other two texts, in the sense that it describes the life of a single person, namely Sultan Iskandar Muda (r. 1607-36). In the history of Aceh, as well as the memory of the Acehnese, Iskandar Muda is the towering figure of Acehnese power in the early modern period. Relatively much is known about his rule and his court, moreover, from various European traders (such as Beaulieu) who visited Aceh in the early seventeenth century.

The Hikayat Aceh, although ‘Malay’ in composition (Johns 1979), represented an older hagiographic tradition, which was fashioned in content and structure after Persian examples (T. Iskandar 1958: 24; Braginsky 2006). The first part of the text deals with the mythological roots of Iskandar Muda’s dynasty. The key figure in this genealogy is Muzaffar Syah, who is claimed to descend from Alexander the Great (Iskandar Zulkarnain), and who married a nymph related to Mahavishnu (Maha Bisnu), a Sufi motif used also in earlier texts emphasising the linkages between Muslim rule and a Hindu past (Braginsky 2006:445). The remainder of the text deals with the life of Iskandar Muda (designated as Johan ‘Alam, ‘Alam Syiah or Perkasa ‘Alam), with special attention given to his birth, the characterising episodes of his youth, and the various signals and omens accompanying these events. A crucial aspect is the emphasis on a global order of power. In the world, it is stated, there are ‘two great Islamic kings’ (dua orang raja Islam yang amat besar dalam dunia ini). Perkasa ‘Alam is portrayed as the ‘great king of the east’, who stands on similar footing with the ‘great king of the west’ (the Sultan of Turkey) (T. Iskandar 1958:166-)

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23 See, e.g., the account of the Englishman John Davis, who visited Banda Aceh in 1599 (Reid 2005:23). The same story was also told by the Frenchman F.M. de Vitré, who travelled to Aceh in 1604 (Djajadiningrat 1911:162-63).

24 According to Lombard (1967:169-170), Iskandar Muda assumed this name (by which he likened to Alexander the Great) as soon as he became Sultan.

25 For this dissertation I have made use by the transliteration (in roman characters) and annotation of the Hikayat Aceh by T. Iskandar (1958).
167), a natural ruler, moreover, who is respected as such by the other nobles in his realm.26

In the *Hikayat Aceh*, religious knowledge and practice are a matter of the elect. Let me suffice here with two examples. When Johan 'Alam is eleven years old he leaves the palace (*Dar ad-Dunia*, ‘House of the World’) to play in the ‘village’ (*kampung Birma*). Immediately a surge of poor people emerges (*segala fakir dan segala miskin terlalu banyak*), who ask the boy for alms. When Johan 'Alam learns about their poverty, he gives them money and food. He then goes on to visit a family member. On the doorstep he is approached by an old *fakih*, who has crossed a river to come and greet him.27 Johan 'Alam notices that the old man’s clothes are still dry, and expresses his worry that he has crossed the river naked. The *fakih* laughs, and answers: ‘Praise God, nothing unusual can still escape from the attention of My Lord. This is yet another of many signs that My Lord is a representative of God (*wali Allah*)’ (T. Iskandar 1958: 145). Johan 'Alam invites the man to sit next to him. A company of officials arrives (including the *syahbandar* and the *syarif*), together with a congregation ‘of all those who know how to chant’ (*segala jema‘ah yang tahu dikir Allah*). They chant together for three hours, after which Djohan ‘Alam and his company return to the palace, on the backs of their elephants and horses, accompanied by the people who sing and make music. The story concludes that this episode in the life of Djohan ‘Alam constitutes ‘a signal of greatness from God, and a sign that God will endow Djohan Alam the status of Caliph (*akan chalifahnja Djohan ‘Alam*)’ (Ibid:144-5).

In another story, Djohan ‘Alam miraculously masters the core tenets of Islamic knowledge at the age of thirteen. He is apprenticed by his father to the *fakih* Indera Purbo. As a consequence of fate (*maka dengan takdir*), Djohan ‘Alam is able to master the Quran and the *kitab* in a very short time. The *fakih*, who is promptly elevated to the rank of Kadi Malik al-Adil, tells the prince: ‘My lord, we, your servants, are all astonished to see his Excellency the prince become a learned person (*jua mengaji jadi ‘alim*) in just a few months. Even in the land of Mecca and Medina, and amongst the children of the *mufti*, there is not one person like Your Excellency the Prince. Thus, we all speak of Your Excellency the Prince as our great sovereign and majesty (*daulatnya dan saadatnya*)’ (Ibid:149).

The question of the function of the *Hikayat Aceh* depends for an important part on the debate about its author and the date of its composition. According to Teuku Iskandar, the work was composed during the lifetime (and probably on order of) Iskandar Muda himself, by the *Shaykh al-Islam*, Shams al-Din al-Sumatrani (T. Iskandar 2001: xlviii-liii). However, in Braginsky’s view this is unlikely.28 He believes that the work was

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26 The text does not contain the designation *orangkaya*. In a few instances there is reference to *orang besar* (‘important people’), but these are mostly found in the section about the king’s genealogy. In the section about his life, the nobility is invariably designated with military titles, such as *hulubalang*, *hulubalang yang besar-besar* (great *hulubalang*), or *panglima*, thus emphasizing their role as servants of the king.

27 A *fakih*, or *fakir*, literally means ‘poor one’. It is also, however, a common designation for a ascetic, associated with particular Sufi traditions. Thus, the term also refers to a person of knowledge.

28 Braginsky mentions two arguments for this. Firstly, he writes that it would be very difficult to believe that Shams al-Din, in his central position at the court, would write a story about two allegedly Portuguese traders trying to establish a factory in Aceh, but whom the Sultan knew to be English. Secondly, it is unlikely that Shams al-Din would write down the famous episode in the *Hikayat Aceh* about the Sultan of Rum (literally ‘Rome’, but commonly referring to the Ottoman empire), and its chronological mix-up. The confusion of characters belonging to different ‘temporal layers’ in *Hikayat Aceh* is so typical of Malay historiography that it will hardly surprise a Malayist. It is surprising, however, if we believe Syamsuddin of Pasai – a well-educated ‘alim and a political counsellor of both Sultan Alauddin and Iskandar Muda – to be its author’ (Braginsky 2006:451-54).
commissioned by his daughter, Sultan Taj al-Alam Safiyat ad-Din (r.1641-1675), who became queen after the death of Iskandar Muda’s successor (and her husband) Ala’ad-din Mughayat Syah (Iskandar Thani, r.1636-1641). According to Braginsky, as the first woman on the throne of Aceh, Safiyat ad-Din was ‘badly in need of a great and glorious ancestor to enhance her right to it’. Whether or not this had to do with her gender, there are indeed indications that the legend of Iskandar Muda was being actively upheld at her court.29

The first years of Safiyat ad-Din’s rule were marked by a disastrous social and economic situation, which seems to have been the direct consequence of her father’s tempestuousness.30 Although Iskandar Muda is remembered until this day as one of Aceh’s greatest leaders, he also left his realm in deep turmoil. A series of futile military excursions to Melaka and a strategy of relatively tight domestic control over agriculture and trade had exhausted the interior.31 In 1641 the Dutch VOC took Melaka from the Portuguese, as part of a strategy to contain indigenous powers in the Melaka Straits.32 Commercially, however, the Dutch were much more interested in the spice trade of the eastern part of the archipelago than the Straits trade, and in consequence Johor quickly surpassed Melaka as the main entrepôt on the Malay peninsula (Lieberman 2009:862-63). Johor was a more important rival for Aceh than Melaka had been, because of its ability to attract Muslim traders.

As a result of Aceh’s worsening position in the Straits trade, the power of the Sultan vis a vis the orangkaya was gradually reduced. Under the rule of Safiyat ad-Din, the former politics of exhaustive military expansionism, as well as the costly glitter and glamour of the court which had characterised the rule of Iskandar Muda, were abandoned (Khan 2011). At the end of the seventeenth century the area controlled by the sultan had shrunk to the northern tip of Sumatra. In the second half of the seventeenth century the Sultan and the orangkaya were increasingly forced to turn to the interior, as they attempted to secure their wealth by levying, in the words of the English traveller Forrest (1792:39), the ‘land and industry of the inhabitants’.

29 I find Braginsky’s statement speculative, perhaps even questionable, in light of the six decades of female rule that followed on her ascension) As for Iskandar Muda’s remembrance, a Dutch trading envoy reported about a royal banquet at which a ‘song of praise’ was performed in honour of the queen’s great predecessor (Reid 1989:40-1).
31 In his monumental The History of Sumatra (1811 [1783]), William Marsden wrote: ‘The whole territory of Achin was almost depopulated by wars, executions, and oppression. The king endeavoured to repeople the country by his conquests. Having ravaged the kingdoms of Johor, Pahang, Kedah, Perak and Dilli, he transported the inhabitants from those places to Achin, to the number of twenty-two thousand persons. But this barbarous policy did not produce the effect he hoped; for the unhappy people, being brought naked to his dominions, and not allowed any kind of maintenance on their arrival, died of hunger in the streets.’ In similar vein, Anthony Reid (2006b:58-61), basing himself primarily on the account of Beaulieu, has characterised the rule of Iskandar Muda as ‘an exceptional period of megalomania’, which was marked by continuous attempts to monopolise the lucrative pepper trade at the expense of both native and foreign traders, and eventually the Acehnese population as a whole.
32 Initially, the Acehnese Sultan and the Dutch VOC were not particularly hostile to one another. In 1637, the Sultan even petitioned the Dutch tot take joint military action against the Portuguese (a suggestion regarded not particularly attractive by the Dutch at the time. Almost twenty years later, the VOC worried that, since Aceh seemed to attract more and more Muslim traders, it may outrival Melaka as a regional entrepôt, particularly of cloth. Thus, VOC administrators reported back to Holland that, with Aceh, either ‘good peace’ or ‘potent war’ was needed. VOC, Generale Missiven, 9 December 1637, p. 605; 7 November 1654, p. 752. In 1660, the Safiyyat-Din reportedly suggested to marry a Dutchman, ‘although our Company did not allow this’ (Valentijn 1724:9).
The crisis affected the court's intellectual milieu. The rule of Iskandar Thani and Safiyat ad-Din is associated with the introduction of a radical, and in the long term extremely influential strand of reformist theology, spearheaded by Nur al-Din ar-Raniri and 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili. Ar-Raniri, a scholar of Hadhrami descent born in Gujarat (India), was appointed Shaykh al-Islam in 1637 by Sultan Iskandar Thani. He became renowned for his fierce attacks on the 'heretical' monism of his predecessors, as he advanced a more scripturalist interpretation of Islamic law instead. Put briefly, Ar-Raniri advocated a sense of 'divine otherness' that contrasted sharply with the more mystical practice of seeking a union between humans and God (Riddell 2001:121-22). He was forced to leave Aceh only seven years after his appointment, presumably because he ran into a conflict with Safiyat ad-Din (Ito 1978). After a brief interval, however, the queen installed a likeminded reformer, 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili, who was born in Pasai, and had spent some nineteen years overseas before returning to Sumatra. Together, the legacies of Ar-Raniri and 'Abd al-Ra'uf ignited a sharp dispute about the place of monistic thought in Malay religious life, which would reverberate in religious scholarly circles for centuries to come. 33

It should lead to no great astonishment, that in this period of upheaval, a text appeared with a politically conservative message. Interesting comparisons may be drawn, then, between the Hikayat Aceh and the Hikayat Patani (as discussed in the previous section). Of course, there are important differences between Aceh in the mid-seventeenth century and Patani around the turn of the eighteenth century. Instead of flocking together at the court to jostle for power and compete for a share in royal revenues, orangkaya in Aceh increasingly succeeded in wrestling themselves loose from the court altogether (even though the sarakata remained the main symbol for their authority). Another difference is the role of Safiyat ad-Din herself. In a detailed study of Acehnese court diplomacy, Sher Banu A.L. Khan (2011) has argued that the first queen of Aceh applied a complex, collaborative and reciprocal style of rule, directed at balancing the interests of the crown and the nobles, keeping the sultanate stable and the state treasury healthy (cf. L.Y. Andaya 2004). Still, in a way very similar to the Hikayat Patani, the Hikayat Aceh was probably intended to advocate the continuation of the existing moral order based on the Sultan as divine ruler.

The Hikayat Aceh had as its aim the safeguarding of political stability in the wake of an uncertain future. The poem emphasised that the king possessed supernatural qualities, while paying due respect, at the same time, to fakih, Sufis and sayids, whose judgements in return confirmed and predicted his 'future greatness' (Braginsky 2006:448). The text was intended to provide a model for the ways in which Acehnese should position themselves in the world, as subjects of a king who stood at the same level as the powerful and legendary Muslim rulers in the West. It explained the Sultan's privileged position on basis of his or her extraordinary descent and spiritual power. The text does not offer a moral message in terms of commands, advises, or recommendations. Rather, the narrative is conservative, picturing the relationship between rulers and ruled as a status quo, and describing Islamic norms on basis of an unchangeable cosmological order.

33 See, e.g., Azra 2004; Gibson 2007; Riddell 2001.
Responsibility and consequence as ethical categories in the eighteenth century

European observers of pre-modern Southeast Asia observed and judged indigenous political and economic systems by comparing them to familiar, western patterns. Often, they concluded that Asian societies were lagging behind in terms of ‘progress’, seeing indigenous institutions as archaic versions of more advanced European models:

Western observers in Asia were so embedded in their assumptions of superiority that they failed to see the strength and continuities in the Asian economy around them. This is not simply a matter of Western arrogance: it is a fundamental misunderstanding of the real world, a choice of ideology over knowledge (Sutherland 1995:145).

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century western observers of Aceh invariably argued that the rule of Safiyat ad-Din in Aceh heralded a period of political and economic decline. Few observers articulated this idea more forcefully than Snouck Hurgronje, who argued that Acehnese ‘fanaticism’, although stimulated by the Dutch invasion, was the result of a long process of economic decline, and political and administrative disintegration (leading, in turn, to racial degeneration). At the moment of the Dutch invasion, he wrote, Aceh was a disorderly land of ‘many chiefs’, where discipline was ‘nowhere to be found’, and quarrel, quick tempers and pigheadedness were common features. Paraphrasing Heather Sutherland, such expressions ‘blinded’ European observers from the structural transformations that characterised Acehnese society in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. A prominent example is the way in which they coupled ‘decline’ to female rule.

Safiyat ad-Din was the first of a succession of four queens. Her position was legitimised by the Syaikh al-Islam, ‘Abd al-Ra’uf, who asserted that, just like her predecessors, she was a ‘deputy of God’ (khalifah) (Amirul Hadi 2004:60). However, the fourth queen, Sultan Kamalat Syah Zinat ad-Din, was forced to abdicate in 1699, according to some indigenous sources because a fatwa by the Sharif of Mecca (which reached Aceh per letter) had stipulated that it was un-Islamic for a woman to rule. It is impossible to determine, on the basis of the available sources, whether this fatwa was ‘real’, or merely an excuse for a particular faction of orangkaya to get rid of the Sultan (Djajadiningrat 1911:191). The only certainty is that her abdication signified the end of a long period of female rule, and the beginning of a relatively unstable period of foreign rule, in which rulers succeeded each other rapidly. In 1726, Sultan Jamal al-Alam Badr al-Munir, the last of a brief dynasty of Arab sultan-sayids, was overthrown by the Bugis leader Sultan Ala’ad-din Ahmad Syah, who is regarded as the progenitor of all Acehnese Sultans until Dutch rule put an end to the institution in 1903 (Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:1.92-5). While politically turbulent, Banda Aceh remained to be an important port throughout this period. According to the Dutch minister and traveller Francois Valentyn (1724:5-7), more than a hundred ships called at the port on a yearly basis in the late seventeenth century. Pepper remained the most important export commodity. An important import commodity was slaves, many of whom were brought from Madras by English traders, and bought, among others, by the Sultan, who employed them in his gold mines.

Yet, even despite these continuities, a significant social restructuring characterised the interior. After the rule of Safiyat ad-Din, the Sultan’s military power had definitely

34 The most forceful expression of this view can be found in Snouck Hurgronje’s infamous ‘Aceh-report’ (Gobée and Adriaanse 1957-65:1.47-124). See this dissertation, Chapter 3.
35 See Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:1.68-69. It was not only the Dutch who expressed such views. See, e.g., the view of the British captain T.J. Newbold (1836), cited below.
waned, and the central regulation of long distance trade had been surpassed by the regional trade in cash crops supervised by territorial chiefs. As a result, the *orangkaya* were able to position themselves more and more as local autocrats. Although formally they remained tied to the Sultan as vassals by signing the *sarakata*, their political authority increasingly depended on local kinship connections, which tied them to tribe-like communities inhabiting their territory. Consecutive sultans tried to counter this trend, for example by introducing trade restrictions. The English captain Thomas Forrest, who visited Aceh several times between 1762 and 1782, reported:

I enquired (...) of a Jew linguist, named Abraham, why the *Orankayos* (men of rank and substance) were not allowed to trade freely, as they did many years before. He said the kings of Atcheen had always lived on very bad terms with the *Orankayos* who got rich by trade; and, to lessen their consequence, his minister [the *syahbandar*] advised him to be sole trader himself; which counsel he imprudently followed, and by that means had impoverished his kingdom in general (...) (Forrest 1792:39).

Forrest argued that the Acehnese nobles were ‘feudal lords’ who ‘levied on the land and the industry of the inhabitants’ (Ibid.). For the British, who supported free trade, the cause for Acehnese (political) ‘stagnation’ was evident, namely the continuing (and fatal) attempts by the Sultan to create monopolies on the basis of military might. William Marsden (writing in 1783), stated that ‘the history of Achin presents a continual struggle between the monarch and the aristocracy of the country, which generally made the royal monopoly of trade the ground of crimination and pretext for their rebellions’ (Marsden 1811). Europeans overemphasizing the ‘feudal’ character of the nobility was a general phenomenon, however. The eighteenth century was a period of political fragmentation, not stagnation. Indigenous chronicles contain endless references to plots against the Sultan (Djajadiningrat 1911; Marsden 1811). For European observers, this suggested chaos. In reality, these contestations signified that the Sultanate had become a weak, but never redundant, institution.

A particularly important development was the increasing power of the so-called *sagi*, (lit. ‘corners’), the territories dividing Aceh Besar, the area comprising the fertile Aceh River valley. The *sagi* were federations of smaller territories, called *mukim*. Each Sagi was headed by a Panglima Sagi (‘Lord of the Sagi’), who acted as a *primum inter pares* among the *uleebalang* in his particular territory. The *sagi* were named after the number of *mukim* of which they were comprised at the time of their formation: Sagi of the 22 Mukims, Sagi of 26 Mukims, and Sagi of 25 Mukims (Snouck Hurgronje 1983-95:I.93). The origins of the Sagi are unclear. Indigenous chronicles ascribe the establishment of the three *sagi*to the reign of Sultan Nur al-Alam Nagiyat ad-Din, Aceh’s second queen (r. 1675-78), a period in which powerful *uleebalang* in Aceh Besar appropriated the right to arrange the matter of royal succession between themselves (Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:190-91). However, it is not impossible that confederations of local chiefdoms existed earlier (Djajadiningrat 1911:189).36

In the eighteenth century, a three-way divide emerged between the court, the Panglima Sagi, and further flung territories that were controlled by local *uleebalang* and opened up to cash crop cultivation. One of the results was a gradual shift of power away from Banda Aceh and to its former hinterland. While the Sultan continued to act as the

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36 It is still an open question whether this development was really typical for the area of Aceh Besar. Snouck Hurgronje answers positively to this, but adds that in Pidie there existed a form of confederation as well. He does not, however, mention any details (Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:1.95, nt. 1).
head of the Acehnese polity, the titles of the orangkaya became increasingly hereditary, and tied to geographically defined units (such as the mukim and the sagi), while kinship bonds held their class together. The logic behind this shift was economic in nature: while the power of the Sultan declined as a result of the decrease in coastal trade, rural production was revived. As a crucial sign of this development, around the turn of the eighteenth century Aceh had changed from a rice-importing to a rice-producing area (Reid 2005:108-109). European reports from the eighteenth century state that Aceh Besar was a fertile, densely populated and cultivated territory. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the sagi became the ‘most important element in the political structure of eighteenth and nineteenth century Aceh’ (Ibid.:107). Another result was that in previously uninhabited areas on the East and West coasts, large Acehnese speaking migrant communities emerged, led by enterprising chiefs who were looking for opportunities to open up the land for pepper cultivation.37

Political and economic restructurings went together with social change. One of the most important developments in this respect related to the position in Acehnese society of the ulama. Let me go back in time for a moment. Although Sultan Iskandar Muda is remembered in most indigenous chronicles as a ruler who was concerned with strengthening Islamic norms in his realm (for example through punishing sinful behaviour, distributing alms to the poor, and building mosques), there is no evidence that he, or any of his successors, were interested in developing Islamic knowledge among their subjects. An English navigator, who visited Banda Aceh in 1599, wrote that the Acehnese ‘bring up their Children in Learning, and have many Schooles (John Da vis, quoted in Reid 1995: 25-6), but, as Michael Laffan has recently argued, there is little evidence to suggest that these schools were anything like the pesantren as we know them today (Laffan 2011:26). Rather, the emergence of an extended network of Islamic learning appears to be a phenomenon of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century.38 Unfortunately, we know little about the emergence of the dayah in the Acehnese countryside. Marsden (1811) observed that the Acehnese had ‘many priests’ and ‘much intercourse with foreigners of the same faith’. But, like that of other Europeans, his account was focused on the port city.

Whatever its exact origins, the emergence of the ulama dayah in rural areas must have constituted quite a fundamental transformation. Some of the treatises of seventeenth century reformist scholars, like ‘Abd al-Ra’uf’s commentary on the Quran, were meant as personal guides for moral development. They were also intended, however, for a scholarly elite, and not for a broad public. Through the development of dayah networks, such knowledge must have become increasingly accessible to ordinary people. As in Minangkabau, about which we know somewhat more, most religious students in Aceh probably emanated from rural areas. Their experiences opened up a new repertoire of

37 Once source that gives us an idea of the rough experiences of Acehnese migrants working the pepper gardens on the West coast is the Hikayat Ranto. Besides offering a rich description of the trials and tribulations related to the practice of pepper planting, this (undated) text contains a vicious social critique. Women, it states, are only interested in men bringing home money. At the same time, the men are unfit to withstand the moral wasteland that constituted these rough, ungodly territories, which is why they give themselves over to sinful practices such as gambling and cockfighting. For a transliteration and English translation of the Hikayat Ranto, see Drewes 1980.

38 This does not mean that religious teachings were totally unavailable in the countryside before the emergence of networks of dayah or pesantren. As Van Bruinessen (2008) noted with regard to Java, children and adults may have received rudimentary lessons in reading and reciting the Quran from co-villagers who had mastered these skills. Or people may have flocked around (itinerant) scholars, in mosques or even in the latter’s home to read the kitab. It was the emergence of the pesantren, however, which turned the ulama into a ‘professional’ class of religious teachers and leaders.
power, making the individual accumulation of religious knowledge and adherence to particular disciplinary practices into a distinct source of moral authority. It is in this context, then, that I would like to move to a discussion of the two greatest Acehnese language epics still known today, namely the Hikayat Malem Dagang and the Hikayat Pocut Muhamad.

Just like the Hikayat Aceh, the Hikayat Malem Dagang deals with the reign of the legendary Iskandar Muda. It focuses on the king’s maritime ventures, assembled into a single story, which climaxes in a battle with Aceh’s major rival Johor. The composer is unknown, as is its date of origin. According to Snouck Hurgronje, the poem was older than the Hikayat Pocut Muhamad, which he dated in the mid-eighteenth century (Snouck Hurgronje 1893-5: I.92-3). However, Cowan believed that the Hikayat Malem Dagang could not have been written much later than the end of the seventeenth century (Cowan 1937:17). The story begins with the visit to Aceh of a princess from Pahang, and her husband, a prince called Raja Raden. After their arrival the two convert to Islam and subject themselves to Sultan Iskandar Muda. The bond is consolidated when Raja Raden gives the princess as a wife to the king. In return, Raja Raden is given the hand of one of the king’s sisters. After this, things start to go wrong. Si Ujud arrives in Aceh, designated alternately as a member of the royal family of Johor, the brother of Raja Raden, and the king of Johor, Banang, Melaka and Goa. Si Ujud disagrees with the conversion of his brother, and tries to make him renounce his decision. Raja Raden refuses, after which Si Ujud takes off, leaving behind a trail of destruction, plunder, and death. Iskandar Muda and Raja Raden are furious, and prepare to do battle against Si Ujud. As they sail along the North coast looking for reinforcements to recruit, Malem Dagang is appointed as the panglima (chief commander) of the fleet. Malem Dagang appears to be an ordinary villager. He is also, however, a grandson of a famous ulama from Medina, Dja Pakeh, who is asked by the king to join the expedition as a spiritual leader. Under the command of Malem Dagang the fleet crosses the Straits. After visits to Asehan and Pahang, the company travels onwards to Johor, where they cast anchor to wait for Si Ujud, who has fled to Goa. After many months the enemy fleet appears, and the battle begins. Si Ujud has decided to stay behind in Goa, but when he receives the news that the king of Goa – his father in law – is killed, his wife spurs him to take revenge. Si Ujud joins the battle and is defeated. The Acehnese take him back to Aceh, where, after refusing to embrace Islam, he is killed.

There are several differences between the Hikayat Malem Dagang and the Hikayat Aceh. Firstly, in this story the Sultan depends heavily on the support of others: uleebalang, common villagers, and advisers (mainly Malem Dagang, Dja Pakeh, Raja Raden, and the panglima of Pidie Maharaja Indra). While the Hikayat Aceh depicts Iskandar Muda as a divine creature, in the Hikayat Malem Dagang nothing human is strange to the king. He is

39 In this dissertation I have made use of the transliteration (in roman characters) and the introduction by H.K.J. Cowan (1937).
40 According to Cowan (1937:6), the historical core event of the poem was the Acehnese campaign against Johor in 1615. See also Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:II.84-85.
41 At one point in the poem, Raja Raden is called the ‘legitimate ruler’ of Melaka, but this is not further elucidated. In general, the role of Melaka is rather murky in this hikayat. Obviously, Iskandar Muda never succeeded in conquering Portuguese Melaka, despite various attempts. In this story Melaka is often mentioned, but as a political entity it appears to vanish to the background of Acehnese maritime power. In a most general sense, one might argue that Raja Raden and Si Ujud, as members of the royal family of Johor, are legitimate heirs of the kingdom of Melaka.
42 Goa, on the West coast of India, was the centre of Portuguese power in Asia. Cowan (1937:2, n.2) noted: ‘That Si Ujud is mentioned as its king, may be explained by the fact that the expedition against Johor was also directed at the Portuguese, who supported Johor, and were thus identified with them.’
energetic, but also ignorant, arrogant, and easily scared. This is in sharp contrast with Malem Dagang, the main hero. Ordinary villagers show themselves loyal to the sultan. When he prepares for war, 'no one [stays] in the village (gampoong). However, when it turns out that the preparations weigh too heavily on the villages, the king is asked to change his mind. Confidence in the expedition is only restored when a jinn, residing in an enormous, unmanufactured keel which has drifted to Aceh from Goa, brings the promise of God's protection (Cowan 1937:23, 77-78).43

One of the most important characters in the Hikayat Malem Dagang is Dja Pakeh. The ulama is consulted for every important decision taken during the campaign. A crucial passage is his first meeting with the king in Meureudu (Pidie), where he acts as chief judge. According to the poem, the land of Meureudu is still thinly populated (go lhom rame nanggro), and does not yet have a chief (hana sidroe lom peutoe). Thus, when the king arrives to recruit soldiers, the people are shy to pay their respects. Instead, they ask Dja Pakeh, who has met with kings before, to represent them. The king is annoyed because the people of Meureudu do not come to meet him in person, and ignores the famous ulama. Deeply insulted, Dja Pakeh tells the people of Meureudu to throw away their gifts, exclaiming: 'Someone who refuses to talk, I refuse to honour. Why would I not just return to my own country, Medina. Here, we are only done injustice' (Ibid.: 28-30, 80). Startled, the king asks Dja Pakeh to sit with him, and expresses his worry that the people do not longer recognise him as their king. Dja Pakeh answers that this is the king's own fault, for no chief (uleebalang) has been installed to administer the territory. The king answers that he will make the land into an Islamic endowment (nanggro wakeueh), to be administered by himself, and then asks Dja Pakeh to join the expedition as a spiritual adviser. The scholar refuses, and explains that the people in Meureudu, who are dependent for their livelihood on the products from the forest, need his guidance. The king then promises to develop the country by giving the people gold to invest in rice cultivation and the production of textile. Dja Pakeh finally agrees, and joins the expedition.

As for the description of religious practices, such as prayer, divination, and conversion, a conspicuous difference with the Hikayat Aceh is the poem's emphasis on the effects and rewards such practices are supposed to bring about. The beginning of the poem contains a story about a magical war vessel, called 'Cakra Donia' (Wheel of the World), constructed from the mysterious keel inhabited by a jinn. When the ship refuses to move, and remains stuck on the shore, the king calls a number of religious specialists (teungku pakeh, ureueng leubeh ulama raja), whom he asks to pray to perform a prayer (beuet do'a). Only when this is done, it is possible to launch the ship (Ibid.:24-25, 78-79). Another example is a divination performed by the queen, directed at guaranteeing the success of the campaign. This divination leads, ultimately, to the appointment of Malem Dagang as the chief commander of the fleet (Ibid.:25-26, 79). In yet another passage, the king (now in Samalanga on the North coast) is performing his daily prayers (salat) when he is approached by a mysterious person. The man tells him that the adjacent river is full of large fish. The king then gives order to the uleebalang, who have shown themselves uninterested in the area, to develop the land (Ibid.:32, 81). Finally, the most ostentatious piety is expressed in the context of battle. At the battle for Asehan, Malem Dagang summons his chiefs, who have become scared, to swear an oath together on a kris. The chiefs confirm their loyalty to Malem Dagang, after which the battle is won and the king of Asehan converts to Islam together with his vassals (Ibid.:44, 85-86). At Johor, Malem Dagang is withheld from doing battle by Dja Pakeh, who does not consider the time ripe.

43 According to the story, the keel originated from a tree cut down by Si Ujud, who wanted to use it for a war vessel. When the keel was carved, the jinn took possession of it, making it float away to Aceh.
He loses the argument, withdraws to his private quarters, purifies himself, prays, and engages in an extensive reciting of the Quran while he patiently waits for a positive sign of the ulama (Ibid.:56, 91).

The references to a more personalised, future-oriented and effective approach to religious practice are even more explicit in the Hikayat Pocut Muhamad. Although this poem is also about war, internal contestations over power have taken over from the struggle against overseas rivals. The author identifies himself as Teungku Lam Rukam (in Aceh Besar), a man 'who knew how to compose a story about princes (tuan njang pham karangan radja)' (Drewes 1979:7). He had an informant, Leube Beu'ah, who 'told [the author] the whole story from the very outset'. Finally, a third person was involved, Pakeh Salikan, who 'wrote [the story] down faithfully (ban aturan geutjalitra)'. The titles of these men (teungku, leube, pakeh) imply that they had at least a minimum of religious training. Judging from the events that are described, the poem must have been composed in the mid-eighteenth century. Overall, the content is characterised by an explicit emphasis on rural hardships, with long digressions on the challenges and virtues associated with village life.

The Hikayat Pocut Muhamad begins with the death of the first Bugis Sultan, Ala’ad-din Ahmad Syah (1735). In the confusion surrounding the succession by his son, Sultan Ala’ad-din Jehan Syah, former sultan Jemal al-Alam Badr al-Munir (called Djeumaloj Alam, or Poteu Djeumaloj in the poem) sees an opportunity to reclaim his thrown. This must be prevented by Pocut ('Prince') Muhamad, a younger brother of the king. Just like the Hikayat Malem Dagang, this poem describes a lengthy campaign, in which support is sought for the impending battle. One of the central themes is the loyalty of the warlord Bentara Keumangan, without whom the war cannot be won. Despite the fact that he is the adopted son of Poteu Djeumaloj, Pocut Muhamad succeeds to convince Bentara Keumangan to choose his side. With his help, Djeumaloj Alam is finally defeated.

In the Hikayat Malem Dagang, the authority of leaders such as Malem Dagang or Dja Pakeh is based partly on the capacity of leading in battle, and partly on the ability to offer spiritual guidance. In comparison, the Hikayat Pocut Muhamad operates a more formalised concept of leadership. Take, for example, a visit of Pocut Muhamad to the VII Mukims, a territory ruled by just three uleebalang, seven imeums and a few village leaders (peutua, keuchik). Pocut Muhamad finds this unacceptable, and admonishes the people that ‘capable, reliable, and honest’ (njang raghoe-raghoe teugoh seutia) village leaders are needed (Ibid:92-93). Their position should be hereditary, he states, so that they cannot be appointed randomly, and ‘everyone going to law must at least have a place to lodge his complaint’. The following conversation ensues between Pocut Muhamad and the peutua of the 7 Mukims:

As regards rulings, prince, the situation here is that anyone can give legal advice. Rulings are given all the time; knowledge of litigation is widely spread (...) Once the conditions are met, and the ruling is fair, they apply to the higher level.

(...) Admonishing the peutuas, Prince Muhamat said: ‘That is not the way. It is devoid of blessing, for you by-pass the public authorities. Jurisdiction in cases of customary law (adat) is due to the powers that be (ureueng mat lidah neuratja). Jurisdiction in cases of the religious law (hukom) is due to the scribes and the jurisprudents (siah ngon ulama) (Ibid.:94-5).

44 For this section I have made use of the transliteration and translation by Drewes (1979). An alternative translation can be found in Siegel (1979).
After a communal meal and a recital of the Quran, Pocut Muhamad appoints a man called Po Minat as the keuchik of the 7 Mukims, and goes on to say ‘to the people’ (ba’ ra’ jat):

Listen, keutjhi’ Po Minat! Be prudent when passing judgement. Administer justice for God’s sake, without regard to persons. Do not spare anyone, and let your rulings be fair and consistent (hukom beuseunang be’ meuriba). No one should live who has forfeited his life; no one walking in the ways of iniquity should stand in good repute. No one deserving life should be put to death. Do not condone anything, lest you be discredited. Exercise justice and examine who is in the right. Whoever the litigant may be, he should have only himself to thank for the issue. Go together with the jurisprudents and the scribes, and do not disregard the Qor’an (Ibid.:94-5).

One of the main messages of Pocut Muhamad, then, is that the people should rely on local leaders, and that these should rely in turn on the ‘literate’ and the ulama in order to apply correct judgment and assist them with the administration of law. At the same time, however, he admonishes the people to take account of the Quran, adding to the equation their own interpretation of what is wrong and what is right.

A key expression of this double message is the attitude of the warlord Bentara Keumangan. The choice whom to fight for is approached by Bentara as a moral decision. Tied to (the former king) Djeumaloj in a complex relationship of debt and reciprocity, Bentara initially refuses to even open a letter from Pocut Muhamat. He is convinced, however, by one of his lower chiefs, who suggests that consultation (mupakat) is the only reasonable response to the danger instilled in the impending war. Bentara decides to ask the advice of an ulama for ‘a scholar always sees clearly what is hard and what is easy after reflecting on it’. Thus he sends for Syaikh Rembajan, who teaches nearby. Incidentally, what follows is – to my knowledge – the earliest description of a religious educational institution in Aceh (as it dates from the mid-eighteenth century):

Arriving at the beunasah (meunasah) [the messenger] entered there without delay. The teungku had six hundred pupils (murib); a cheerful noise and bustle was prevailing there. Some pupils were reciting the Qor’an, others the Masa’il. Some were reading the Ajurrumiyya, others were translating the Fatiha;45 Some were reading a Malay book (kitab Djawoe), but others were chatting animatedly. In the western house (rangkang) the pupils were studying grammar; in the eastern house spelling. In the house upstream they studied mysticism (teusawoh), the subtle wisdom of the Hikam and the Ihya. Everyone according to his capacity; some studies Arabic works, others Malay ones (ladom Arab ladom Djawa). The teungku exercised the superintendence, but he had a deputy (waki) in every house. The waki bent his head in order to see how the pupils were busy spelling. Dressed in white and with white head-covering (Ibid.:134-35).

Bentara’s messenger tells Syaikh Rembajan: ‘A letter has arrived from Aceh; it must be read and interpreted. It is from you only that [Bentara] wants information; you must explain to him the content of the letter’ (Ibid.:137). The following morning, Pakeh Rembajan comes to see Bentara, who says: ‘no one but you is able to give a considered opinion, after scrutinising the words and their meaning.’ The scholar agrees, reads the letter, and advises him to join Pocut Muhamad’s campaign (Ibid:139). Hearing the advice, Bentara agrees to meet Pocut Muhamad. The prince explains to Bentara that the war has

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45 Masa’il stands for the masa’il al-muhtadi (‘Questions of the Path-Seeker), a book used for basic Islamic instruction. The full title is masa’il al-muhtadi li ikhwan al-muhtadi (see Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:II.4, 30; Bowen 1993:43-45). Adjurumijah stands for an Arabic grammar (al-Muqaddima al-Ayurrumiyya), written by the Moroccan scholar Ibn Ayurrum (d. 1323). The Fatiha is the first chapter of the Quran.
made people poor and their lives troubled. He argues that the kings cannot be reconciled, but that, either way, the war must be ended. Thus, the only possible solution is that either one of them shifts allegiance. Bentara and Pocut Muhamad swear an oath of loyalty to one another, and in the final battle victory is forced over Djeumaloj. In the final battle Bentara Keumangan is killed.

In the *Hikayat Malem Dagang* and the *Hikayat Pocut Muhamad*, the model of divine cosmology is no longer glorified and preserved, but criticised and even mocked. While the *Hikayat Aceh* reflected on the place of a Malay-Islamic kingdom in a wider Muslim world, the Acehnese-language *Hikayat Malem Dagang* and *Hikayat Pocut Muhamad* engage with the concerns of ordinary villagers. The main point of view has shifted from a cosmic order to village life, and from the coast to the interior. With regard to social relations, the emphasis is placed on the bonds between villagers, local village and adat leaders. The most important relation, however, is that between the individual and God. Formative events, such as the election of leaders, the decision to go to war, and the acceptance of death, are understood, much more explicitly than in the *Hikayat Aceh*, from the perspective of a world governed by God, understood and interpreted on basis of abstract ideas, values, and qualities (harmony, loyalty, chastity, patience, sacrifice and piety). Those who are able to internalise these values succeed in winning the favour of God. The figures who come closest to reaching this state of mind are the ulama Dja Pakeh (in the *Hikayat Malem Dagang*) and Pakeh Rambaja (in the *Hikayat Pocut Muhamad*), and their views and advices are crucial for the course of the stories.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that the fortunes of the people (*rakyat*) are entirely dependent on the mediation of the ulama. Religious agency is expressed in the acknowledgement of consequences and responsibilities associated with ritual practice, and human life in its broadest meaning. This is true for the heroes and their advisors, but also for common villagers and soldiers. One of the greatest dilemmas faced by Pocut Muhamad is the fact that the enemy king, Djeumaloj Alam, is a *sayid*, a descendent of the Prophet. Thus, in the midst of the battle, he says to his men: 'You are fighting a *sayid*, a descendent of the Prophet, a holy man, descended from the Prophet. Let none of you be too exultant; do not be haughty, brothers! (baranggasoe be' seu'u, be' teukabo he tjeedara)'. The soldiers answer: 'We are not haughty, prince; we only thank our Lord!', after which the prince says: 'I trust myself to the Lord; let the will of God the Only One be done. Let all of us do likewise and trust ourselves to the Lord Most High!' (Ibid.:224-25).

**Ethical reflection in the nineteenth century war literature**

The expansion of European trade in the eighteenth century affected indigenous political polities in different ways. On the one hand, trade could be disruptive, as local leaders jostled with centralised power for control over newly found resources, such as tin or gold. On the other hand, European demand brought opportunities for a revival of royal power (Lieberman 2009:870-71). In Aceh, both trends occurred simultaneously. The entrance in the archipelago of English and American traders ignited a new pepper boom, which meant that large parts of previously uncultivated land on both coasts of Aceh were opened up by enterprising chiefs.46 By the early 1820s, Aceh was responsible for over half of the world’s production of pepper (Ibid.:858).

Formally, European visitors were required to trade with the Sultan (Valentyn 1724:5-7). This decree was still enforced on the North coast, at least until 1765, when two

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46 See Dobbin 1983: 87-108; Lee Kam Hing 1995; Reid 2006.
English traders were ‘cut off at Pedir, when trading there without the king’s leave’ (Forrest 1792:47). On the West coast, however, the situation was different. As Forrest wrote, in Meulaboh, ‘good profit may be had on European goods (...) The king [Sultan Ala’ad-Din] endeavours to monopolize all the trade, but in vain’ (Ibid.:46). From the late eighteenth century onwards an increasing number of ships left directly from Meulaboh and other ports on the West coast to Penang (established 1789), Melaka (ceded to the British in 1824) or Singapore (established 1819), thus evading the Sultan’s toll. The British also strengthened their presence in Sumatra, establishing ports and fortresses in Bengkulu and Padang, thus making direct trading even easier. By the end of the eighteenth century American traders came directly to the ports on the West coast to fetch shiploads of pepper (Gould 1956).

In the meantime, the position of the Sultan became more precarious. About Sultan Ala’ad-din Muhammed Syah it was reported that he kept a band of private soldiers (sepoys) permanently on his side.47 After his death in 1795 the Panglima’s Sagi appointed his son, Ala’ad-din Jauhar al-Alam Syah, as the new king. However, Ala’ad-din Jauhar faced opposition, financial troubles, and even a full-scale revolt between 1814 and 1819.48 He repeatedly petitioned the British for an alliance. The British refrained from interfering in Acehnese matters, however, a stance which was formalised in the Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824. These tensions have been discussed in great detail by Lee Kam Hing (1995), so there is no need to discuss them here. I should, however, mention one aspect of the 1814 rebellion. According to a British report, the Panglima’s Sagi came to Banda Aceh in order to overthrow the Sultan. This was announced in the presence of a ‘gathering of the other important orang kaya, uleebalang and ulama of Aceh’. As the main reason, they stated the Sultan’s ‘un-Islamic behaviour’. According to the nobles, he refused to keep to God’s commands, to follow the customs of previous kings, and it was even said that he had become an unbeliever by converting to the religion of the English (Djajadiningrat 1911:208; Lee Kam Hing 1995:194). Of course, these accusations were closely connected to the political intrigues of the moment.49 What the story signifies, however, is the long way Aceh had gone from a dominant model of divine kingship, to a political culture in which it was expedient to denounce the ruler, simply, as ‘un-Islamic’.

These accusations invite a somewhat more detailed discussion of the development of local political structures in this period. Central, in this respect, was the institution of the mukim, the building blocks of the three sagi. The mukim was a geographical entity, which was based on the centrality of a mosque. Each mukim stood under the authority of an imeum, and comprised a number of villages (gampong).50 Because of the establishment of

47 See Forrest 1792:56. Sultan ‘Ala ad-Din was befriended by Forrest during the latter’s last visit to Aceh in 1784. The king appeared to be a rather sophisticated person, having travelled widely, spending time in the Hejaz and in Mauritius, where he learnt French (as well as the craft of making ‘guns and shells’) (Forrest 1792:52). According to Forrest, he was spoken well of by his subjects, whom he tried to ‘civilize’, and encouraged ‘to become tuan hadjees [pilgrims], and tuan imums [knowledgeable persons]’ (Ibid.:57).
48 See Anderson 1971 [1840]; Marsden 1811; Lee Kam Hing 1995.
49 Lee Kam Hing identified different causes for the revolt, including the ongoing tensions between the Sultan and the Panglima’s Sagi, disputes over the collections of taxes and port duties, and machinations of powerful Arab and Chulia merchants on both sides of the Straits seeking to strengthen their control over the Aceh-Penang trade (Lee Kam Hing 1995:194-206). Apart from the Panglima’s Sagi, the rebels were led by an Arab merchant, Hadji Abdul Rahim, who had been in conflict with the Sultan ever since, allegedly, he had murdered the syahbandara a few years earlier.
50 The term mukim derives from the Arabic word for ‘resident’, which refers to the minimum of ‘unbound adults’ (meaning not slaves) necessary to make a Friday service valid according to Islamic law (Snouck Hurgronje 1893-5: I.84-5). The establishment of the mukim as an administrative institution has been
the *mukim* as an administrative unit, newly built mosques functioned not only as places of worship, but also as administrative centres, at least symbolically, tying the local congregation of (male) Muslims to a bureaucratically administered polity. According to Snouck Hurgronje, by the nineteenth century the *mukim* had effectively become a secular institution, because the *imeum* were typically absorbed in all kinds of worldly contestations, and ‘rarely involved personally in matters of the mosques, which they only led in name’ (Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:1.86-9). However, the question whether the *mukim* was a ‘religious’ institution was probably not particularly relevant in the context of indigenous political culture. The important principle was that the *mukim* connected the adherence to the Islamic faith in the interior (including the villages on the fertile plains of Aceh Besar and the North coast, the Gayo highlands, and the further flung coasts of West Sumatra) directly to political control. Thus, the establishment of the *mukim* was very different from the emergence of the *dayah* as independent, relatively isolated institutions. This principle was further substantiated in the production of different royal edicts that declared the dissemination of religious commands as a primary responsibility of local chiefs and judges.51

In his underrated analysis of the nineteenth century Acehnese polity, Karel Van Langen (1888) described a political order that was decentralised rather than ‘disintegrating’. Some *mukim* were administered independently from the centre, while the *imeum* was assisted by ‘a council of wakils (deputies) and ketjiks [keuchik, village heads] and if necessary also by the tengkoe’s (*ulama*) and orang-toeha, the elderly’. ‘In every neighbourhood there is a place of worship, binsah [*meunasah*] or mandarsah [*madrasah*], where meetings are also held and religious training is given’ (Ibid.:19). Importantly, Van Langen emphasised the importance of consultations between local leaders, and the importance of population density. Large villages incorporating fertile terrain produced powerful leaders, even if these did not belong to the local aristocracy. In this context, charismatic *ulama* with ‘worldly’ ambitions were able to rise to positions of considerable power. This was true not only in territories far from the centre (such as Rundeng, on the West coast, to which I will turn below), but even in the centre of royal power. An example is Habib Abdurrahman Zahir, an Arab *sayid* who, at the time of the Dutch landing, held the office of *syahbandar*, and was regarded as the most powerful official at the Acehnese court. ‘The Habib’, as Snouck Hurgronje invariably called him, was the Sultanate’s most important diplomat. In Aceh he was known as the instigator of a ‘crusade’ against ‘immoral’ practices, including ‘ram- and cockfights, playing dice, opium

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51 Two conspicuous examples are the ‘Peraturan Di Dalam Negri Aceh Bandar Dar As-Salam Di Dalin Deri Pada Daftar Padoeka Sri Sultan Makota Alam Iskandar Muda’ (Administrative Regulation in the Realm of Aceh, Abode of Peace, Copied From The Register Of His Highness Sultan Makota Alam Iskandar Muda) and the ‘Serkata Masa Paduka Sri Sultan Syamsul Alam’ (Resolution from the time of His Highness Sultan Syamsul Alam) (1723?). Manuscripts of both texts (incomplete, in the case of the *Adat Makota Alam*) were found by the Dutch during the taking of the Indrapuri mosque (Aceh Besar) in 1979. For a transliteration of the (Malay) manuscripts in roman characters, and a Dutch translation, see Van Langen 1888:56-91).
smoking, pederasty and other illicit sexual acts', urging the Acehnese 'to fulfil their most important religious duties'. It is in this context of fragmented authority, that the Dutch invaded Aceh in 1873. Although the official reason for the war was the Sultanate's alleged support for 'piracy' in the Melaka Straits, the Dutch decision should be seen in the broader context of imperial conquest. An 1871 treaty with the British had 'allocated' the whole of Sumatra to the Dutch sphere of sovereignty. Dutch administrators subsequently argued that the region was to be integrated, politically and economically, into the Dutch empire. Sultan Mahmud Syah, who was not consulted for the treaty, sought allies in Turkey, France and America, but to no avail. In 1874, the Dutch captured the royal palace (dalam), forcing the Sultan to move his headquarters to the Pidie village of Keumala. The Dutch regarded Aceh as an easy conquest. Instead, it became a deadly campaign, which, as Van 't Veer (1980) has argued, never really came to an end. Up until the 1890s the Dutch controlled only a small territory, comprising a number of defensive works on the coast, connected by a tramline. The momentum only changed when, in 1891, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje discovered that a number of Acehnese fighters considered the struggle as a Holy War, and that behind the 'line of concentration' a bitter conflict over arms, resources and authority was taking place between local chiefs (the uleebalang) and a faction of ulama. According to Snouck Hurgronje, the ulama had risen to their position as leaders of Acehnese resistance both because of the inherent 'fanaticism' characterising their faith, and because – in contrast to the chiefs – they were based in their isolated (and thus vulnerable) dayah in the Acehnese countryside. Snouck Hurgronje's advice to support the uleebalang, and ruthlessly persecute the resistant ulama, ultimately shifted the balance into the advantage of the Dutch. In 1903, after thirty years of war, Sultan Muhammad Daud Syah (who was only a child, and not yet Sultan, when the war began) surrendered.

52 Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:I.165-67, 326. These duties included the five daily prayers (theumajangs). There were also 'stories' that the Habib prohibited the veneration of certain graves as constituting a heretical practice, though with limited success. Apparently, the Habib was so influential, that the Sultan, in consultation with his most important chiefs, 'felt impelled (...) to establish a new kind of court, the balè meuhakamah, where the Habib could try all matters relating to religion'. It is unclear, however, how effective this court was.

53 For a full discussion of the international events leading up to the first Dutch invasion in Aceh, see Reid 1969. For a more up to date background to these events, see Feener, Daly and Reid 2011 and Reid 2006. Some Dutch historians, including I. Schöffer (1978) and H.L. Wesseling (1978), maintained that Dutch imperialism was 'reluctant' or 'reactive' in nature (that is, rather than ideological or virulent). Others, like M. Kuitenbrouwer (1985) and E. Locher-Scholten (1994), have argued against this view, pointing out the similarities between the Dutch and other European colonial projects. What stands out, is the extent to which the Dutch imperial project was actually related to that of the British. As Nicholas Tarling (2001:135-44) remarked, the British were 'patrons' of the Dutch, for 'what the Dutch undertook was designed to underpin their claims to the archipelago at a time when the arrangements the British had made in their primacy were under threat from the emergence, of rivals, the spread of industrialism, the penetration of concessionaires, and the weakness of native states. Dutch expansion was imperialism with a difference, but hardly unique'.

54 In this thought, they may have been strengthened by the views of the British. In 1836 Captain T.J. Newbold wrote: 'Achin at present is in a state of anarchy. The little authority formerly exercised by its prince has been usurped by the Saghis and heads of tribes; its trade, with our ports is still considerable, though much diminished, and, indeed, in a fair way to become annihilated altogether, if more attention is not paid to scouring the seas of the numerous pirates by which they are infested, and who are daily becoming more presumptuous, from impunity. The Dutch, who are now strenuously attempting the subjection of the whole of Sumatra, will probably find Acehin an easy conquest, in consequence of the divided state of its councils (Newbold 1836:120).
If the war turned out to be a grave problem for the Dutch, for the Acehnese it was simply devastating. The attack was total. Acehnese leaders were co-opted or killed, and the areas brought under the control of the Dutch were fundamentally reshaped. The Dutch army attacked not only the port city, the palace of the Sultan, coastal fortifications and other strategic places, but also, from the very outset, the villages of the interior. The population was decimated. Thousands fled to the Malay peninsula (with thousands more becoming internal refugees). Complete villages, rice fields and irrigation channels were destroyed, and the pepper production collapsed. In brief, this was a period ‘in which one out of eight Atjehnese was killed or displaced and in which the economic base of Atjehnese society was drastically altered’ (Siegel 1979:229).

While in the collective memory of the Dutch and the Acehnese, as well as in the scholarly literature, the image has taken root of a black and white struggle between ruthless colonial conquerors and fanatical Acehnese fighting for their autonomy as a Muslim kingdom, in many respects the war was a more ambiguous affair. One way to get a sense of this, is by turning to the war literature. Two prominent examples of this literature are the *Hikayat Teungku Meuké* and the *Hikayat Prang Kompeuni* (‘Story of the War against the Dutch’).

The *Hikayat Teungku Meuké* describes an episode of the war in the surroundings of Meulaboh, on the West coast. What makes this poem special, is that is centres not on the struggle against the Dutch (although these do play an important role), but on the struggle between two local factions, one belonging to the chief of Meulaboh, Lila Peukasa (who is loyal to the Dutch), and one belonging to the ulama Teungku Meuké, who has risen to power in Rundeng. This region on the Southwest coast is part of the Meulaboh territory, but also badly accessible because of a large swamp. The author of the poem identifies himself as Teungku Malem, hailing from Trumon (close to Rundeng), who has ‘entered the service of Lila Peukasa’. Although the story applies shifting view points, the main perspective is that of Lila Peukasa’s counter campaign against the ‘holy war’ waged by the defective Teungku Meuké. The story begins with Gampong Rundeng, where Teungku Meuké has built a strong blockade to disturb trade. The story ends with the capture of the Rundeng fort, and the death of Teungku Meuké. The episode I want to focus on takes place in between these two events.

Teungku Meuké is designated in the poem as a ‘religious teacher’ (Tjoekuna, Teungku), and as ‘the mighty sword of the Rawa people’ (*geudubang taré’ aneu’ Rawa*). The latter suggests that he was a descendent of a group of Minangkabau, which had migrated to this area many years earlier, and which was known among Acehnese settlers as *ureueng Rawa*, people of Rao (a Minangkabau region just south of Tapanuli; Ibid.:52; cf. this dissertation, Chapter 3). Because of Teungku Meuké’s standing as an *ulama*, the poem states, many people had come to Rundeng to fight against the Dutch and the traitors from Meulaboh. Teungku di Meuké has told them that they should not be fearful, for, in case of being killed in the struggle, God would grant them Paradise (*Tuhan bri dudo teuma tjeuruga*) (Ibid.:72-73). The confrontations between both factions lasts for many days, and is only decided when Lila Peukasa’s group is given weapons by the Dutch. This turn of luck

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55 For a detailed discussion of Dutch scorched-earth tactics in Aceh, and the attack on its ‘environmental infrastructure’, see Kreike 2012.
56 The same may be said about the so-called ‘Padri War’ in West Sumatra (1815-38), to which I will turn in the final section of this chapter.
57 For this chapter, I have made use of the transliteration and translation by G.W.J. Drewes (1980).
58 See Drewes 1980:56-57, and also Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:120.
causes a large part of Teungku Meuké's faction to defect. 'We had better go!', they tell the teungku, 'Why should we be attached to an ill-fated country?' (Ibid.:82-83).

On the 27th of the holy month Ramadan, when his situation has deteriorated greatly, Teungku Meuké decides to meet with his enemies face to face. He leaves the fortress, prays, and 'commits himself to God' (Ibid.:86-87). He will die in this enterprise, but the section I would like to quote is a conversation at the fort Seh Dawot, which has been taken by the enemies. Here, Teungku Meuké meets with a clerk, Nja’ Seh, who is ‘in high favour with Lila Peukasa’. He asks the latter why the common people are fighting him. Nja’ Seh tells him that the people want to retaliate on Teungku Meuké, because the blockade at Rundeng has done them great harm:

You assert that you are conducting a holy war. Why then do you hate Lila Peukasa? You have cheated us, people of Meulaboh; you have taken away all our gelded goats. You have taken all our goats and ducks; you carried them off and brought them hither. You consider us, the people of the river mouth, as unbelievers, and you have taken away all our nets and angling rods (Ibid.:88-89).

Nja’ Seh mentions other reasons as well: The uleebalang took great issue with Teungku Meuké’s decision to marry above his standing, and with the fact that he had not recognized Dato’ Djanggot as the chief of Rundeng. He states: 'You ignored the uleebalangs; it would appear that you were the chief!' Interestingly, this is how the confrontation ends:

[Nja’ Seh says] ‘What do you intend to do now, teungku? Where does the road to the mountains lead to, once you have left here? Why should I fire at you, teungku? We have quarrelled only for a moment.’ ‘My son, do not kill me, for I intend to leave here.’ ‘Good luck to you, teungku; we are not perfidious’ (hana kianat kamoe dumna) (Ibid.).

The use of the word kianat ('betrayal', or 'treason') is intriguing. Having vilified him for doing harm to his community, Nja’ Seh refuses to 'betray' Teungku Meuké's authority, and lets him walk away. Later that night, Teungku Meuké 'dies a martyr' (tjahit Tjoekuna) at the hands of a warlord fighting on the side of Lila Peukasa.

In contrast to the ambiguous content of the Hikayat Teungku Meuké, the Hikayat Prang Kompeuni speaks squarely to its listeners about the religious duty to protect their ‘state’ (nanggroe) and their ‘community’ (ummah) against the destructive power of the ‘unbelievers’ (kafir). The composer identifies himself as Dokarim (Ar: ‘Abdulkarim’), who comes from the village of Glumpang Dua, Aceh Besar. According to Snouck Hurgronje, who met with him in person, Dokarim was a specialist of seudati, an Acehnese dancing style cum literary performance inspired by Sufi motifs (Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:II.106-122). Apparently, the composer could read nor write, and sang his composition by heart. Thus, Snouck Hurgronje had the poem written down 'directly from his lips' (Ibid.:106-109).\footnote{Unfortunately, this version was lost. Snouck Hurgronje himself was clearly excited by the idea of a work of Acehnese literature being created in front of his own eyes, especially, of course, since the war was not over yet, and the ending of the story was still uncertain. He was also skeptical about the poet's hawkishness, convinced as he was that a 'soft transition' (by which he meant the anticipated surrender of resistance leader Teuku Umar) would 'prompt the man to recast his poem into a glorification of the Kompeuni'. To what extent the wish was the father to the thought is difficult to say for, ironically, Dokarim was killed a few years later, in 1897, on the orders of the very same Teuku Umar (one of the heroes of his poem), after being accused as a traitor (see the later, adapted English translation of Snouck Hurgronje’s ethnography, 1906, 102, n. 1).}
the early twentieth century, the *Hikayat Prang Kompeuni* circulated widely across Aceh in many different versions. The Dutch scholar H.T. Damsté wrote that, while residing in Idi (East Aceh) in 1911 to study the Acehnese war literature, many copies of the poem were sent to him by military officers, who seized them from the shelters of Acehnese guerrilla fighters. A decade later, it was still 'on many lips' (Damsté 1928:545). By the 1920s the poem had evolved into a whole genre of its own. Still, different versions all seemed to take their cue from a combination of the original text composed by Dokarim, the admonitions of famous *ulama* leading the struggle, and other texts glorifying the 'holy war' (such as Abd al-Samad of Palembang's *Fadail al-Jihad*, or 'The merits of jihad').

Snouck Hurgronje regarded the *Hikayat Prang Kompeuni* as a primary symbol of Acehnese revivalist piety. Indeed, it is plausible that this poem motivated some Acehnese fighters, or caused them to be less fearsome. It certainly made a deep impression on ordinary villagers, as noted for example by John Bowen, who observed that older people in the Gayo highlands were still able to recite the poem in the 1980s (Bowen 1991:67–68). Whether it really persuaded ordinary peasants to leave their homes and families and join the struggle seems to be a questionable claim. Here, I tend to agree with Jean Taylor, who argues that most guerrilla bands probably consisted of landless men. Either way, Dutch administrators and military leaders were convinced of the effect of the poem as a dangerous piece of propaganda, finding fertile ground in the violent and 'fanatical' nature of the Acehnese people. Thus, the Dutch military were ordered to actively seek and destroy copies of the poem during their patrols, a practice going on until deep in the twentieth century.

Earlier analyses of this poem have focused on the theological aspects of 'Holy War' as a religious idea, the perceptions of afterlife and the promise of paradise as 'promised' by Islamic scripture, including its poetical representation. It would be a distortion, however, to view the poem primarily as a kind of epitome of 'piety', certainly if this piety is left unspecified. A less deterministic reading of the poem reveals elements of a different sort of religious consciousness, based on an idea of personal ethical reflection, and informed by aspirational visions of the future.

The core message of the *Hikayat Prang Kompeuni* is that Muslims should concentrate on the rewards and punishments in the afterlife instead of this-worldly 'life and goods'. Great emphasis is placed on the idea of martyrdom, and the divine rewards awaiting those who fall in paradise. Thus, the poem glorifies the heroic acts of resistance leaders such as Teungku di Tiro and Teungku Kutakarang. Some sections are directed explicitly to the wealthy section of the population, and explain that the holy war is not just about fighting, but also about financial means. Admonitions about joining the struggle are

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60 Aspinall 2009:26; Damsté 1928:545-46; Siegel 1979:229-36. For this dissertation I have primarily made use of the transliteration (and translation) of a version collected by H.T. Damsté (1928). Another version can be found in Alfian 1992. Other discussions of the work include Amirul Hadi 2011; Siegel 1979 (who also translated a few segments of the poem); Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:106-124; and T. Iskandar 1986.
61 See J. Taylor 2011:222. Taylor also takes note of the English-language edition of Snouck Hurgronje's *De Atjehers* (*The Acehnese*, trans. By A.W.S. O'Sullivan, Leiden: Brill, 1906, p. 176) which stated that the 'raw material' from which fighters were recruited was highly diverse, and included '[v]agrants without visible means of subsistence, who in ordinary circumstances supply their needs in the way of rice and opium through theft or (...) through murder and rapine' as well as religious students and 'hot-tempered' youngsters convinced of the pious nature of the war.
63 Most manuscripts were destroyed by the Dutch. A 1986 inventory made by T. Iskandar included 46 manuscripts held in libraries and collections around the world (T. Iskandar 1986).
combined with long, and rather detailed discussions, full of quotations from the Quran and the Hadith, about money and payment. It is not only those who refuse to fight who will be punished, it is also those who refuse to pay. They will be punished, ‘as God speaks in the Quran’, for the very gold they pile up and refuse to spend according to the Way of Allah will be heated in the fire of hell and branded onto their bodies.\textsuperscript{64} To escape from these punishments, the Muslim community (oomat moehamat) will have to tear itself away from worldly temptations (Ibid.:552-3). Thus, the poet warns: ‘You collected many treasures, but you gave nothing for the Holy War (...) Remember the moment that we will return to God’ (Ibid.:566-7). In connection to these admonitions, the poem contains numerous references to internal social divisions, and rejoices in the idea (or the fantasy) that the act of uniting, as Muslims, in the fight against the infidels might have the effect of transcending these division. Holy war, it states, is an obligation ‘similar to the daily prayers’ (Ibid.:564-65). It applies to every Muslim, including the poor, the rich, the pious (alem), the ordinary villagers and their leaders (keutji’ and waki), and slaves (Ibid.:564-65, 576-77).

Yet it is not so much the representation of the war through which social distinctions are addressed, but the prospect of living under Dutch rule. If no one resists, the poem states, every single person will be encumbered. No village or sagi will be spared from Dutch taxes, duties and fines (Ibid.:572-73; 580-81). People will be prohibited to travel without a pass. Goods will be appropriated, and ‘divided amongst those brought with them’ (Ibid.:584-85). Half of the possessions will be taken, the other half may be kept, for ‘that is the rule with the Kompeuni’ (Ibid.:586-87). The Dutch will destroy religion, because they change the law (hoekom). Once in power, they will incite people to gamble and smoke opium, while pocketing their losses (Ibid.:586-87). Dutch soldiers will be given free rein to admit to their sexual desires, and take unrestrained delight in local virgins and married women. This prospect of a morally and economically ruined society is not derived from stories about and histories of legendary wars against unbelievers, but deduced from the fate of other places where the Kompeuni is already in control. Thus, the poem states that, in places such as Java, Palembang, Padang, and the ‘lands of the Malays and the Singkil’, it is the ‘law and the adat of the kafir’ to tax land, birth, marriage, and death (Ibid.:573-75). This prospect applies not just to ordinary villagers, but also to rich and powerful chiefs:

Distinguished uleebalang (oeleebalang oegoh-oegoh) will be beaten to death. Peutua’s will be killed. A part [of the people] will be brought to Batavia, another part to Europe. The young are made into soldiers, the old into sailors (Ibid.:586-87).

Considerable space is devoted to emphasize this point. For example, a long passage discusses the hypothetical case of an important uleebalang, unable to withstand the wishes of the Dutch, including their claims on his wife. In conclusion on this story, the poem reflects on the ‘laws of the kafir, Beulanda style’ (hoekom kaphe bie beulanda):

Of seven working days, one is for the ruler (...). Such laws are devised by them: women and men, small and big, even small children and the sick. If these are strong enough, they are made to show up. Oeleebalangs must work, including the potjoet [prince or princess] in the large

\textsuperscript{64} Here, the poem refers to the Holy Quran, Sura 9 (Al Tawbah), verses 34-35: ‘[34] (...) And there are those who bury gold and silver and spend it not in the Way of God: announce unto them a most grievous penalty. [35] On the Day when heat will be produced out of that (wealth) in the fire of Hell, and with it will be branded their foreheads, their flanks, and their backs. – “This is the (treasure) which you buried for yourselves: taste you, then, the (treasures) you buried!”’ \textit{The meaning of the Holy Quran}, transl. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Sekretariat Himpunan Ulam’ Rantau Asia; Selangor Darul Ehsan, 2005).
house. Everyone is made the same (habeb bandoem dipeusanteut). Who is potjoet, who is Si Laba,65 who is slave, who is lord, it is no longer visible. The kafir levels out everything (boet si kaphe dipeurata). The titles keutji' and imeum are no longer valid. Wazi's and mantri's are mixed up. (Ibid.:592-95).

In a footnote to this particular passage, Damsté referred to Snouck Hurgronje, who often heard the Acehnese say: 'The Kompeuni lump everyone together, making the lowly high, and the highly low' (Ibid.:594, n.1).

There is, of course, a marked ambivalence in this concern. On the one hand, the view of the Kompeuni 'lumping everyone together' refers to an existential threat to the Acehnese social order. One the other hand, the poem explicitly associates the war with opportunities for ethical improvement. Take, for example, a fascinating passage at the beginning of the poem, in which the Dutch are compared to jinn, (potentially) evil spirits:

The deceptions of those jinn-like kafirs (tipee djeen kaphe), no one can resist them. If adat and faith (iman) are ruined, people do not care. Thus speaks the devil (seeten), who commands to live with the Kompeuni. Surrender to God. How could you resist. If you fight, you leave behind many rice-storages, children, women, possessions (...). Let us stay here in the gampong, and accept what God ordained. (...) Listen not to the fallacies of the devil. Have faith in God and the Prophet. When the kafir take the land (...), do not trifle, go to battle and follow the Prophet (Ibid.:564-65).

Jihad is thus presented as a personal, spiritual development, and as a way of strengthening oneself against the diabolical tricks rousing Muslims into passive compliance. Indeed, the poem suggests that the social disruption of the war provided responsible choice, rather than repression of mind. It is in this respect that people of authority are tempted to neglect their duties:

Many [tengkoe's] may be regarded as having become kafirs. Not one is strong in faith (iman). A sign that the end of the world is drawing near. The teungkoe's have been betrayed by the jinns. Those who gathered lots of knowledge, do not put this to use. Thus speaks the devil to the teungkoe's, when he is at work in their hearts: How would you go to war, teungkoe? How would you care for the country's people? (ra'jat lam nanggri). (...). Thus are the tricks [the devil] uses against the keutji' and teungkoe's, and thirdly to the waki's, until the children of the land (aneu' nanggroe) think: Our teungkoe has not descended to the countries below, what hurry is there for us? Perhaps this war is not imperative? Perhaps we should not go for now. Were it customary to go to war, surely the teungku, our teacher, would have cared (adat meunjo prang peureulee, teungkoe njang goeree ka neupeudoeli). Because he is a learned person (oereueng malem). He reads, day and night. He recites the kitab and the Quran, which discuss the holy war:

This passage could be seen as special admonition to the 'lazy' or 'irresponsible' ulama, who are not prepared to lead the people in battle. But the passage might as well be read as a message to 'ordinary', lay villagers, who should be aware that, ultimately, no one should be trusted more than oneself.

According to Ibrahim Alfian, the Aceh War should be seen as a manifestation of the 'Smaller Jihad' (jihad al-asghar), or the 'Jihad with the sword', in contrast to the 'Greater Jihad' (Jihad al-akbar), including the 'struggle against the devil' (jihad al-syaitan) and the

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65 Laba literally means 'advantage' (I: keuntungan), and Si Laba means slave. There is an expression in Acehnese which says: 'If he no longer possesses gold, a king from any country is called Si Laba' (’oh ka hana meuih di dalam jaroe, raja nanggroe pi geukheun Si Laba).
'struggle against oneself' (jihad al-nafs) (Alfian 2006, 109-10). In my view, however, the content of the Hikayat Prang Kompeuni contains a subtext of spiritual development. It is important to emphasize, moreover, that the ideas expressed in the poem were embedded in the conditions of Acehnese society. Already before the war, Acehnese society was marked by shifting loyalties, and contestations about the position of Sultans and 'chiefs'. At the same time, village leaders, such as the keuchik (village head) or the teungku meunasah (the head of religious ceremonies) were drawn in continuous, albeit highly localised, struggles for power and resources. The Hikayat Prang Kompeuni demonstrates that these contestations were infused with moral appeals emanating from different layers of society, and related to divergent ideas about the question how society might be organised. Underneath the bombast of heroic warfare, then, the process of personal reflection is a crucial concern in the poem, which admonishes its audience to investigate, and critically evaluate, the pious sincerity of others and the self.

During the war against the Dutch, people in Aceh took into account ideas about both vices and virtues of their own society. According to the Hikayat Prang Kompeuni, these ideas built as much on changing opportunities and aspirations as on the experience with violence and the concomitant idea of a disintegrating moral order. This was true for learned scholars as well as for ordinary villagers. In an afterthought, the composer stated that he put the 'loftiness of the war' (keuleubehan prang) into verse, because in this way it could be understood even by those who did not have 'specialised knowledge' (eleumee), like himself. The poem was never meant for the religiously learned, for that would be like putting 'water in a well'. 'If I speak, teungku, it is because I fear to be sinful in front of God (ba’alah lon takot deesa) (...) That is the reason I created [these verses], so that you will join the war against the Dutch' (Ibid., 598-601).

In the next chapter, I will further elaborate on this connection between the colonial 'encounter' and evolving (colonial and indigenous models) of moral improvement. Before I do so, however, I would like to zoom out for a moment, and consider some broader patterns characterising the relationship between the development of religious educational institutions, (colonial) violence, and individual ethical reflection among Muslims in Southeast Asia. Particularly important is the contingency of these patterns, and the question of what such a brief comparison tells us about the problem of Acehnese exceptionalism, as introduced in Chapter 1. Considering space, I will limit this comparison to the cases of Java and West Sumatra.

**Violence, colonialism and the making of proper Muslims**

The emergence of religious schools in Southeast Asia, and the increasingly important social position of religious professionals, was inspired by a combination of global reformist currents, increasing levels of individual mobility, and (later) the printing press (see Hefner 2009:18-19). In all of these aspects, Aceh was not very different from other regions in the archipelago. There is no evidence, for example, to support the claim that the Acehnese networks of dayah were older, or more 'entrenched', ethnically or culturally, in Acehnese society (like some authors, especially in Aceh, have done). One factor distinguishing Aceh is that the early phase of religious professionalization took place outside the sphere of colonial domination and anti-colonial violence. In this sense, the situation in Java and West Sumatra was quite different.

In pre- and early-modern Java, rulers such as Sultan Agung (r. 1613-46), Pakubuwana II (r. 1726-29), and Dipanegara (1785-1855), reconciled Islamic and 'Javanese' religious identity in what Merle Ricklefs has called the 'mystical synthesis'
(Ricklefs 2006). Fusing a commitment to Islamic identity, basic Islamic norms, and local spiritual forces, by the early nineteenth century the mystic synthesis became the dominant mode of Javanese religiosity, embraced by elite and commoners alike (Ricklefs 2007:11). This synthesis was apparent also in conflicts resulting from colonial incursions: violent resistance against colonial domination were inspired both by the Quranic idea of ‘Holy War’ and by messianic or millenarian motivations (Kartodirdjo 1972). From the eighteenth century onwards, anti-colonial movements became increasingly organized through networks of religious institutions, such as perdikan or pesantren.66

In the mid-nineteenth century, the combination of a more incisive Dutch presence and a sharp increase in the number of pilgrims returning from the Middle East ended the mystical synthesis as a major strand of Javanese religiosity (Ricklefs 2007). Proponents of a global, non-place-specific interpretation of Islamic norms increasingly distanced themselves from ‘traditional’ Javanese society, advocating instead a strict observance of the Shari’a. However, according to Ricklefs’ thesis increasing numbers of Javanese were uncomfortable with the ideas preached by these pietistic movements. In response, they moved away from the mystical synthesis, either by converting to Christianity or by relinquishing some of the basic tenets of normative Islam. Thus emerged a category of nominal Javanese Muslims, who came to be known as the abangan (the ‘brown ones’, opposed to the pious white ones, or putihan). Islam in Java thus became polarised, with the mystical synthesis surviving as a minor stream in the margins of pious practice.

Under very different circumstances, a comparable process took place in West Sumatra. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, teachers in the most important Minangkabau religious institution, the surau, became increasingly concerned with the signs of moral degradation in areas affected by sudden commercial expansion. Many of these teachers were born in villages which had experienced a rather sudden influx of wealth derived from the expansion of the coffee trade. Appalled by the prominence of practices such as cockfighting, gambling, and the use of alcohol and opium in market towns (where the most important surau were located), these teachers vied for a more prominent role of Islamic law in Minangkabau society, as a cure for rotten moralities in personal and commercial affairs (Dobbin 1983:126; Hadler 2008:21). Gradually, the idea that Islamic (Shari’a) law should be applied strictly and evenly to every single individual in Minangkabau society, regardless of status or social background, was regarded as a serious challenge to Minangkabau adat, and to the ‘other-worldly’ teachings associated with Sufi practice. The situation escalated after 1803, when a number of haji’s, known as the Padris, started to engage in violent campaigns against ‘non-compliant’ villages, aiming to establish a ‘true’ Islamic community in West-Sumatra, based on the primacy of Islamic law.

The Padris were successful among upland rural communities who, in the past, had been relatively poor in comparison to more prosperous commercial centres concentrated in the coastal plains, and now experienced sudden wealth because of the coffee boom. One of the main attractions was the fact that the Padris seemed to offer an ideological system capable of conserving this wealth, and managing it justly at the same time. In addition, the Padris gave the inhabitants of mountain villages a new sense of moral and social superiority over the lowland communities who, in the past, ‘despised [them] for their poverty and isolation’ (Dobbin 1983:133). Besides seeking revenue from trade and commercial agriculture, the Padris engaged in the collection of booty and slaves by waging

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66 See Laffan 2011:40-46. Perdikan were religious institutions or ‘schools’ located at holy sites, and exempt, under traditional Javanese (and consequently Dutch) rule, of fiscal obligations (See Laffan 2011: 45; Carey 2008; Ricklefs 2007). Carey and Laffan have argued that a large part of the followers of Prince Dipanegara were students of such institutions.
war with hostile villages. However, from the 1820s onwards their activities became increasingly frustrated as the Dutch had become determined to expand their influence in highland West Sumatra. For this reason, they had sought alliances with the Minangkabau royal family, who had seen its power decline at the hands of the Padris. Gradually, and by means of bloody conquest, Dutch military troops succeeded to incorporate the rural areas of West Sumatra into the Dutch trading orbit, wrenching the lucrative coffee trade out of the hands of the Padris. In 1833, after more than a decade of war, the Padris were definitely defeated, when its two most important leaders were both killed by Dutch forces (Ibid.:149).

Although the image of the Padris seems to imply differently, Minangkabau society in the nineteenth century was not ‘split’ between Islamic fundamentalists and conservatives loyal to the colonial overlord. Among the Dutch, stances were equally complex: while siding politically with the ‘traditional’ Minangkabau aristocracy, in practice Dutch administrators agreed with many reformist goals. Javanese religious life at the end of the nineteenth century was similarly characterized by a complex negotiation between old and new forms of piety, quiescent local elites, and Shari’a-minded reformers essentially, but not always openly, dismissive of non-Muslim rule. In this respect, the colonial encounter was not fundamentally different in Aceh. Rather, what made the situation in Aceh stand out was the moment, the pace, and the scale of the violence. When, in the late nineteenth century, the Dutch annexed the area associated with the sovereignty of the Acehnese Sultan, it was with such brutal intensity, that the space for negotiation, and the formation of flexible and adjustable relationships, was much smaller than in other parts of the archipelago, where the changes took place at a slower pace.

Conclusion

Conversion in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago was not a top-down process. Rather, it was a process of complex local interactions, based on the cultural value of Islam as a universal, but also adaptable system of thought and practice. The moral values offered by Islam acted simultaneously as a source of power for rulers, and a source of agency with the potential quality of subverting or compromising political power at the local level.

In this chapter, I have used examples from the hikayat literature to locate this tension in Aceh, and to investigate its temporal dynamic. Until the late seventeenth century Islamic religiosity was presented primarily as a category of ritual practice, dependent on a Sufi-inspired cosmological order centred on the idea of divine kingship. In the eighteenth century this moral configuration was gradually undermined by a religious orientation based on the ethics of individual responsibility. This shift was driven by two specific transformations: the political and economic fragmentation of the Sultanate state, and the emergence in rural areas of the ulama. Compared to the seventeenth century Hikayat Aceh, eighteenth and nineteenth century epic poems contain a personalized interpretation of Islamic ritual that was central to local contestations of authority, and

67 Dobbin has stressed that the Padri movement never comprised a single or coherent conflict. Rather, it consisted of different local struggles, led by local leaders who entertained diverse motivations, intentions, and strategies. Also, the struggle was not framed as an assault on ‘adat’. One of the main strategies of Padri leaders, she argued, was ‘to set one entire village against another, [which was] no very difficult task given existing inter-village rivalries and the possibility of booty and adat-prescribed tribute from the defeated village’ (Dobbin 1983:128-41. Hadler (2008) has argued that many young Minangkabau students were confronted with a variety of ideological streams at the same time. He advances these complex ideological contestation as one of the major explanation for the conspicuous fact that many important Indonesian intellectuals have hailed from this region.
instructive in the development of a sense of moral responsibility. What these poems reflect, then, is a shift from a socio-religious orientation based on the ‘acting’ Muslim, engaged in the ritualistic affirmation of moral order, to the idea of ‘being’ Muslims, based on the individualized process of ethical reflection.

There is a latent, but necessary tension in this prolonged shift between the responsibility to ‘be’ a good Muslim (involving a learnt, but also personalized reflexive ethical process), and the increasingly important local debates about the formation of a ‘proper’ Muslim society based on ‘correct’ norms and practice. Thus, I have placed as an epigraph above this chapter Pocut Muhammad’s fundamentally ambiguous admonishment: ‘go together with the jurisprudents and the scribes, and do not disregard the Quran’.

In the nineteenth century this tension was made manifest by the extremity of colonial violence. In the eyes of local religious leaders, the scale and intensity of the Dutch put religiosity and the integrity of the community to the ultimate test. As time progressed, however, and violence subsided, the colonial encounter took a more ambiguous form. It is this situation to which I will turn in the next chapter.