
REVIEW ESSAY

ISLAMIZATION AND THE CHANGING ETHICAL IMAGINATION IN JAVA

M. C. Ricklefs. *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: c. 1930 to the Present*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2012. 576 pp.

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Islamization—the process whereby knowledge and practice in a particular society or social domain are brought into closer alignment with what is regarded (but inevitably also contested) as a more normative profession of Islam—is a commonplace of religious life in modern Muslim societies. In the West African nation of Mali, the past century has brought a disparate assortment of native peoples, only 10 percent whom were Muslim in 1900, into a recognizably Sunni profession of the faith.¹ Once characterized by a variety of Islam as richly hybridic as that in late colonial Java, the densely populated landscape in what is today West Bengal and Bangladesh has also experienced powerful waves of Islamization over the past century, the cumulative effect of which has been to do away with the vividly untidy syncretisms for which Bengal, like Java, was once famous.²

Notwithstanding these and other comparative examples, the continuing Islamization of Javanese society ranks as among the most complex and politically consequential in the world. For one thing, as Merle Ricklefs reminds us in his superb new book, there are today some 100 million ethnic Javanese, 97 percent of whom are Muslim (p. 314). This demographic fact establishes the Javanese as one of the largest

¹ See Brian J. Peterson, *Islamization from Below: The Making of Muslim Communities in Rural French Sudan, 1880–1960* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2011); and Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power, and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001).

² See Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871–1906: A Quest for Identity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981); and Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

Muslim-majority ethnic groups in the world, and religious change among Javanese as of global significance. No less important, however, the deepening Islamization of the Javanese has had profound implications for Indonesian politics and society. Java is a region where, as all Indonesianists learn, the social divide between *santri* (Muslims oriented to a more normative and *fiqh*- [jurisprudence-] based profession of Islam) and *abangan* (Javanese who practice a non-standard, indigenously inflected Islam) once coincided with different political orientations, as well as profoundly different world-views, social organizations, and ethical subjectivities. Clifford Geertz's *The Religion of Java* and Robert Jay's *Religion and Politics in Rural Central Java* were the standard bearers in the literature on this division in Indonesia's early independence era.³ Herb Feith then showed how momentous this social division was for party politics.⁴ For many years, these authors' accounts were regarded as so definitive that many younger Indonesianists felt that research on religion in Java was old hat, and they would do best to extend their research gaze beyond Java to what we used to refer to as, in the most Java-centric of malapropisms, "the outer islands."

No more than in Mali, Bengal, Uzbekistan, or Turkey, however, Islamization did not come to an end in Java in the middle of the twentieth century, and by the 1980s accounts that had once seemed definitive were beginning to look dated. In that decade, anthropologists and others began to speak of a new wave of Islamization in Java, and of the spectacular decline of *abangan* rituals and subjectivities.⁵ Although some Indonesianists were at first skeptical, it soon became clear that, like much of the rest of the Muslim world, Java was in the throes of an historically unprecedented Islamic resurgence. What was still unclear at that point was just how far-reaching this new wave was to be.

In addition to these world-changing events, there were two shifts in academic circles that also contributed to the realization that it was time to revisit our models of Islamization in Java. The first was an influx of scholars from Islamic studies into discussions of Islam in Indonesia. As specialists familiar with the sciences of Islamic learning transmitted in Middle Eastern and South Asian madrasas, Islamic studies scholars helped to distinguish more clearly the "Javanese" and "local" from the putatively "universal" in Islam as practiced in Java. Specialists from Islamic studies also provided a finer sense of the forms and meanings of the *shari'a*, this at a time when calls for the implementation of *shari'a* were growing in most Muslim lands, including Indonesia.⁶

The second academic development altering the study of Islam in Java in the 1990s and 2000s was an influx of Muslim Indonesian scholars into the field. Although earlier,

³ Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1960); Robert Jay, *Religion and Politics in Rural Central Java* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Program in Southeast Asian Studies, 1963).

⁴ Herbert Feith, "Dynamics of Guided Democracy," in *Indonesia*, ed. Ruth T. McVey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Human Relations Area Files Press, 1963), pp. 309–409.

⁵ See Robert W. Hefner, "Islamizing Java? Religion and Politics in Rural East Java," *Journal of Asian Studies* 46,3 (August 1987): 533–54; and Bambang Pranowo, "Creating Islamic Tradition in Rural Java" (PhD dissertation, Monash University, 1991).

⁶ See, among many fine works, R. Michael Feener and Mark E. Cammack, eds., *Islamic Law in Contemporary Indonesia: Ideas and Institutions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); M. B. Hooker, *Indonesian Syariah: Defining a National School of Islamic Law* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008); and Tim Lindsey, *Islam, Law, and the State in Southeast Asia; Vol. I: Indonesia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012).

in the age of Geertz, Jay, Mortimer, and Feith, there had been Indonesian nationals who were also leading scholars of Indonesian Islam—Deliar Noer and Taufik Abdullah, among others⁷—by the 1990s and 2000s the number of Indonesians with world-class academic credentials had increased so significantly that they became, not merely fellow-travelers, but pioneers of new approaches to the study of Indonesian Islam. In addition to bringing national voices into Indonesian scholarship, the Indonesians' arrival was also serendipitous because it happened to coincide with what was proving to be a turbulent time for Muslims in Indonesia.

For reasons having to do with changes in the world as well as changes in the professional classes that study that world, then, by the mid-2000s the time seemed right for a rethinking of Islam and Islamization in Java. Widely regarded as the pre-eminent historian of Indonesia and Java, Merle Ricklefs set out in the 2000s to offer just such a revisionist account. At first sight, Ricklefs might have seemed an unexpected candidate for this task. His early monographs from the 1970s were most famous for their fastidious combing of primary sources from the Javanese courts and Dutch colonial archives, and for the way in which they greatly sharpened our sense of court culture, politics, and the transition to Dutch rule. However, these works only intermittently focused their gaze on Islam in Java. Yet, with each new edition of his *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200*, readers were treated to a more comprehensive discussion of Muslims and Islam in Indonesian history. Even more striking, Ricklefs's new translation (released in 1995) of P. J. Zoetmulder's classic work, *Pantheism and Monism in Javanese Suluk Literature*,⁸ made clear that by the 1990s Ricklefs had turned his attention to the varieties and history of Islam in Indonesia.

Notwithstanding these precedents, few Indonesianists could have anticipated what was to come next in Ricklefs's scholarly career. In quick succession, between 2006 and 2012, he released three books that aimed to provide nothing less than a new framework for our understanding of the history of Islamization in Java from the fourteenth century to today. In addition to incorporating new research materials made available over the previous thirty years, Ricklefs sought to challenge what many Indonesianists once regarded as the most enduring cleavage in Javanese society—that posing indigenized *abangan* against normative-minded *santri*. The division, Ricklefs's first two volumes showed, was not rooted in a distant and unknowable past but was a creation of the late colonial era. Even more startling, in the third volume Ricklefs argues that both this division and many of the most distinctive features of the arts, ritual, and social etiquette in Java are unlikely to survive the new waves of Islamization and modernization sweeping across Indonesia since the late 1960s. In one sense—and I say this with no intent at exaggeration, albeit with a bluntness with which Ricklefs might disagree—this third volume can be read as a testimony to the end of Javanese culture as most Indonesianists have known it.

This, then, is the intellectual background to Ricklefs's new and, with its 576 pages, weightiest volume yet in his opus on “the history of the Islamisation of the Javanese

⁷ See, for example, Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra (1927–1933)* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1971); and Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia, 1900–1942* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1973).

⁸ P. J. Zoetmulder, *Pantheism and Monism in Javanese Suluk Literature: Islamic and Indian Mysticism in an Indonesian Setting*, ed. and trans. M. C. Ricklefs (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1995).

people" (p. xvii). The first volume, *Mystic Synthesis in Java*, outlined the history of Islamization in Java from the fourteenth to the early nineteenth century. Alongside a wealth of discussions of Javanese historiography, court culture, the arts, and the circumstances leading to colonial rule, Ricklefs's achievement in this first book was to demonstrate that the opposition between *abangan* and *santri*—long "taken to be something 'primordial,' a social cleft of deep sociohistorical origin and enduring significance"—is, in fact, "historically contingent and ... of no great antiquity,"⁹ having arisen in the mid-nineteenth century. Although this first volume shows that early Javanese engagements with Islam were marked by zig-zag contestation, it also demonstrates that by the end of the eighteenth century, "after some four and a half centuries of complicated and often violent history, the people who spoke the Javanese language appear to have come to see themselves as more genuinely a single group, the Javanese, and a group whose core religious identity was defined by Islam."¹⁰

Even more important for the comparative study of Islamization, however, the "Islam" on which the newly reimagined Javanese people agreed was a thoroughly Javanized variety, which Ricklefs refers to, appropriately enough, as the "Mystic Synthesis." In highlighting this point, Ricklefs resists the anachronistic tendency seen among some contemporary Indonesianists to identify "Islam" in terms of a modern reformist standard. As in other parts of the Muslim world, what was culturally construed as "Islam" in Java was far from stabilized for most of Javanese history. No scholar has more exhaustively demonstrated the historically contingent, socially constructed, and politically fissiparous nature of Islam in Java than Ricklefs.

First formulated during the reign of Sultan Agung (r. 1613–46), but only firmly established as "the core religious element of Javanese identity" at the end of the eighteenth century,¹¹ the Mystic Synthesis, Ricklefs argues, had three distinctive components. The first was the conviction that—notwithstanding "small pockets of population where pre-Islamic faiths were still adhered to"¹²—to be Javanese was to be Muslim. The second was agreement on the importance of observation of the five pillars of Islamic ritual, i.e., the confession of the faith, the five daily prayers, the giving of *zakat* alms, fasting during Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca for those able to do so.¹³ The third and most distinctive of the Mystic Synthesis' components was, "despite the potential contradiction with the first two [components], acceptance of the reality of local Javanese spiritual forces such as Ratu Kidul (the Goddess of the Southern Ocean), Sunan Lawu (the spirit of Mount Lawu, essentially a wind-god), and a host of lesser supernatural beings."¹⁴

Some readers of the first volume have expressed reservations about the generalizability of the second of these three components. They have pointed out that, in popular society if not the Javanese courts, observance and even familiarity with such

⁹ M. C. Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Norwalk, CT: East Bridge, 2006), p. 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

¹² M. C. Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society: Islamic and Other Visions (c. 1830–1930)* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2007), p. 6.

¹³ Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java*, p. 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

normative duties as daily prayer, the payment of *zakat*, and Ramadan fasting may not have been as widespread at the end of the eighteenth century as Ricklefs suggests. Although scholars will continue to quibble over the precise degree of Islamic observance in popular society, Ricklefs's more general point is convincing and important, namely, that Javanese Islam at the end of the eighteenth century was premised on the coexistence of a taken-for-granted Islamic identity and widespread belief in spirits and deities that reformist Muslims would later come to regard as thoroughly un-Islamic.

The second volume in Ricklefs's trilogy, *Polarising Javanese Society*, picks up where the first volume leaves off, but highlights a rupture in the dialectic of Islamization and Javanization. No sooner had Java's Mystic Synthesis been "embraced by commoners as well as the elite" than forces were unleashed that brought about "the shattering of this unifying religious identity"¹⁵ and, in at least a few areas of Java, the deceleration of the Islamization process itself. With Dutch rule and the establishment of a new colonial regime, the hegemonizing influence of Java's courts declined. The implementation of the Dutch Cultivation System (*cultuurstelsel*) brought a new Javanese middle class into existence, "for there were many tasks that were needed but which were not government monopolies."¹⁶ For the first time in Javanese history, too, there was a small but notable conversion of Javanese to Christianity, under the influence of lay Christians of Indo-European ancestry competent in the Javanese language and comfortable with Javanese customs. After 1850, the number of Javanese making the pilgrimage to Mecca grew steadily, until by the final years of the nineteenth century Javanese were among the largest ethnic groups in pilgrim-season Mecca. Returning pilgrims, as well as piety-minded people in general, began to promote ideas of Islamic reform that rejected the Mystic Synthesis, on grounds that it was heterodox. The spread of Sufi brotherhoods (*tarekats*), and the gradual establishment of a network of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantrens*), also contributed to the rise of Islamic reform. Although some *tarekats* and boarding schools promoted antinomian ideals consistent with the Mystic Synthesis, the more powerful *tarekats* (especially the Naqshabandiyya and the Qadiriyya wa Naqshabandiyya) and many *pesantrens* counseled a more faithful adherence to Islam's five pillars and *shari'a* law.

Notwithstanding the growing ascendance of Islamic reform, Ricklefs shows, many among the Javanese continued to subscribe to Mystic Synthesis Islam. But the taken-for-granted status of this Javanized Islam was now and forever a thing of the past. As Muslim reformists intensified their attacks on the Mystic Synthesis, some among Java's aristocratic literati asked openly whether conversion to Islam had not been a civilizational mistake. Although Ricklefs does not cite this particular fact, one could add that it was also during this time that a new folk tale and ritual cult dealing with the Javanese culture hero, Ajisaka, swept across eastern and east-central Java, calling for the "followers of Muhammad" to respect the "followers of Ajisaka."¹⁷ The rise of Islamic reform had put even Ajisaka's populist followers on the cultural defensive.

¹⁵ Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society*, p. 11.

¹⁶ Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents*, p. 12.

¹⁷ See Robert W. Hefner, *Hindu Javanese: Tengger Tradition and Islam* (Princeton, NJ, and London: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 126–41.

Taking strong exception to Clifford Geertz's characterization of the *abangan*–*santri* division as having originated in time immemorial, then, Ricklefs shows that it was the agonistic contests of the later colonial period that made the division between *abangan* and *santri* culturally and politically salient. With the rise of mass-based religious and social organizations like the Muhammadiyah and Sarekat Islam in the first decades of the twentieth century, this nineteenth-century division was also to inform and inflame twentieth-century struggles over Javanese identity and Indonesian nationalism.

It is at this point—the waning years of Dutch colonialism and on the eve of the Japanese occupation—that this new book, volume three in the trilogy, begins its narrative. As Ricklefs explains in the appendix to the new book, this volume differs from the first two in relying on interviews and fieldwork-based case studies as well as primary and secondary source materials. In 2003, when Ricklefs began the research for this volume, he had chosen Surakarta and Kediri as sites for his case studies. However, in 2006, shortly after joining the history department at the National University of Singapore, he added two more sites, Yogyakarta and Surabaya. The local histories, newspaper clippings, and interviews (including with such radical luminaries as Abu Bakar Ba'asyir of Jemaah Islamiyah fame) add to the book's narrative vividness and analytic richness.

Islamisation and its Opponents in Java is divided into three sections. Part 1, "The Troubled Path to Deeper Islamisation, to c. 1998," consists of six chapters; Part 2, "Coming to Fruition, c. 1998 to the Present," comprises seven; and Part 3, "The Significance," is a single concluding chapter of forty pages. The last chapter does something not seen in the first two volumes: it aims to place the case of the Islamization of the Javanese in a broader academic context, in relation to both the study of Islam and to rival models of human flourishing in Western and Islamic ethical philosophy.

Covering as they do a period (1930–98) discussed in many other works on Islam in Indonesia, the chapters in Part 1 at first blush seem the more familiar. Chapter 1 reviews the arguments of the first two volumes in Ricklefs's series, doing so in such a manner as to ensure that readers unfamiliar with the first books can read this book on its own. Chapter 2 traces the intensifying competition between *abangan* and *santri* in Javanese society during the 1930s. Chapter 3 projects the argument forward into the Japanese occupation and the war of independence, with its, for the first time, bitter outbreaks of violence between *santri* and *abangan* in settings like 1948 Madiun. Chapter 4, "The First Freedom Experiment," looks at the intensifying competition of the parliamentary and Guided Democracy periods (1950–66). It examines the role of the Communist Party in opposing Java's Islamization, and follows the Muslim–Communist competition to its climax in the mass killings of 1965–66. Chapter 5, "The Totalitarian Experiment (I)," looks at the consequences of New Order policies for Christians, *kebatinan* mystics, and *aliran* politics in the period from 1966 to the early 1980s. This chapter shows how the repressive controls of the New Order period at first provided an impetus for mass conversion to Christianity (and to a lesser degree, Hinduism), but eventually ushered in the decline of *abangan* Islam, as well as the end of the *aliran* politics to which it was linked.

Part 1 also introduces the reader for the first time to radical Islamism, by way of a detailed and intriguing case study, based on Ricklefs's interviews and field research on

grassroots “purification movements” in Surakarta. In just ten pages the author introduces readers to Abu Bakar Ba’asyir as well as two other movement leaders, providing the kind of intimate portrait so often lacking in analyses of radical Islamists. In these pages, too, Ricklefs touches on ethico-political themes developed in greater detail in Part 3, his conclusion. He describes Suharto’s New Order as an example of an attempted totalitarianism premised on what the British liberal philosopher Karl Popper has referred to as “holistic or utopian social engineering” (p. 200). He also notes that New Order historiography exemplifies what Hannah Arendt has called “the monstrous forgeries in historiography of which all totalitarian regimes are guilty” (p. 201). The primary heirs to this totalitarian legacy, Ricklefs will later argue, are the radical Islamists of the post-Suharto era.

The last chapter in section 1, Chapter 6, “The Totalitarian Experiment (II),” decenters its gaze away from the state toward Muslim society. The discussion begins with more-or-less familiar accounts of regime efforts to impose ideological conformity, in turn exploring their implications for Muslim groupings like the *Nahdlatul Ulama*. The chapter ends with a discussion of the late Suharto regime’s embrace of Islamism and radical Muslim movements.

Although Part 1’s overview of the decades from 1930 to 1998 covers ground surveyed in other works on Islam and Muslim politics in modern Indonesia, the range of Ricklefs’s discussion is far more comprehensive than in any previous work, and the breadth of insight impressive. Notwithstanding occasional references to scholars of comparative Islam, like Olivier Roy or Gilles Kepel, Ricklefs does not aim to develop a theoretical model of Islamization, or engage the diverse literatures on religion, radicalism, or post-secularity and late modernity. His method is instead that of a meticulously empirical historian of Java and Indonesia, patiently gathering evidence from disparate sources to make his narrative case. The key analytic distinction around which he organizes his data centers on a comparison of the educational, social-welfare, and political institutions developed by the two major protagonists in the first half of his story, the *abangan* and *santri* communities.

Along the way in the book’s Parts 1 and 2, however, Ricklefs also treats the reader to a series of detailed digressions on topics that a more conventional analyst of politics and religion would have overlooked, but which enhance the reader’s sense of the scale of change taking place in Java. Painted alongside the book’s broader canvas, these miniatures include (to take but a few examples from Part 1) discussions of women, polygyny rates, and gender disparities in literacy and employment in the 1930s (pp. 23–25); the views of the modernist Minangkabau intellectual, Hamka, on Sufism (pp. 52–54); the impact of religious and political change on Java’s once-rich (but now fast-declining) popular arts (pp. 32–43); the nature of the *abangan-santri* conflicts that preceded the awful Madiun violence in 1948 (pp. 71–79); and careful, if still tentative, estimates of the percentage of the Javanese population that was *abangan* as opposed to *santri* Javanese in the mid-1950s (pp. 84–85).

The evidence that Ricklefs accumulates is staggering in detail yet engaging in its presentation. The body of data allows him to demonstrate that up through the calamitous violence of 1965–66, the *abangan* community developed social and political institutions (not least of all through the Communist and Nationalist Parties) that enabled it not only to challenge proponents of a deeper Islamization, but actually

contain or reverse the progress of Islamization in some regions. However, the collapse of the Communist Party, and the New Order's turn to religion as an instrument of societal control, ultimately played to the advantage of the forces of Islamization. This would spell the end of *aliran* politics—but also usher in an era of heightened contestation among Muslims themselves as to which variety of Islam was to prevail in Indonesia's now-Islamized public sphere.

The seven chapters that make up the book's Part 2 continue with the narrative dialectic between broad-scope social changes and fine-stroke miniatures. Chapter 7 looks at the *santri*–*abangan* balance in the aftermath of Suharto's overthrow and with the inauguration of what Ricklefs refers to as "the second freedom experiment." In striking contrast to religious politics under Suharto, "it became less a case of the political regime setting the religious agenda than the reverse; religious dynamics shaping the political regime" (pp. 259–60). Although a naïve analyst might have speculated that the decline in state power would enhance that of "civil society," Ricklefs argues the outcome was less sanguine. "By the time of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono ..., a much weakened presidency was reluctant to wield state authority against even the more thuggish forms of religious activism" (p. 260). Chapter 8, "An Islamising Society," traces the growing prominence of Islamic actors and symbolism in public life, again emphasizing that the growth in popular religiosity often played to the advantage of religious conservatives and radicals. Fatwas issued by the Council of Indonesian Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI) condemning the US invasion of Afghanistan created a space for radical militants to mobilize. Taking exception to those political scientists who would describe the PKB (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa, National Awakening Party), PAN (Partai Amanat Nasional, or National Mandate Party), and even Golkar (Golongan Karya, Functionalist Party) as "secular," Ricklefs argues that "religious positioning and politicking was so ubiquitous that *santris* could comfortably choose from across the political spectrum" (p. 279).

A far more serious issue for those concerned with questions of religious freedom arose: both the national and local governments came to see the promotion of Islamic piety as "a proper task of government"; even the police in cities like Surakarta were required by their superiors to learn to recite the Quran; women officers in Surabaya were asked to don the headscarf (p. 281). Seen from this angle, the fact that, as Robin Bush has so convincingly shown,¹⁸ only a minority among local governments adopted regional ordinances inflected by *shari'a* ideals does not detract from the fact that the illiberal idea that government should promote piety and religious values was more pervasive than ever. In April 2010, the Constitutional Court upheld the country's much-abused blasphemy law, thereby confirming "the constitutionality of the state's integration with religiosity" (p. 287).

Chapter 9 pursues this last theme further, examining the efforts of national organizations like the Indonesian Council of Ulama to enforce conformity of religious belief and action through such initiatives as the campaign against the Ahmadiyya and other alleged deviationists. Citing MUI fatwas as if they had the force of national law, the police joined in the crackdown on "deviationists sects," rounding up sect members

¹⁸ Robin Bush, "Regional Sharia Regulations in Indonesia: Anomaly or Symptom?" in *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*, ed. Greg Fealy and Sally White (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), pp. 174–91.

and, as in Yogyakarta in 2007, pressuring them to stage public acts of repentance (p. 333).

Chapter 10 highlights the plight of the Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama in the post-Suharto era, noting that the rise of relatively smaller, more conservative Islamic groupings has placed both of these large and long-established movements on the defensive. The chapter also provides a concise analysis of the rise and relative marginalization of young liberals within and around each organization, including the Liberal Islam Network (Jaringan Islam Liberal) and the Muhammadiyah Young Intellectuals Movement (Jaringan Intelektual Muda Muhammadiyah). Conservative groupings within and outside NU and Muhammadiyah mounted successful campaigns against the young liberals. No less significant, more puritanical and Islamist groupings like the Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, PKS) and the Liberation Party (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, HTI) have attempted to infiltrate NU and Muhammadiyah, sparking bitter (but as yet, not entirely effective) counterattacks by the mainstream organizations' leadership.

Chapter 11 adopts a different approach to the process of Islamization, exploring "older cultural styles on the defensive" (p. 371). Ricklefs discusses the changing relationship of the Yogyakarta court to mystic synthesis Islam, which he notes "was by now a minority phenomenon" (p. 372). Shortly after his investiture in 1988, Sultan Hamengkubuwana X became the first king in the history of the Javanese monarchy to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca. Notwithstanding the clear evidence of the sultan's piety, the court continues to carry out traditional rituals, including the ritual bathing of royal heirlooms (*pusakas*) and the presentation of offerings to the spirits of Mounts Lawu and Merapi, as well as the goddess of the southern sea. Ricklefs points out that after 2002 the Muslim mayor of Kediri took to sponsoring an annual "throwing of offerings" into the Brantas River, while after 2005 the regency government took to presenting offerings on the slopes of Mt. Kelud. Islamists in groups like the HTI and the Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, PKS) objected to these invented traditions, but "the need for symbols of local identity and tourism were evidently overriding considerations for the local governments promoting them" (p. 379).

Meanwhile, *kebatinan* mystical groups have "been on the defensive for over forty years" (p. 387). Notwithstanding their habit of steering clear of politics, mystical groups have increasingly been the targets of attacks "by religious zealots on a charge of deviancy" (p. 388). As to the popular Javanese arts long regarded as sources of spiritual power in their own right, "it does seem that they have declined in frequency and popularity," notwithstanding the efforts of some of their proponents to adopt a more Islamic mien. The arts have fared better "where local authorities support them for the purposes of tourism or reinforcing a sense of local identity" (p. 392). Ricklefs quickly adds that the spectacular decline of the traditional arts is not solely the result of the growing tide of Islamization. It also reflects, "modernization generally, the availability of other forms of entertainment, education that has led to general decline in knowledge or sympathy regarding older views of spiritual powers, and declining command of the Javanese language" (pp. 406–7).

Chapter 12 is likely to be among the most avidly read of all the sections in Part 2. It examines the rise of the "new totalitarians"—small Islamist and "dakwaahist" (proselytizing) movements like the Jemaah Islamiyah and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia. In

describing these groups as “totalitarian,” Ricklefs explains that their “overall objective is to shut out voices, lifestyles, and ideas other than their own, to close the public space to them, and to prevent them winning a wider adherence,” often through the use of intimidating techniques that stop just short of terrorist violence (p. 408). Ricklefs acknowledges that some groups that are extreme in ideology—he includes the PKS in this group—are not so in practice. However, others, like the various groupings with which Abu Bakar Ba’asyir has been involved, have acted in a way consistent with their totalizing aims. As with their counterparts in other parts of the Muslim world, the radical groups have a tendency to “change, overlap, fuse into umbrella organizations for particular actions and then split again” (p. 423). However, at least since the end of the Suharto era, they have succeeded in making themselves a more or less “constant presence,” one marked by their determination to make “society ... conform to their picture of a more moral and more perfectly Islamic society” (p. 423).

No issue provokes the ire of these movements more than conversion from Islam to Christianity. Ricklefs sees an irony in this antipathy: the intensity and extremism of anti-Christian and anti-“deviationist” mobilization appears in some regions to have pushed larger numbers of nominal Muslims into Christian ranks (p. 440). As to the future of the Islamists and radical Dakwahist movements, Ricklefs sees little evidence to predict their imminent decline. The militants recruit from the ranks of the brightest and most active segments of the Muslim community, and they are “likely to play crucial leadership roles in Indonesia’s future. They are the ones seeking major change, and it is people who seek change who by definition hold the initiative” (p. 445). Moreover, he implies, the activists “operate in an environment in which Islam permeates Javanese life” (p. 445). If one asks, then, “Who now are the opponents” of a deeper and more conservative Islamization of Javanese society? then the answer, Ricklefs suggests, is “hardly anyone” (p. 445).

This last theme is central to the book’s final substantive chapter (13), “The Remaining Opposition.” There is now “no significant opposition to the deeper Islamisation of Javanese society” Ricklefs observes (p. 446). Rather than involving secularist opponents as in the 1950s and early 1960s, “the main form of resistance now concerns how religion should affect public life.” This opposition-from-within-Muslim-ranks comes most commonly from various liberal Muslims who oppose “that very thing Islamists want: an Islamized government and public space” (p. 446). But in the face of the past generation’s groundswell of Islamization, the liberals’ “arguments have remained at an intellectual level rather detached from the social and political realities surrounding them” (p. 447). Some activist opponents of Islamist varieties of Islam have sought to revive a multiconfessional understanding of the Pancasila so as constrain if not eliminate state meddling in religious affairs. But in its ruling upholding Indonesia’s blasphemy law in April 2010, the Constitutional Court dealt these pluralists a blow, affirming that it was a legitimate responsibility of the state to “upgrade piety and noble character” (p. 448). For the time being, then, the dream of state restraint and confessional equality remains a distant one.¹⁹

¹⁹ For a thoughtful analysis of the prospects for reforming the blasphemy/defamation law, see Zainal Abidin Bagir, “Defamation of Religion Law in Post-*Reformasi* Indonesia: Is Revision Possible?” *Australian Journal of Asian Law* 13,2 (2013): 1–16.

Chapter 14 is the book's concluding chapter; it is also the most theoretically ambitious. Ricklefs places the case of the Islamization of the Javanese in three academic contexts: the history of religions, religious change in the contemporary Islamic world, and Java's Islamization in relation to alternate political-philosophical models of human flourishing. With regard to the history of religions, Ricklefs draws on the work of the historian of English religion, Keith Thomas,²⁰ to argue that the "Javanese story mirrors a more universal change in what religion means in personal and social life," in that it has been broadly defined by "the transition from religion as principally a marker of identity, an assertion and enactment of cultural belonging, to religion as a matter more to do with personal faith and internalized piety" (p. 462). In both seventeenth-century England and today's Java, the modern era ushered in purification movements that brought "increased attention to what people believed in their heart of hearts" (p. 463). Readers of a Weberian or Foucaudian orientation might speculate that this heightened emphasis on ethical subjectivity and individual self-discipline has something to do with, not just different species of religiosity, but broader changes in the organization of society, politics, and capitalism.²¹ In keeping with the theoretical restraint that marks most of his scholarship, however, Ricklefs eschews such flights of theoretical speculation.

What makes the modern pattern of Javanese religiosity particularly distinctive, Ricklefs suggests, is that from 1830–1966, "no political authority exercised control over Javanese Islam" (p. 464). It was only with Suharto's New Order regime that "a government made credible attempts to control religious life," but it did so as part of a "totalitarian experiment" that sought to "control both the actions and the thoughts of the people" (p. 464). Although "inefficiency, incompetence, and corruption limited the government's capacity to implement its totalitarian aspirations" (p. 464), Islamists eventually found the regime's integration of state and religion "quite congenial" (p. 465). They sensed that "a government directing Islam set a promising precedent for Islam directing a government" (p. 465).

Ricklefs also suggests that the Javanese example has lessons to offer on the broader Muslim world. Ricklefs takes note of Olivier Roy's declarations on the "failure of political Islam."²² But Ricklefs goes on to point out (correctly, I feel) that, in Java and Indonesia, Islamists may have failed to come to power, but they have nonetheless succeeded in having "dramatically increased the influence of Islamically derived ideas and standards on Javanese society, culture, and religion," as well as on its politics (p. 469). The Suharto regime sought to create a totalitarian state but ended by facilitating heightened Islamist influence (p. 473). Abdurrahman Wahid momentarily severed the tie between Islamists and the presidency, but he was "very ill, inexperienced, incautious, and over-confident" (p. 474). His liberalizing efforts, then, proved short-lived. Ricklefs reserves his harshest judgment, however, for the administration of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Under Yudhoyono's leadership, "The national

²⁰ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

²¹ As argued, for example, in Daromir Rudnycky's important *Spiritual Economies: Islam, Globalization, and the Afterlife of Development* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2010).

²² Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, trans. Carol Volk (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

state effectively opened its doors to conservative and even violent forms of Islam" (p. 474). Even ill-conceived fatwas from the Council of Indonesian Ulama have been "treated as if they have the force of legislation" (p. 474). This has allowed the integration of religion and state begun under Suharto to assume an even more starkly intolerant face.

Islamization's advance, Ricklefs notes, does not mean that there is any agreement on a "single, coherent ideology called 'Islam'" (p. 476). On the contrary, as elsewhere in the Muslim world, Islamization has been accompanied by bitter ethical disputes and sectarian fragmentation. But in all this, conservative Islamists like Abu Bakar Ba'asyir have one advantage in the competition for authority and followers: they offer "simplicity and certainty" rather than the "serious intellectual demands" made by traditionalist or modernist scholars (p. 477). Agreeing with the British author Salman Rushdie, Ricklefs notes that in times of perennial and far-reaching social change, "certainty and simplicity ... may have an advantage over more subtle and complex forms of faith" (p. 478). Indeed, Ricklefs argues, in one of his stronger secularist statements, "there may be only two circumstances in which 'moderation' is a natural position for believers to adopt" (p. 479). These are "when doubt arises" about some aspect of religion or some strategy for implementing its ethical imperatives, or when "one's social and political agenda is Liberalism, with its search for greater individual freedom in religious and other matters, for this leads inevitably to the view that religious belief is a private, individual matter" (p. 479).

This last observation segues to Ricklefs's concluding remarks, ones that are likely to generate the most heat in readers' commentaries on this important book. The discussion at this point centers on the conditions conducive to human social and ethical flourishing. "Socio-political thought in all places and traditions has been remarkably consistent in identifying tyranny as the principal barrier to a better life" (p. 480). However, Ricklefs argues, human efforts to restrain or eliminate tyranny have consistently come down to a choice between two public ethical alternatives—only one of which has any chance of being effective. The first way of combating tyranny centers on the search for justice, a justice that is often grounded in some sort of divine imperative. This is the recipe for human flourishing, Ricklefs observes, that Plato first enunciated. It is also an approach with which both the Javanese and Islamic concepts of justice are in broad agreement. The model rests on a pessimistic view of human society that assumes humans are prone to doing evil, and that freedom can only lead to licentiousness and chaos. The solution to the challenge of tyranny, then, is high-minded government, led by a ruler who seeks to promote justice rather than freedom. But this only compounds the problem, according to Ricklefs. However well-intended the ruler's motives, he inevitably creates the conditions for curtailing freedom and reintroducing tyranny.

Ricklefs argues that the second solution to the problem of tyranny, a solution based on the promotion of individual freedom, is less prone to this totalitarian drift. Unfortunately, however, approaches that foreground freedom also have much less of a presence in Islamic and Javanese tradition. "When we turn to the concept of freedom as the antidote to tyranny," Ricklefs notes, the first thing we realize is that the formula "does not have strong roots in Islamic or Javanese traditions, but rather is more associated with modern Western thought" (p. 481). At first sight, Indonesian concepts

of *kemerdekaan* (independence) and *kebebasan* (freedom) might seem to provide robust local rationales for freedom. But, in fact, they have more to do with freedom from an overlord than they do “the concept of individual freedoms that Liberals seek” (p. 482). Liberal affirmations of freedom are grounded on an optimistic view of individual humans, seeing them as more inclined to do good than to do harm. “[I]f individuals are allowed personal freedoms, then they will accept personal responsibility for their actions and show respect for others” (p. 482). This same school of thought “rejects utopian ideas of perfection,” and as such rejects any demand for absolute freedom in favor of agreed limitations and a balance of freedoms (p. 482).

In his remarks on the two models of public ethics and human flourishing, Ricklefs draws inspiration from Karl Popper’s *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945).²³ Like Popper, Ricklefs argues that the proponents of justice ultimately can become the handmaidens of tyranny, especially when their ideal of justice is premised on a holistic or collectivistic vision. On this last point, Ricklefs suggests, there is a clear line of continuity between the totalitarianism of Plato and modern Islamist radicals. In the name of justice, both would strengthen the state and subordinate the freedom of the individual to utopian ideals (p. 484). In the case of Islamism, the tendency is typically expressed by way of demands for the implementation of *shari’a* law. In classical formulations of justice in Islamic tradition, Ricklefs argues, justice itself has no independent criteria—other than the complete and willing submission to God’s law. In a context of Islamic revivalism like that here in Indonesia, conservative and Islamist Muslims will reject the claim that sacred texts can be made subject to human reason at all, since this would be to arrogate a right of legislation that is God’s alone. In this and other regards, “Like the secular creeds of fascism and Communism that Popper analyses,” Islamism is but one more “episode within the perennial revolt against freedom and reason” (p. 494) that Popper has described.

Not surprisingly perhaps, this tableau leads Ricklefs to a guarded but pessimistic conclusion as regards Java and Indonesia’s religious future. “It is difficult to imagine the deepening influence of Islam among Javanese can be stopped or reversed by any remaining opponent” (p. 499). Inasmuch as this is the case, the key issues that Java and Indonesia will face in years to come are two: first, “the extent to which political elites ... allow religious elites ... to dominate the public realm,” and, second, “which political philosophy—the search for justice or the search for freedom—has greater influence within a more deeply Islamised society and state” (p. 499). For those hoping the answer to the latter question may involve some measure of human freedom, the final two sentences in this book are cautionary, to say the least.

The Islamist agenda now is about influencing, infiltrating, and taking over state, semi-state, and civil society organizations, in which they are having considerable success. Meanwhile Dakwahism continues powerfully at grassroots level. (p. 499)

The book ends here, leaving the reader to draw her own conclusions. But the argument of the previous five hundred pages, and especially of the final chapter’s essay on freedom and justice, would seem to leave little doubt that the prospects for enhanced

²³ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, two vols. (London and New York, NY: Routledge Classics, 2003).

freedom in Indonesia—especially freedom of thought and action in matters of religion—are slim, if not entirely lost.

This is a serious, sobering, and heartfelt conclusion to a book that is, in my opinion, one of the finest ever written on religion and culture in Java and Indonesia. Everyone—Indonesians as well as non-Indonesians—would do well to ponder long and hard Ricklefs's conclusion.

That said, however, I would suggest that there are other ways of framing the rich and complex history Ricklefs has provided his readers. Analysts of a sociological or constructivist disposition may well feel that the problems of violence and coercive conformity that plague the religious field in Indonesia today have less to do with an eternally recurring opposition between the proponents of justice and those of freedom than they do with situationally contingent, and thus highly unstable, contests and coalitions in the political and religious fields. Like their counterparts in the “black economy” and “shadow state” analyzed by Gerry van Klinken in his analysis of violence in the early post-Suharto period,²⁴ some of those inclined to violence do so with the encouragement of patrons in and outside of the formal state. Ricklefs's references to such collaborations, as in his excellent discussion of the Islamic Defenders Front (pp. 420–21), show that he is keenly aware of such anti-liberal collaborations across the state–society divide. But I would suggest that the fact that radical Islamists have failed to gain traction in the electoral arena indicates that the Muslim public has decidedly ambivalent feelings about such undertakings. They seem to agree that public life should be subject to a non-secularist ethical discipline. But they also sense that the radicals' violent adventurism brings the wrong form of religiosity into public life. It may well be that some of the Indonesian electorate is *less* interested in certainty and simplicity than we think, because voters are *more* keen on blending Islamic and (at least some) democratic values.

There is a larger issue in this example, one that has to do with, not just Java, but Islam and Muslims generally. Ricklefs rightly points out that the concept of social justice is central to most varieties of Islamic political and legal thought. However, the argument that justice for Muslims has no independent criteria other than those provided by the *shari'a* is an idea that—although popular in Islamist circles today—does not reflect the rich history of Islamic legal ideas or ethical practices. As the great Pakistani scholar Muhammad Khalid Masud has shown, the modern Islamist claim that Islamic law provides a comprehensive set of norms for regulating social life that admits no other sources of or criteria for morality, justice, or human flourishing misrepresents the varied ways in which justice was conceived and enacted in most Muslim societies.²⁵ In the modern period, both Islamic “liberals” and “conservatives” (both terms must be used with caution) have tended to agree that justice and the *shari'a* involve, not just detailed rules and regulations, but general principles or values. The latter can only be identified by a complex and holistic understanding of the spirit or

²⁴ Gerry van Klinken, *Communal Violence and Democratization in Indonesia: Small Town Wars* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), esp. pp. 31–32, 47–48.

²⁵ See Muhammad Khalid Masud, *Muslim Jurists' Quest for the Normative Basis of Shari'a* (Leiden: ISIM Lectures, 2001); and Robert W. Hefner, “Shari'a Politics—Law and Society in the Modern Muslim World,” in *Shari'a Politics*, ed. Robert W. Hefner (Bloomington, IN, and London: Indiana University Press, 2011), pp. 1–54, esp. pp. 43–48.

“aims” of the law (*maqasid al-shari'a*).²⁶ In their efforts to identify such general ethical principles, a number of today's Muslim scholars and activists “go well beyond the ancient masters, arguing that what Islam essentially is all about, and what *shari'a* represents, are basic values, such as justice, freedom and equality, consultation/participation (*shura*), and accountability/responsibility.”²⁷

With his appeal for a rejection of the myth of an “Islamic system’ purified of Western failings” and his promotion of “an Islamic universality whose essence is pluralistic,” the UK-based Muslim intellectual Tariq Ramadan has presented proposals for a reform of Muslim ethics that resonate with aspirations among some of the Muslim population in countries as varied as Turkey, Tunisia, and Indonesia. These trends are premised on, not an irrecoverable opposition between Islamic justice and democratic freedoms, but their coimbrication.²⁸ Radical Islamists like Abu Bakar Ba'asyir may well dismiss such hybridic constructions, not least those that present human freedom as not opposed to, but a key component in the Islamic ideal of social justice. Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's “certainty and simplicity” (p. 478) on matters of God's law may also appeal to some people. But it is not a style of reasoning that is intrinsic to Muslim concepts of social justice.

This is not to suggest that Muslim Indonesia stands on the threshold of a secular-liberal revolution. Far from it. The core conclusion to which Ricklefs returns again and again in this fine book—that growing numbers of Muslim Indonesians believe that the responsibilities of government extend to religious life and the task of encouraging piety (see p. 353)—is carefully documented and utterly convincing. A secularist “separation of religion and state” does not seem to be in the offing in Indonesia any time soon. However, on this point, too, we have to remind ourselves that *secularist* liberalism is but one among the political frameworks within which modern democratization has unfolded. As the political theorist Jonathan Fox and the sociologist Jose Casanova, among others, have pointed out, what has come to be regarded as a “liberal” separation of religion and state is, in fact, rather uncommon in the modern world, including (outside of the United States) in the democratic West.²⁹ The challenge for non-secularist proponents of democracy and religious freedom, then, is not to drive religion back into the private sphere, but to attempt to recognize public religion while inviting its practitioners to commit themselves to the rule of law, citizen freedoms, and multiconfessional equality. Such coimbrications of Islamic ethics and democratic values are at the heart of the Muslim democracy to which reformists aspire in so much of the Muslim world. In its affirmation of public religion and democratic

²⁶ On this manner of reasoning, see Muhammad Khalid Masud, *Shatibi's Philosophy of Islamic Law* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1995), esp. pp. 127–68; and Felicitas Opwis, “Islamic Law and Legal Change: The Concept of *Maslaha* in Classical and Contemporary Legal Theory,” in *Shari'a: Islamic Law in the Contemporary Context*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Frank Griffel (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 62–82.

²⁷ Gudrun Kramer, “Justice in Modern Islamic Thought,” in *Shari'a*, p. 23.

²⁸ See Tariq Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation* (Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 286, 294.

²⁹ Jose Casanova, “The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms,” in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 54–74; and Jonathan Fox, *A World Survey of Religion and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

ideals, Muslim democracy bears more than a passing resemblance to the Christian democracy of the late-nineteenth century.³⁰

For the time being, Ricklefs has shown us, the struggle to forge such an Islamic and democratic hybrid remains a difficult task in an Indonesia still living in the shadow of New Order authoritarianism. But the poor showing of Islamist parties in national elections, the continuing opposition of most Muslim women to Salafist models of female subordination,³¹ the impressive vitality (however contested) of the State Islamic University system—these and other indicators suggest that the struggle to forge a Muslim public ethics that identifies social and intellectual freedoms as ingredients in an Islamic recipe for social justice is far from finished.

Whatever one's judgment of Ricklefs's concluding observations, they deserve a long and serious reading. *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java* merits even more. This book strikes me as one of the most masterful ever written on religion and politics in Indonesia. Ricklefs has at the same time provided us with a case study in Islamization that is among the finest I know from any part of the Muslim world. Notwithstanding its 500-page girth, this is a book that was, for me, hard to put down. Even when not reading it, I found myself mulling over its examples, moved and troubled at the same time. This is, in other words, a brilliant book by a historian at the peak of his craft. It is a book that should be read by all who care, as Ricklefs so clearly does, about Java and Indonesia, as well as by all who wish to understand the paradoxes and coimbrication of Islamization, freedom, and social justice in our age.

³⁰ See Stathis N. Kalyvas and Kees van Kersbergen, "Christian Democracy," *Annual Review of Political Science* 13 (2010), pp. 183–209.

³¹ As seen in, among other things, Indonesian Muslim women's acceptance of the religious legitimacy of polygyny, but their objection to efforts to make its practice widespread. See Nina Nurmila, *Women, Islam, and Everyday Life: Renegotiating Polygamy in Indonesia* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2009).