

Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present, by M. C. Ricklefs, (Singapore: National University of Singapore [NUS] Press, 2012), xxi + 576 pp., ISBN: 978-9971-69-631-3, US\$38.00 / S\$45.00 (pb)

This hefty tome of more than five hundred pages is the third and longest volume in Merle Ricklefs's trilogy on the history of the Islamization of Java – the most populous island of the world's largest Muslim nation state: Indonesia. It completes a narrative which started with *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamisation from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries* (2006), followed by *Polarising Javanese Society: Islamic and Other Visions (c. 1830-1930)* (2007). It also continues an argument for understanding the Islamization of Java as an open-ended and ongoing process of religious transformation.

Organized in two parts, the first half of the book covers a period of almost sixty years from 1930 until the fall of President Soeharto in 1998, and the subsequent disappearance of his military-dominated regime which had controlled the country for more than thirty years. The second part tells in almost two hundred pages the story of developments since the turn of the century. The book's closing chapter constitutes a third part in which the significance of this Islamization process is assessed in the contexts of the generic field of the history of religions, the contemporary Muslim world, and in relation to an ethical-political agenda for the search of a better life.

Before moving to what Ricklefs calls the 'deeper Islamization' of Java in the course of the twentieth century, the book's opening chapter offers a summary of the two previous volumes. It explains the inherent tensions between making Java Islamic and contextualizing Islam into the Javanese setting through a process of 'mystic synthesis' that lasted for more than half a millennium. This is followed by a century of more forceful intrusions of Islamic ideas and practices which resulted in the polarization of Javanese society, not least because it coincided with increasingly invasive interventions by European colonial powers and Christian missionaries during the age of high imperialism. According to Ricklefs this period is characterized

by two competing forms of 'globalization and modernization: on the one hand, international Islamic purification movements and, on the other, European colonialism and its attendant baggage of scientific and technological advances' (p. 17). This penultimate timeframe is conveniently marked off by the start of the Java war in 1830 and the onset of the Great Depression after the stock market crash of 1929.

The Dutch East Indies government census of 1930 is used to sketch the demographic and social-political setting of the last one hundred years of Javanese Islamization and present some snapshots of Javanese cultural and religious life as it became 'polarised on the precipice' (p. 56) of the Second World War. Throughout the book, Ricklefs continues to draw extensively on statistical data in order to make sense of and accurately interpret the complex dynamics of Islamization amidst the cultural vibrancy of a populous and culturally diverse island like Java. He further unpacks themes which were introduced in the previous volumes, such as the continuing evolution of the 'mystic synthesis' and the increasing tension between practicing pious and 'nominal' Muslims, referred to in Indonesian as *santri* and *abangan* respectively.

In the next four chapters, the narrative of the Islamization of Java and Indonesia at large begins to converge and overlap as the colony of the Netherlands East Indies evolves into a federal and then a unitary nation state, bringing together a geographical expanse that encompasses more than sixteen thousand islands and hundreds of ethnic groups. Exploiting the more positive attitude of the Japanese occupiers during World War II towards political Islam, Muslim activists advocated the formation of an Islamic state. Arguing that this was the main unifying factor of Indonesia's multi-ethnic population, this assertiveness required some delicate negotiating and manoeuvring from both Muslim politicians, united in the Masyumi party (in effect an umbrella organization of a plethora of Islamic organizations spanning a spectrum from rural traditionalism to cosmopolitan urban Islamic reformism and modernism, but dominated by the modernist Muhammadiyah), and their political opponents – consisting of secular nationalists; a sizeable communist party; and – after a 1952 breakaway from Masyumi – a party of Islamic traditionalists, called *Nahdatul Ulama* (NU). After the proclamation of independence Masyumi failed not only in establishing an Islamic state, but did not even manage to secure a reference to Islamic law in the country's first constitution. Instead, the

secular nationalist and first president, Soekarno, introduced a so-called Doctrine of 'Five Principles,' the *Pancasila*, which only stipulated a mandatory belief in one God and reduced Islam into one of four officially recognized religious traditions (alongside Catholicism, Protestantism, and Hinduism-Buddhism).

The result was a further sharpening of divisions, leading to what Ricklefs refers to as 'Aliran politics' – the political fragmentation of Indonesian society into separate ideological 'silos' of nationalists, communists, socialists, and an Islamic bloc which was internally divided between Islamists, who continued to campaign for an Islamic state, and Muslim politicians who wished to further Islamize Indonesia through democratic means. Eventually, 'the first freedom experiment' (pp. 80 ff) collapsed as a result of communist opposition to Islamization and the disappointing performance of the Islamic parties in the first elections held in 1955. Failing to retain their preponderance in party politics, the Masyumi party was first sidelined as President Soekarno introduced his 'Guided Democracy' initiative and then effectively dissolved and banned from politics in the wake of a number of regional, Islam-inspired, rebellions and the fateful decision of a number of cornered Masyumi politicians to join a renegade secessionist government.

This chaotic situation with increasingly violent confrontations between rebels and the army, provided the excuse for a military coup in 1965, which led to an orgy of violence against alleged communists by both the regular armed forces and Islamic militias. This not only exacerbated the *santri-abangan* dichotomy, but also inaugurated a period of totalitarian rule by General Soeharto at the head of the so-called 'New Order' Regime. Ricklefs sketches how the general's own spiritual inclinations, which had more affinity with the religious orientation of the *abangan* than the *santri*, were now presented under new categories. Initially a term with recognizable Islamic connotations, *kebatinan*, was used to classify manifestations of Javanese spiritualism, but this was increasingly subsumed as part of a 'broader social category' referred to as *kejawen* or 'Javanism' – 'implying true Javanese identity' (p. 269). *Santri* Muslims felt not only squeezed by this new religious category, but also by other developments. In particular Muslim modernists associated with the still banned Masyumi party were also alarmed by large-scale

conversions to Christianity among the *abangan*, while the traditionalist NU experienced a reversal in its political fortunes. Having managed to retain a working relation with the Soekarno government during the 1950s and early 1960s, under New Order the NU was regarded as a competitor for the loyalty among Java's vast rural population. Consequently, the NU opted for a political role as the regime's opposition, whereas Islamic modernists deployed other strategies. One group of activists, gravitating around a select group of intellectuals and youth activists working through Muslim student unions, adopted an accommodationist attitude and developed a *modus vivendi* with the regime, whereas others – seeing the road to Islamic party politics blocked off – opted for grassroots level *da'wa* or religious propagation activities, coordinated by an 'Indonesian Islamic Mission Council' (Dewan Da'wa Islamiyah Indonesia, DDII) for which they had managed to obtain government approval.

Both strategies sorted such effect that – by the 1980s – the New Order Regime felt compelled to navigate between, on the one hand, a re-affirmation of the Pancasila as state doctrine, and, on the other hand, in exchange for their acceptance of Pancasila, overtures towards the Islamic bloc. It resulted not just in a rapprochement between the regime and NU, but also in increasingly overt manifestations of renewed Islamization efforts – not just condoned but often actively supported by the government. Thus emboldened, the DDII and other *da'wa* organizations became increasingly assertive and between the mid-1980s and late 1990s a vast array of Islamic NGOs entered the Indonesian public sphere. These concessions on the part of the regime proved too little too late because eventually Soeharto was no longer able to avert his own downfall in 1998.

As the Islamization process comes to its fruition, Ricklefs notes that in the second part of the book, the 'discussion will have only little to say about resistance to Islamisation per se. Rather, the conflicts that we will observe will be contending views of what a more Islamic Java – and, of course, a more Islamic Indonesia – should look like' (p. 256). Continuing his survey into what he calls the 'second freedom experiment' (pp. 261ff) of the post-Soeharto period, Ricklefs describes the sea-change set in motion by New Order's political attitude toward Islam not so much on the level of national governance, but by offering a richly textured narrative of grassroots level developments, paying attention to social, cultural, and artistic

developments, which he describes in minute detail. For this he draws on vast amounts of documentary evidence, interviews with many individuals of both national and of local significance, and observations accrued over many decades of very intensive and intimate scholarly and personal engagement. With that, the second part of the book presents a varied pallet of developments which can only be captured and brought together into engaging accounts by a scholar with such unparalleled erudition and experience, and which are impossible to do justice within the space of a brief book review. For those interested in a comprehensive insight into the religious experience of the Javanese as 'one of the largest ethnic groups in the Islamic world' (back cover), together with the two preceding volumes, this latest book by Merle Ricklefs offers the definitive account of a unique six-century Islamization process.

Carool Kersten

King's College London, London-UK

E-mail: carool.kersten@kcl.ac.uk