The study of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago has made considerable advances in recent years through the publication of major monographs in a number of different fields. Understanding of the historical relationships between pilgrimage, study, migration, and social change has been greatly advanced with the publication of Azyumardi Azra's revised dissertation covering the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and Michael Laffan's treatment of Southeast Asian Muslim students in Mecca and Cairo in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, respectively.¹ The changing dynamics of religious literature and ritual in Javanese history in particular have been illuminated in the recent work of M. C. Ricklefs.² Anna Gade has produced groundbreaking work on the cultivation of affective piety in her study of Qur'anic recitation praxis,³ while Robert Hefner and John Bowen have documented and critically analyzed political and legal developments.⁴

To this impressive array of scholarship, Stephen C. Headley's Durga's Mosque makes a valuable contribution by providing a thickly described study of "village Islam" in Central Java that reminds us in a compelling way that "there is more to Islam than the Jakarta-centered national level" (26). At the same time, it also stresses the importance of recognizing that "there is more to Javanese society than just Islam, and this 'more' despite being old is resilient" (429). This is an increasingly important point to be kept in mind by contemporary scholars confronting the issues raised by the recent and rapid "Islamization" of various sectors of Indonesian society.

Being neither a Javanist nor an anthropologist, my reactions to Headley's work are those of an outsider to both of his fields of specialization, albeit one who has studied Islam and Muslim societies both within and beyond Southeast Asia from other disciplinary perspectives. From the perspective of a historian of religion, this book has much to teach and can help in fostering a more sophisticated appreciation of the continuity and change of older patterns of practice among rural Muslim communities of Central Java.

Headley describes his project as an exploration of "how the configuration of values proposed by Islam becomes part of a Javanese hierarchy of values, based on inclusive

---

² M. C. Ricklefs, Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries (Norwalk, CT: EastBridge Press, forthcoming 2005).
social integration” (43). He focuses specifically on the historical development of Islamization in terms of changes in the conceptualization of the “worship community” and “spiritual geography” of a forest dedicated to the goddess Durga near Kaliasa on the banks of the Cemara River north of Surakarta.

This book is a monumental work of great richness in its presentation of an immense array of material ranging from cosmological conceptions and court ceremonial to domestic architecture and land tenure arrangements. In the process, Headley takes us through over five hundred pages of rural sociology; foundation myths; indigenous, Indic, and Islamic cosmologies; ritual praxis; the construction of lineages; and discussions of the cultural impacts of modernity in Central Java. At one point, Headley describes his work as a “documentary monograph.” In this sense, the book can be seen as a massive keystone set upon the arch of his already rich body of work on cosmology and prayer in Java.5

The book’s vivid historical, literary, and ethnographic content provide not only deeply textured visions of Javanese culture, but also insightful analyses into areas of broader theoretical interest, including cosmology, the construction of domestic space, formations of social hierarchy, and the practice of prayer. Its tremendous, site-specific richness makes for a treasure trove of data for specialists of Javanese culture and great gleanings for the comparativist. However, at times the sheer weight of material can feel overwhelming, particularly after reading through some of the frequent and lengthy quotations from previous scholarly works on Javanese culture.

Beyond the ethnographic particulars of his Central Javanese sacred grove, Headley also engages with the broader field of Javanese literature. In particular, he revisits earlier discussions of “pantheism” and “radical monism” in Javanese Muslim mystical texts6 within the context of his broader arguments about the nature of Islam in the “hybrid holistic society” of Java. In the textual history, however, there are a few source-critical issues that remain problematic, particularly in his chronological arrangement and dating of texts including Serat Siti Jenar, the “Admonitions of Seh Bari,” and the Babad Giyanti. Nevertheless, aside from some bibliographic details and a few editing lapses that remind the reader that earlier versions of various chapters were previously published as essays and articles, the tome as a whole is rather free of quibbles. This is a remarkable feat for a work of this size and scope. In fact, on the level of detail, these six hundred pages are exemplary in the way in which they present the fruit of long years of careful reading and sharp ethnographic observation.

The extensive material that Headley presents in this book is worked into an extended complex of arguments extending French anthropological conversations in the tradition of Louis Dumont on hybrid societies and “les hommes incompletes” by

---


6 Particularly palpable is the background of these discussions in P. J. Zoetmulder’s 1935 Leiden University dissertation, which has been translated from the Dutch by M. C. Ricklefs as Pantheism and Monism in Javanese Suluk Literature: Islamic and Indian Mysticism in an Indonesian Setting (Leiden:KITLV Press, 1995).
examining "the Javanese umma as a vector for the introduction of individualism" (xv). Through this approach, he addresses questions such as, "How was the Muslim community grafted onto pre-existing Javanese social morphology?" and "In what sense can Islam be said to have become a local community?" (25), as avenues along which to conceptualize implications of Islam's confrontation with individualism as "a modern conception of man's destiny" (7) that spread within contexts of colonialism.

These are vital issues on levels broader than the purely local and are thus of considerable interest to those studying Muslim societies around the world. However, the potential for such comparative reflections is considerably compromised by Headley's repeated reiterations of statements extolling Java's "exceptional" nature, which at several points he contrasts with rather stern imaginings of "Islam." His impressions of Java's "uniqueness" are reinforced in places through recurring comparisons of his own ethnographic field with "the Arabian peninsula" and "the caliphate." Unfortunately, his essentializing imagination of "parts of the Arabian peninsula where national frontiers are ideologically covered and bounded as if by the roof of one great mosque" (527) is not only factually inaccurate, but it also decreases the interpretive potential of the perspective gained through his deep familiarity with local practice in Java. Nowhere does Headley attempt to consider the possibility that other majority Muslim societies might be as complex as his particular field of specialization. However, broader ethnographic data since the day of Snouck Hurgronje has pointed to diverse examples of such an "inclusion of the heterodox" even within the sacred confines of Mecca.

Headley explains "the whole point of entitling this volume Durga's Mosque was to scrap the neat distinction between Javanese paganism and Islam" (515). However, he appears to maintain a rather narrow conception of "Islam" as a foil against which to rattle his presentation of the Central Javanese material. For example, in tracing "the morphologies of the Javanese Muslim community," he characterizes neither "the two-tiered system of individualism on the national level," nor the "pseudo-holism on the local level" as "genuinely Islamic" (42). In this he appears unable to part decisively with some rather mixed and problematic company.

Recurrent throughout the text are tropes from both contemporary Islamist and older Orientalist discourses such as, "Islam does not distinguish between the temporal and the spiritual," and "One can feel solitude in a Muslim crowd and fraternity in a pagan land." Even more disturbingly, Headley repeatedly reiterates essentialized distinctions between dar al-Islam and dar al-harb ("Abode of Islam" and "Abode of War," respectively) and invokes a "dhimmitude" (derived from al-dhimmi, a "protected, non-Muslim minority") model of managing diversity, a problematic concept in contemporary conversations about Islam and pluralism that has rather tenuous roots in the historical experience of Muslim Java. Headley then reads this as implying that in some way, "A Muslim is not always capable of respecting difference and alterity (believer: non-believer). The other people of the book, Jews and Christians, can be demonized. Since the umma does not transcend earthly cities but unifies them, the danger of ethnic and religious cleansing is ever present" (7). At least some readers might be led to wonder then to what extent this is a distinctively Muslim dilemma.

Headley makes it clear early on that "the objective of this book is to see how the configuration of values proposed by Islam becomes part of an earlier Javanese
hierarchy of values, based on inclusive social integration" (43). In his monumental study of Javanese cultural history across the long durée, Denys Lombard reflected on the role of the doctrinal influence of Islam's conceptions of space and linear time in the development of new conceptions of personhood. In *Durga's Mosque*, Headley approaches the issue by focusing on the notion of individualism in relation to formations of specific patterns of social bonds embedded in particular local practice. From this vantage point, he comes to view the formation of the “Javanese persona” as produced by the relationships into which they enter, which in turn can be seen as reflecting patterns of participation in a common cosmology.

Through an exploration of the cultural metaphors of the body and of domestic space, Headley attempts to assess “How individual is the Javanese concept of person?” (77) Weaving across diverse fields of cultural practice, he argues that—in Java—Islam’s appropriation of modernity has been most extensively engaged not with issues of “secularization,” but rather with its “accommodation to individualism” (53). Thus, near the end of the book, he finally acknowledges that all along his winding walk through the grove of the goddess Durga, the ghost of Durkheim lurks in the recesses as a proponent of what Headley considers an “untenable opposition of individual and society” (514). In confronting this demon, he emphatically argues that “human relationships are not extrinsic to the persons who create society, but that personal experience of ‘others’ constitutes society. Society is not beyond, but inside the persons animating it” (515).

It is in these sections that one can begin to assess the importance of this work beyond the merely documentary. For these more theoretical excursuses are the record of Headley’s attempts to answer such vital questions as why and when does the solidarity of the community of the faithful translate into a *jihad* against the infidel? There is now a great interest in and need for more detailed and nuanced presentations of diverse Muslim cultures, and the work of such an accomplished scholar of Java could have much to offer to a broad readership across disciplinary boundaries and geographic areas of expertise. Nevertheless, I wonder whether it would have been more productive to engage with questions less tightly bound to the restricted readerships of latter-day Javanists or anthropologists occupied with such a specific substream of theoretical conversations. Likewise, after working through the mass of material between its covers, thoughts arise as to whether or not it would have been more effectively presented in two books, one dealing with kinship, cosmology, land appanage, and the symbolism of the four “foetus siblings” (placenta, umbilical cord, amniotic fluid, and *vernix caseosa*) of traditional Javanese persons, and the other revisiting issues of Javanese pantheism and monism through an examination of prayer formulae and their accompanying ritual praxis.

*Durga's Mosque* is a demanding book, in ways mirroring the dangers of its primary site of inquiry. In the forest of Krendawahana one either becomes lost, or goes mad (310). This is dense and difficult terrain, through which perhaps younger and more limber guides than the sage Frenchmen invoked here might have offered more productive passage. Nevertheless, its many pages do contain indications of insights relevant to the broader concerns of those confronting the issues of modern societies.

---

undergoing an intensification of religious sensibilities and their accompanying politics of piety. This is particularly true of Headley’s sharp observations on the ways in which the New Order “privatized the public good for reasons of ‘security’ and making matters that belonged in the public sphere into purely individual concerns” (35). Such reflections hint at the work’s potential to inform conversations on contemporary developments considerably removed from the village-level contexts of Headley’s ethnography.