Navigating multiplicity in a binary world

A Javanese Example of Complex Religious Identity

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Introduction

This chapter explores the spiritual practice, identity, and commitments of a small group of study participants from fieldwork conducted in and around Yogyakarta in Central Java, Indonesia, in 2013, looking specifically at their experience with multiple religious traditions. I approach this subject as a practical theologian and a spiritual care provider. In order to give some sense of where my disciplinary commitments lie, I reference the words of Kathleen Greider (2011), who writes in "Multiplicity and the Care of Souls":

> Practical and pastoral theology begin with the study of lived religion: our primary commitment is to learn from the ways in which persons and communities navigate the interplay between religion/spirituality and the living of their lives. One way to illustrate how this prioritization functions is to note that there is debate among some scholars of religion (perhaps especially Christianity) about whether religious multiplicity is, from the point of view of doctrine and church authority, possible. *In practical and pastoral theology, we start with the reality that persons and communities say that religious multiplicity is an aspect of their lives, and seek to learn from these persons and communities how religious multiplicity is, in fact, possible.* Pastoral theology is a form of constructive theology in which care is the orienting value and evaluative standard. (Greider 2011: 120; my emphasis)

Following Greider's definition, as a practical theologian concerned primarily with the lived experience of religion and/or spirituality, instead of asking how the subjects in this study *can* integrate different religions, I accept the fact that *they already do.* As such, the participant's own voices shed light on their experience as people who are influenced by multiple religious and cultural traditions. As a person who also considers herself religiously plural, I

have in some small way an insider status, since we share this mixed aspect of our identity. So, at the same time, my own voice and interpretations influence the voices of the participants, as theirs do mine, and there is a process of mutual transformation.

The subject of religious hybridity or, what I prefer to call in the individual context, complex religious identity, has not been explored at great length in the theological literature. What few texts we have generally do not come from a spiritual care perspective. Three of the more significant monographs addressing this issue are Catherine Cornille's *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (2002), Gideon Goosen's *Hyphenated Christians* (2011) and Rose Drew's *Buddhist and Christian?* (2011). Goosen, Drew and Cornille's contributors largely respond to the question of how an individual can reconcile two different belief systems. Always, this is from the primary perspective of Christianity, and frequently it is in relation to Buddhism.

Although I too am an Anglophone and of European heritage, and have been influenced by the two traditions most often explored to date, I will demonstrate that this particular location does not prevent me from offering a unique perspective. The question of reconciliation is a non-issue for me because, while I am influenced culturally by Christianity, I do not subscribe to the tenets and doctrines of the Christian faith. In a similar vein, my interview participants are not concerned with how they can reconcile different belief systems because they are not necessarily coming at this issue from a place of belief. In this chapter, I also attempt to privilege their voices over mine. Most of my research participants would be described as nominal or cultural Muslims (or, in some cases, Catholics) who have incorporated or unconsciously inherited traditional Javanese rituals, and/or who practice meditation informed by one or more tradition. If the issue of reconciling competing truth claims is not a question for my participants, then it will not be my concern either, quite independent of the emphasis given to this aspect in the existing literature on dual belonging.

Methodology

While striving to present the authenticity and reliability of qualitative research, it is important to also recognize the subjective nature of relating with other human beings – our research participants – and subsequent research data. As individuals, we come to this work with a particular frame of reference, one that influences the research questions we ask, the conversations we have, and the overall interpretation and presentation of our data.

I am interested in relationships of power and the ways in which institutional forms of religion marginalize people who we might call spiritually independent or religiously complex. In this sense, I see qualitative inquiry in general and my particular research as belonging to the tradition of critical theory. Further, as a pastoral theologian, I am always relating to my subjects and data with a particular interest in the implications for the provision of spiritual care.

Although the methodological approach I have taken with this research is largely phenomenological in nature – in that I attempt to describe, through narrative, the phenomenon of having multiple religious and cultural influences on one's spiritual belief, practice and expression – it does not assume that I as researcher can entirely "bracket out" my own experiences. Instead, viewed with a more hermeneutical lens, this research seeks to uncover hidden meanings embedded in the psychospiritual experience of both the researcher and the participants. In the context of discussing *epoché* (the bracketing of one's own beliefs, values, opinions, etc.), which he says is an impossibility, Ramon Panikkar (1978) argues that "interreligious dialogue demands a mutual confrontation of everything we are, believe and believe we are, in order to establish that deeper human fellowship without prejudicing the results, without precluding any possible transformation of our personal religiousness" (ibid.: 44). In this case, what Panikkar says about interreligious dialogue can apply equally well to cross-cultural qualitative research. Ultimately, I came to this research with a deeply personal interest in the experience of plurality within the individual, and that shapes how the research was conducted and interpreted.

I have also incorporated elements of ethnography in this research. During the course of my field work, I conducted 18 formal in-depth interviews with 16 informants (14 individuals and one couple), had numerous informal conversations with the same participants and with other individuals, and also spent time in the company of the participants in social settings. Although it was potentially boundary-crossing to engage the research participants in more informal ways, being entirely new to Indonesia, it was important for me to take advantage of the opportunity to get to know the culture through these social engagements, and to strengthen my access to and knowledge of the sub-culture I was researching in this way.

I recruited participants using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling. My initial informants came from one of three main locations:

- a spiritual retreat for advanced meditators at a *vihara* (Theravada Buddhist temple) with monks in residence;

- a local *vihara* in the city run by laypeople, where local people gathered weekly for meditation practice; and
- the Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies and the Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies (ICRS/CRCS) at the University of Gadjah Madah.

In the first instance, I was not a retreatant but had gone to meet with the meditation instructor for the day, and then met some of the participants in the retreat who in initial conversations revealed themselves to be good candidates for my research and, when asked, were amenable to participating at a later date. In the second context, I was a sporadic participant in the weekly meditation gatherings and discussions that followed (primarily in Bahasa Indonesian, though people graciously translated for me), and was able to recruit participants at that time. And in the third case, I was hosted as an international researcher by ICRS/CRCS and was actively involved in classes and activities that were part of the program, allowing for conversations that led to gaining additional participants. I therefore had varying levels of access and time in the field with each of the three populations, and acted to varying degrees as observer and participant observer.

The first contact I made within the community of advanced meditators became my key informant and gatekeeper from that point forward. She introduced me to participants who were either (1) part of the community of students who work with this particular meditation teacher, or (2) the "adopted children" or students of her two mentors from the Javanese indigenous tradition (*kejawen*). While I interviewed both the meditation teacher and the *kejawen* mentors, I chose to focus on a small subset of my participants for the purposes of this paper, which does not include the teachers. I chose these three participants because in many ways they are representative of the entire sample while, specifically, they have a shared spiritual community, practice, and vernacular, which together provided a point of connection with the researcher as well. The quasi-"insider" status I as the researcher was able to achieve with this subset of participants is both a liability and an asset. It was an asset in that I was able to build rapport and trust with the participants, which led to rich conversations; it was a liability in that I may have engaged in more leading questions and influenced the language choice of the participants during our conversations. Given that my intention, working from a place of critical hermeneutics, is to understand and interpret, and to challenge norms and power structures, assuming that this influence went both ways, this could be a desirable outcome. However, it is important to note that this was not an entirely reciprocal exchange. Beyond the power relationship

inherent in my being a researcher, the interviews were conducted in English, and my participants' native language was Bahasa Indonesia and/or cara Jawa (Javanese). This, combined with my relative inexperience with qualitative research, meant there were ample opportunities to impose my view when words did not come easily for them.

I also drew from the tradition of grounded theory in order to analyse my data. After transcribing the interviews verbatim, I went through an initial open coding process in which the data was coded line-by-line, focusing on actions and processes (Charmaz 2006). I compared the codes across interviews and made modifications to the in vivo codes in each of the transcripts accordingly. I then analysed the most prominent themes in the interviews and identified categories that represented the most frequently occurring codes. The process was inductive and iterative; however, this was somewhat limited by timeline and scope of a semester-long graduate-level directed study. The themes that I chose to highlight are representative of the particular research questions I asked going into this project and they are representative of the relationships that I was able to foster with the individual participants while in the field. Any number of other interpretations could be made and would be made by another researcher or, had I approached the research with a different interpretive lens or had I had the opportunity to dig even deeper into the data. Suffice it to say, this is only one possible interpretation of a small subset of the data.

The context: religion in Indonesia

Research was conducted in Yogyakarta, Central Java, Indonesia, during a nine-week period between May and July 2013. Yogyakarta is a city of slightly under 400,000, which is part of a metro region of nearly 2.5 million. The majority of its residents are ethnically Javanese though, due to a large number of universities in the city, there are also students who come from other parts of Indonesia as well as from foreign countries. While the overall population in Indonesia has approximately an 87 per cent Muslim majority, in Yogyakarta the estimates are over 90 per cent. Although in recent decades more and more practice a strict (or "pure") form of Islam that approximates the traditions of the Middle East, many practice what is referred to as "popular Islam". This latter form is an outgrowth of the Javanese folk traditions (which I will refer to generically as my participants did, as *kejawen*), which have absorbed Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim – particularly Sufi – influences over the centuries. In discussing the indigenous religion of Java, Mesach Krisetya (2007) explains that it is not doctrinal, but of the 300 or more forms, there are shared

assumptions rooted in concepts of unity and interdependence, the divine nature of the human being, the need for spiritual and intellectual development of the human being, and shared ritual (*slametan*) which symbolizes the social and mystical unity of its participants (ibid.: 209–210).

In 1947, after Indonesia gained independence from Dutch colonial rule and a brief Japanese takeover, the philosophical foundation of *pancasila* (lit: five principles) was implemented by President Sukarno. First among the principles was citizens' required belief in the divinity of God (the word *Tahun* replaced the original *Allah* to placate non-Muslims). *Pancasila* is understood to have been a sort of compromise between various factions within the new Indonesian government and, in order for the majority that did not want Sharia Law, to avoid its implementation. Soon after, six official religions – reduced to five during the long Suharto era (1967–1998) – were named and Indonesia's citizens were required to claim one, which would be listed on the individual's government-issued identification card.[1] Officially, indigenous religion is characterized as a belief system (*kepercayaan*) or worldview, instead of a religion (*agama*),[2] so for those that primarily identified with *kejawen* or other traditional belief systems, a primary religion among the approved traditions had to be named instead. In some cases, individuals chose Buddhism or Hinduism as more accommodating than the monotheistic traditions of Christianity, Catholicism, and Islam.[3] At the same time, with the increasing Islamization of Indonesia, it became more and more attractive to claim one's religion as Muslim, and we can assume that some people who are officially Muslim are more *kejawen* in heart. While a law was passed in 2006 allowing citizens to leave the religion section of their identification card blank, in practice this is hardly ever used, either because the local bureaucrat issuing the ID is not aware of the law or does not want to implement it, or because citizens themselves fear the consequence of claiming no religion.[4]

Also of note is the 1974 Marriage Law, which has been widely interpreted as prohibiting interreligious marriage in Indonesia, largely because a civil marriage ceremony would no longer be recognized and only one done in accordance with one of the six official religions could be registered with the State (Buchanan 2012). Since 1974, couples choosing to marry across religious traditions have either had to perform their ceremonies overseas or had one individual convert to the other tradition.

Voices of the spiritually independent: the participants

The three participants used for this discussion, for which I am using pseudonyms, are all students of the meditation teacher whom I will call Pak (Father)

Wahyu. Mas (Brother) Buana is a 30-year-old man who is officially Muslim, and works as a freelance environmental researcher. He is the middle of three children. Mbak (Sister) Indah, also officially Muslim, is the only child of a Christian father and a Muslim mother, who were married before 1974. Indah is 27, has a bachelor's degree in communication, and is an entrepreneur. Romo (Priest) Wibisono is 45, is the eighth of eleven children, and is a Jesuit priest trained in philosophy and theology. I would consider each of the three to have a complex religious identity, in that they depart from the mainstream interpretations and doctrines of their traditions and, in that they are influenced by and engage in multiple religious traditions and spiritual practices. We could also call them spiritually independent. While the characteristics they share – making them representative of the participant sample and of the larger population I am interested in understanding better – are related to spiritual and intellectual independence, as well as mystical conceptions of the sacred, each has their own way of talking about their religious identity and different strategies for responding to the cultural and "legal" or practical obligation as Indonesians to both claim a religious identity among the six available, and to believe in God.

Rejecting authority

All three participants grew up with a strong religious family culture. In both Buana and Indah's case, there was a strong negative connotation to religious rituals, particularly *solat* or formal prayer, which ideally occurs five times a day, and a resultant questioning and ultimate rejection of religious authority and doctrine. Buana describes his questioning spirit and his desire to understand the meaning of the rituals he engaged in:

> [U]ntil now, even until I got to college, I still feel searching in myself, I feel searching: "Why should I do solat, why should I read Qur'an?" Even after I have many teachings from my teachers, my parents, and imam or someone else. They always talk about, if you don't do your solat you'll go to hell. Things like that. It's not about something human. I mean, what about, my question is always, "This will happen in the future, if I don't do solat, in the future I'll go to hell. But, what's the implication if I do this now, or I don't do it now? What's the real implication in human life? In my life?" And I don't feel the difference until I realize once I go to Bali [meditation retreat, 2011], I join the meditation, I start to understand that there is something more than doing solat. There's something more. I got the knowledge of seeing inside me, seeing the depth of my soul maybe? If I can use that word.

Buana is not interested in a punishing theology or an obligatory ritual, and he wants the religious rituals and teachings to speak to his daily life and experience. He finds meaning internally, which is helped through the experience of meditation. It is not that there is something inherent to meditation which prayer could not provide and still meet Buana's spiritual needs, but it is the appeal to direct experiential knowledge, as opposed to obedience and faith in the knowledge of others, that he gets from the meditation retreat which revives his connectedness to the sacred. Having to say prayers in Arabic, a language unintelligible to Buana, did not help make him feel that formal prayer was transcendent. As it was at the time of the interview, Buana was not doing *solat.*

Indah's experience growing up is that she felt very much responsible for her parent's salvation, understanding both the Christian and Muslim doctrines presented to her as saying that each of her parents would go to hell if she were not of his or her faith. However, understandably, given the cultural context and the doctrinal interpretations, Indah never considered it a possibility to be both Christian *and* Muslim, and so she faced an insufferable predicament. She would secretly go to church with her father, and secretly pray with her mother, all the while fearing for her parents' souls. Indah recounts a particularly impactful memory of the secrecy and the confusion that came from competing truth claims in her own family. She says:

> When I was five, my father know that when me and my mom, we were praying, we were *solat maghrib*, in the evening, 6:00 when my father noticed and he was very mad and he just throw my *mukenah* [prayer shawl] in the garbage and then, since then I have big trauma with *solat.* When I did *solat*, I always got afraid.

Despite this difficult experience, at an early age, Indah identified as Muslim. Religious education is part of the public education curriculum in Indonesia, and there are separate classrooms and teachers for Christian, Catholic, and Muslim students, though not often for the other traditions. Indah explains:

> Yeah. I must choose Islam because I grew up in the Islamic tradition of education. I mean, in the school I have to study Islam, in my junior high school I have to study Islam also, so then I just put Islam on my ID.

Presumably, associating her father's religion with one that is punishing not just in the hereafter, but in the here and now, would also have affected Indah's religious identification, but when asked for clarification, Indah said that her mother was similarly angry when she found out that Indah had attended church services with her father. She couldn't win:

> For some time I believed that doctrine. I did believe [that my mother would burn in hell if I wasn't a Muslim; that my father would burn in hell if I wasn't a Christian]. Doctrine. That's doctrine. It's just the same. Even when you go to Buddhism, they will call it karma. Punishment is karma. You will get bad karma. Yeah, every doctrine is just the same.

As her words convey strongly, formal religion ends up leaving Indah dissatisfied. She is compelled to continue searching for something that resonates, however, and diligently attends to the spiritual life from childhood on.

Curiosity about other religions

Unlike Indah and Buana, Romo Wibisono, whose parents were both converts from *kejawen* to devout Catholicism, experiences prayer as an important family time marking the beginning and ending of each day. He was drawn to the priesthood from an early age, moved by his older brother's ordination ceremony, and inspired by local priests, both of which he encountered as a teenager. Part of what attracted Romo Wibisono to the Society of Jesus was the service orientation of the priests in his village. After he entered the priesthood he says, "We worked for the empowerment of poor people in Jakarta, urban-based NGO, but also we were involved in advocacy for political violence, for political rights." Wibisono did this for seven years, and he got burned out, disillusioned that anything could ever change. Unlike the experience of his younger spiritual friends, Buana and Indah, Wibisono found something personally resonant and rewarding in his given tradition, but it led to compassion fatigue when he encountered a larger world that did not share the same values.[5]

Being interested in both the intellectual and contemplative aspects of the Jesuit tradition as well, Wibisono ventured to Sri Lanka to spend some time on spiritual retreat. There he encountered Buddhist forms of meditation, which added to his knowledge of the Catholic contemplative practices he already engaged in but was not totally satisfied with. In India, Wibisono went on retreat with a Jesuit priest and Zen master who taught him meditation in the Zen tradition. This teacher asked Wibisono to "drop all the concepts, all the theology, all the spiritual experiences". Later, Wibisono would read the teachings of Jiddu Krishnamurti and he said, at that time, he was "still imprisoned by dogmas and doctrines, so many concepts". After continuing to read Krishnamurti and going on retreat with Pak Wahyu, Wibisono said, "Step by step, I see the truth. And, I do agree [with Krishnamurti] that there is no ... way to the real truth, to the Absolute Truth, there is no way. And we

have go beyond all the doctrine, all the concept." Wibisono refers to the form of meditation that he, Buana, and Indah practice under the guidance of Pak Wahyu as a kind of pure *vipassanā* (lit: insight, a form of meditation prevalent in the Southern or Theravada school of Buddhism), or what he says may be better termed "post-vipassana", one free of dogma, doctrine, and concepts, and thus, one ostensibly compatible with other religious practices. Wibisono, as a priest and religious leader, faces challenges the others do not have, in that he still has to operate within the structure of the church. He explains, "the problem comes from community, because I live and work in community, I'm still doing ritual [providing the Eucharist] everyday to these people. So I have to talk about [doctrine, by giving a homily] ... so it gives me tension."

Buana was aware of religious diversity from a young age, seeing friends in school who were Catholic and Christian and, in particular, engaging with a non-Muslim family that his entire family was close to. Buana began to have questions early on, because of seeing what he called inconsistencies in the teachings he received and in people's actions. Buana, in remembering his growing up, was startled to hear other children talking about how so and so would go to heaven and so and so would not, just because they were from a different religion. Buana recognized and affirmed difference and wondered how anyone could say, "we are the right ones" or "we have the true faith". After 9/11, he saw an even greater religiosity among Muslims in Indonesia, and he felt even more that this was not the Islam he knew. Buana's parents also became increasingly more strict Muslims as he grew older and, as he heard his father talk about *kejawen* customs as now forbidden, he started to have questions. Buana began to read the Bible, in secret, because he was curious. As he read parts of the Bible, the Qur'an, and the Barnabas Bible, the latter of which his father okayed, Buana said comparison helped him to understand. He says he realized about Christians, "They are not wrong, because they have it as I have Qur'an. Their parents give them Bibles, just like my parents give me Qur'an. And that's not wrong." Beginning in his adolescence, Buana also was influenced by an older cousin who would go both to church and the mosque and modelled good relations with many different kinds of people. This family member also connected Buana with his ancestral tradition, with *kejawen*.

Indah's interreligious education was even more explicit than Buana's, being pulled on a regular basis between her parents' faiths, and having both Christian and Muslim extended family. Early on she became interested in exploring Christianity and Buddhism, but she also wanted to strengthen her understanding of Islam. In college, Indah joined a Shia discussion group because she was attracted to the more intellectual approach of that tradition

as compared to the Sunni tradition she grew up in, which is also the majority in Indonesia. Indah admits that she was also influenced by secular values, largely instilled by her father, who she said encouraged her liberal and feminist ways of thinking and being in the world.

A mystical understanding of God

Indah shared with me on several occasions how she walked her own path. Talking about her conception of God, and how others made her feel "weird" because of it, she explains:

> I believe in God, but not the God in the book, in the holy book, Holy Bible ... God is inside my heart, inside my body, inside my gut. Everywhere ... When I was a teenager, I understood that. I have a personal relationship experience with God ... And when I was around 12 or 13, I feel like I want to find my own way, my own religion, my own God, and at that moment ... I feel like when I talk to myself, I talk to God. But my Islam teacher, my private Islam teacher told me "No!" And my classmates told me that I'm a weirdo because at that time, my perspective of God was very different from theirs ... [W]hen doctrine came, every doctrine came, just made me feel God's far away from here. God is over there, God is in the sky, above the sky. God is not close here ["here" said pointing to chest].

This idea of God as inside, close by, and also something unknown or inexpressible, was shared by all three respondents. Both Buana and Indah found comfort in their internal monologues, as a way of being close to God. Buana, who suffered chronic physical abuse growing up, says he's agnostic about God. He feels that he knows that which people call God from his meditation experience and, as he realized during the course of our conversation, also from the times that he sat alone in his room as a child, talking to himself and wondering why a loving God would allow his father to hit him. He says:

> Because in the teachings I've received before, they always said God is up there, is out there. And after meditation, I start to realize that God is inside. It's so close to me, it's not out there. So if you want to ask something to God, just ask to yourself. Not praying to something out there that we don't know. [A]nd why I still believe in that is that there is something inside me that I still cannot explain. I found something and I don't know what to call this entity, but somehow when I do meditation there's still other power inside that I cannot explain. I only see my mind, my soul, and this other thing. And, yeah, I cannot explain it ...

Romo Wibisono speaks at two different levels when he discusses God. He understands God in a more typically Christian way as love, but he says that he also understands God as a concept, a symbol expressing that which cannot truly be expressed. He says:

> God for me is no different from God before I know this kind of [awareness or meditation] practice, yeah. God is, now is, something unknown. You know? So, yeah, when we talk about God, I think when we talk about God as God, I think we can talk just in the level of intellect ... [W]e cannot talk about God, you know? Yeah, we know that there is something beyond, something unknown, something like Krishnamurti said, immeasurable. God is love, love that is not love we know.

So for Wibisono, God is fundamentally a concept. And this is what he teaches when he leads people in retreat – people who identify as atheist, agnostic, Catholic, Muslim, you name it – in his blog writing and published books, and perhaps even more surprising, it is also what he teaches during his homilies.

Identifying religiously

Indah explained to me that she does not intend to tell her parents much about the changes she has experienced in her religious practice and spiritual life. While they know that she meditates, they do not know that she has stopped observing Islamic rituals. Even though her Christian father already had to accept her choice to identify as Muslim when she first got an identity card at age 17, to tell them that she no longer identifies with Islam, she feels would only hurt them. Moreover, surrendering her claim to Islam would be impractical. Indah explains her identity like this:

> I'm now in a God religion, where, yeah, that's the religion of God. Not Islam, not Christianity, not Buddhism, not Hinduism, just God's religion. It's just God and me. Yeah ... [I]f I don't choose [my official religion on my state ID], I will get difficulties. If I can choose by myself, I can write it down, I will choose God. Or just leave it blank. So what I can say about me is I'm a religious person, but I don't have any religion. But I'm religious.

Indah has already explained that the God she knows is not the God of the Bible or of the Qur'an. Her understanding of the kind of religion that is meaningful to her is that it is one that transcends sectarian and philosophical boundaries, thus "God's religion". Her relationship with God is personal, and it is shaped by both her awareness practice with Pak Wahyu and the silent meditation

combined with ancestor devotion that she practices with her *kejawen* community, the latter of which is undoubtedly also a deeply, perhaps largely unconscious, transgenerational influence on most Javanese people.

Speaking to the multiple influences on Indah's spirituality which leads her to claim the rather uniform "religion of God", Michael von Brück writes, "identity is a construct in multiple relationships which are to be interpreted in a host of multiple or plural parameters ... we cannot avoid facing reality as a pluriform and pluralistic field of references" (von Brück 2007: 182). And Greider writes, "the notion that religious purity is possible...makes it difficult for us to recognize how persons are themselves often religiously plural" (Greider 2010: 296). Not surprisingly, Indah's identity does not fit neatly in a box, although she checks one to ensure that law enforcement doesn't give her any trouble, as well as to avoid uncomfortable conversations with acquaintances. For many people, though, Indah's explanation that she is religious *and* that she doesn't have religion would not compute.

In the United States, terms like "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR) – or even the "nones" – attempt to corral these kinds of people into some "known" category, but such categorization is not likely to be terribly meaningful. Like Indah, I consider myself deeply religious though not identified with a particular religion. I prefer the term religious to spiritual in this sense, because the idea of someone being spiritual is something that I think is indisputable. As a spiritual caregiver, I recognize that the spiritual realm is inherent to all human beings. Being religious, however, is particular to *some* people and, as a term, it is imprecise in that it could refer either to those who focus on the interior or contemplative life or to those who are more concerned with the externals – the going to church, the doctrines, etc. Or, of course, to someone who appreciates both. Traditionally in the Western world, religion is more often associated with belief, and particularly belief in God, than it is with other aspects of religion such as practices, rituals, community, action/service, ethics, etc. However, this obviously limits what it means to be religious a great deal.

Buana is a little bit more comfortable with his Muslim identity than is Indah. Initially, it was difficult for him to accept that he could incorporate aspects of Buddhism or *kejawen* into his spiritual life. When he first started meditating, he had a hard time walking into the *vihara* because he thought it was *haram* (forbidden). Now he has resolved that for himself. In fact he feels like his awareness practice may be even more authentic prayer than the traditional *solat*.[6] Regarding his identity, Buana says,

> I'm not leaving Islamic faith, because I still have Islamic faith, but I'm not
> doing what I used to or what my teacher or my parents said to me ... I'm not

doing what most Muslims do, but I think I still have influence from Islamic ways. In that way, I think I haven't "left" Islam because I'm still [guided by] their values, their teachings. The difference is just that I'm not doing what they used to do ... [W]hat I'm doing, and what religion or what practice I like to choose, this is my personal things, and what my parents have to know is just that I become myself, I do what I want to do. It's not their right anymore to rule me. Yeah. About telling them? Mmm, if it's, I think, when it's time. When it's necessary I would tell them.

Buana expresses here what it means to be culturally or nominally Muslim, given that he accepts that being Muslim is just a fact for him. It's an important thread in his relationship to his parents. Buana has been shaped by Islam at home, in school, and by the larger society and though he may have a different interpretation of the teachings than that of others, he does not feel a need to abandon his identification as Muslim. However, the rituals – fasting during the month of Ramadan, *solat*, reading the Qur'an, do not hold as much meaning for him now as does meditation or exploring the *kejawen* tradition.

We can see in Buana what Goosen (2011) argues, that in instances of complex religious identity, "the main religion remains, so there is nothing that remotely resembles a movement which involves an abandonment of religion A to embrace religion B [typical conversion], or a movement from unbelief to belief ... There is a movement or development but it is more the use of religious symbols, insights and rituals from another tradition which are able to speak to us of the transcendent" (ibid.: 146). One of the more powerful comments that Buana made during our conversations was that this inner journey had really provided a confidence in his inner moral compass. He says:

I usually, after meditation, I usually ask my heart, my inside, that's what I have to trust because I cannot trust the teaching from others. Because, I don't know where they get those teachings from or if they're good for my way of life. I don't know. I only trust myself, my inside. That's when I disconnected from the teaching, the teaching in my past.

Wibisono who, early on in giving sermons that departed from traditional doctrine was disciplined by church leadership, says that his congregants have slowly come to understand the teachings he is trying to share. He knows not everyone will understand, but he has learned how to use the language of the church to convey the messages that he believes are crucial. He explains, ultimately that he is "beyond religion", saying:

[F]or me, belief system is not a big thing now ... Except that this is important tools to talk about, and because I have a congregation, to help people through these kind of concepts. But, personally, this is not a big deal. It's not

an important thing. [F]or the sake of ... you know, for practical reasons, I can express I am a Catholic. But, deeply, I am beyond Catholic. No religion, yeah.

As they describe their religious identity, we can see the intellectual influence of Krishnamurti (see Appendix) – also a key source for Pak Wahyu's teachings – on all three participants, a reliance on direct experience, and a redefining of what it means to be religious, as well as what the concept of God points to.

Discussion: what these voices reflect about complex religious identity

Often complex religious identity is spoken of in negative terms. Cornille writes of those who no longer accept every aspect of a religion as taking "a more piecemeal approach to doctrine, symbols, and practices governed by personal judgment and taste" (Cornille 2002: 3). The "cafeteria" or *bricolage* style which people associate with New Age, and the use of the word "piecemeal" and "personal taste" here specifically, are characteristic of the way that religious syncretism in general has been discussed in the academy. Goosen (2011: 14) contends that what keeps a religiously plural person from falling into this "unholy bricolage" is having a "sound religious base" or "sound understanding of at least one tradition". Although the participants chosen for this discussion do have a sound base in their respective traditions, nothing in their presentation suggests that this is a requirement for their authentic experience of being religious people. Cornille further argues "the experience of profound identification with one religion without losing one's attachment and commitment to another seems to be more often than not deeply confusing and spiritually unsettling" (Cornille 2002:4). My participants' narratives certainly challenge this perspective. They have approached the spiritual practices learned from both Buddhism and *kejawen* not as belief systems, but as ways of being. Any sense of conflict around their incorporation of different spiritual systems stems not from internal confusion, but from the external expectations of others: parents, bishops, teachers and the society at large. Like Buana, wondering if it was *haram* for him to meditate, Indah has struggled with questions along the way as to whether or not she was a "good Muslim". But by and large, the participants have resisted the norms imposed on them in conventional interpretations of their traditions – with varying results in terms of their willingness to identify with their respective birth religions.

The idea of being hybrid, as in Buddhist-Christian or Muslim American, whether hyphenated or not, points to something akin to being bilingual or

multiracial, where depending on the context one is in, one identity might be more predominant than the other. We see aspects of our identity becoming more salient when it is appropriate for them to be so, depending on whom we are with. Of course this assumes that, in the above examples, being Muslim and being American are somehow mutually exclusive, which is not a fair assumption at all. There is the related phenomenon of "code-switching" in which one fluidly alternates between one form of speaking (dialect, language) and another (Burke 2009: 70). This does not appear to be what is happening for my participants; they are not Catholic one day and Buddhist the next. They are not Muslim in some, and *kejawen* in other company. Their identities are more integrated than that. They have not converted, nor have they abandoned their religious frame of reference, (often referred to as like "clothing" by my participants, or by Wibisono as like "family", community). Instead, they have sought a more authentic expression of their identities through the exploration of the more universal aspects of the various religions and cultures influencing their spirituality.

Retsikas's (2012) ethnography of the people of Probolinggo, on the north coast of East Java, where people are often of mixed ancestry, offers another perspective on hybridity. Retsikas refers to the *diaphoron* person, whom he says, "is to be understood not as the site and source of a pre-given identity but as an unstable and shifting subject permeated by and constituted by means of difference" (ibid.: xxii). Retsikas further explains that:

> The idea of mixing refers to the collapse of "pure" and "original" categories of people...and asserts that their personhood is composite and plural rather than elemental and singular ... *To be a mixed person means to be of different kinds of people simultaneously, emphasizing the innovative and novel character of the persons involved* ... The self of mixed persons is both part of and yet different from the other to the extent that it consists of several others; it is marked by multiplicity, its presence is excessive. (Retsikas 2012: 40; author's italics)

This idea of simultaneity (as opposed to switching) does seem to be more representative of not only my participants' experience of their religious identities, but also of how many multiracial American individuals express their experience, e.g., "I am 100 per cent Korean *and* 100 per cent Black." Not half and half. Also, Retsikas's reference to the innovative and novel character of these people is refreshing when set aside the more frequently cited voices on religious multiplicity.

Spiritual care implications and conclusion

Although these findings are suggestive rather than conclusive, they do point to an experience of plurality in the individual, which is something that could be celebrated as opposed to maligned. As teachers, friends, caregivers, therapists and others in relationship with people who have complex religious identities, we can honour the different sources of wisdom that make these individuals who they are, and we can explore ways of connecting to their spirituality independent of doctrinal interpretations and scriptural references. We can accept individuals' right to self-identify religiously and spiritually speaking. Far more research needs to be done in order to understand exactly who are the "nones" and the "SBNRs" in America today. Although the Javanese experience is clearly unique, what it shares with the American context is that Islam, like Christianity here, is a predominant cultural force, even though we both live in an ostensibly secular nation and one that is obviously culturally and religiously diverse. Although Americans have more religious freedom than do Indonesians, since we do not have to state our religion on our identity cards, nor do we receive religious education in public school, we are still significantly shaped by the larger religio-cultural norms. Further, the idea of being something other than one of the conventionally accepted and clearly delineated religious traditions is no more acceptable in the US than it is in Java – although this expectation does not generally become explicit until we are in religious contexts. These similarities would suggest that the experience of complex religious identity may be more common than we realize here in America. Also, the experience of being culturally Christian, a phenomenon that has been explored qualitatively in Denmark from an atheist and sociological perspective (Zimmerman 2010), but has not been explored from a pastoral theological point of view, may be significant.

Insight into the phenomenon of complex religious identity and more generally the lived experience of religion will not be realized primarily through surveys or experimental means, but will be best explored through qualitative research. I hope to inspire others to conduct this research and to contribute to such scholarship myself for years to come. Hermeneutical inquiry appears to be an appropriate methodology to use in exploring the subject of complex religious identity from a spiritual care perspective as well:

> Hermeneutics suggests that the fusion of horizons is more like a posture, a style, a way of living, or a way of conducting oneself than it is a way of knowing. It involves the willingness to open oneself to the standpoint of another in such a way that we genuinely let the standpoint of another speak to us, and in

such a way that we are willing to be influenced by the perspective of another. (Thompson 1990: 246)

This is similar to the experience that a hospital chaplain might have in a spiritual care encounter – one in which ideally there is transformation on the part of the caregiver and perhaps, on that of the care receiver as well.

How did my participants transform the way that I understand the phenomenon of complex religious identity? In many ways but, perhaps most significantly, in the ease with which they have navigated their spiritual journeys, and the independence with which they have explored their authentic spiritual selves, I am inspired. These individuals have challenged the existing characterizations of complex religious identity, and demonstrate that terms like dual or multiple religious belonging may be insufficient in describing this experience. For one, belonging may not be at the heart of the identification with one tradition or another. In other words, one may not feel that she or he *belongs* to a community of believers, to a congregation or mosque, or to a shared set of doctrines. This is the reason that I prefer to use the term identity to describe this phenomenon.

Further, as the Greider reference used earlier highlights, the myth of religious (as in racial) purity belies the reality of plurality that exists not only within individuals, within communities and within religious traditions, but also the plurality of responses in which complex religious identity can emerge. An individual does not have to convert, become an apostate, or practice/worship/congregate in more than one tradition in order to fit the criteria for complex religious identity. People do not have to check one box, no box, two or more boxes – spiritual independence takes many different expressions and may not be able to be categorized so neatly. Goosen writes:

> Perhaps one hundred percent belonging to two religions is not possible because it is not possible to be fully acculturated into a new religious culture. This presumes one is only enculturated once in one's life, and that attempts at a second (religious) culture will always be less than one hundred percent. (Goosen 2011: 143)

Clearly this presumption does not fit the Javanese context, and it may in fact reflect the American context no more adeptly. The assumption that there is a chronological adoption of religious norms and values does not represent the experience of people who are raised in multireligious households, nor does it reflect the experience of people who are shaped simultaneously by cultural traditions that may have a spiritual aspect, and religious rituals or practices, which of course may derive from traditions that number greater

than two. Again, bilingual, bicultural and multiracial people and families provide an analogy for the kinds of experience that can produce individuals with complex religious identity.

These narratives begin to bring light to a phenomenon that while enlarged by the Javanese context is certainly not unique to people living in Java. Complex religious identity is a universal phenomenon, one made even more likely by the intersection of cultures brought on by colonization, globalization, immigration, and the subsequent plural environments in which many of the world's people now live. It is time that we take a more nuanced approach to this subject and privilege the religious voices of those who identify in less mainstream ways, and from all walks of life.

Appendix: Krishnamurti (1970) on religion

Sir, what is religion? Actually, what is religion? First of all to find out what is religion we must negate what it is not. What it is not; then it is. It's like seeing what is not love. Love is not hate, love is not jealousy, love is not ambition, love is not violence. When you negate all that, the other is, which is compassion. In the same way if you negate what is not religion then you find out what is true religion; that is, what is the truly religious mind. Belief is not religion, and the authority which the churches, the organized religions assume, is not religion. In that there is all the sense of obedience, conformity, acceptance, the hierarchical approach to life. The division between the Protestant, the Catholic, the Hindu, the Moslem, that's not religion. When you negate all that, which means you are no longer a Hindu, no longer a Catholic, no longer belonging to any sectarian outlook, then your mind questions, asks what is true religion? This is free from their ritual, without their masters, without their Saviour; all that is not religion. When the mind discards that, intelligently, because it has seen that it's not religion, then it can ask what is religion. Religion is not what I think, but religion is the sense of comprehension of the totality of existence, in which there is no division between you and me. Then if there is that quality of goodness which is virtue, real virtue not the phony virtue of society, but real virtue, then the mind can go beyond and find out, through meditation, through a deep, quiet silence, if there is such a thing as reality. Therefore a religious mind is a mind that is constantly aware, sensitive, attentive, so that it goes beyond itself into a dimension where there is no time at all.

About the author

Katherine C. Rand, PhD is an independent spiritual care scholar practitioner with a particular interest in reflective practice, narrative methods, and relational research. When pushed to label herself, Katherine will identify as religiously plural, spiritually fluid, or as having a complex religious identity. More specifically, she has been formed significantly within the Christian tradition – both culturally and academically – has humanistic and sceptical leanings, has engaged in a long practice and study of Buddhism and is an ordained Buddhist lay minister and trained healthcare chaplain. Katherine rejects the a/theist binary and hopes to assist those working in clinical, educational and congregational contexts to better understand and support individuals shaped by more than one religious tradition, including those who might be termed "spiritual-but-not-religious" and "nones". Through her work, she hopes to expand the boundaries of chaplaincy to include the moral and spiritual life of organizations and systems (while, of course, supporting the individuals within them), and to help heal structural wounds in the process.

Notes

1 The official religions are Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and the one not allowed under Suharto, Confucianism.
2 Religion is defined officially, by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as something that has a) sacred texts, b) a prophet, and c) is recognized the world over.
3 Today, there are communities throughout the Indonesian archipelago advocating for the right to identify themselves by their indigenous religion, without having to call it by another name.
4 This information was shared informally with the researcher by her Indonesian informants and confirmed by the US State Department in their International Religious Freedom Report (Department of State 2010).
5 I am referring to Wibisono's family culture and the religious tradition he was acculturated with as "given". However, it's important to note that Wibisono is a minority Catholic in a Muslim world, and he is also the child of parents who converted from the *kejawen* tradition and, despite their commitment to Catholicism, are likely still very much shaped by their inherited belief system. Therefore he is necessarily plural, although as a Jesuit priest his primary frame of reference may be Catholic.
6 Buana says, "After I understand that yeah, we can do *solat* everywhere, anywhere, what is most important thing is, do you really want to do that? Do you really need to do that? And what, uh, what motive [intention] you have in doing this. Is it the right motive or not? Yeah, that's what I have been learning in *vihara*, not in mosque. Something like that, and that's changed my view on how religion works. That's really changed me a lot".

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