

Mitsuo Nakamura. *The Crescent Arises over the Banyan Tree: A Study of the Muhammadiyah Movement in a Central Javanese Town, c. 1910s–2010*. Second Enlarged Edition. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012. 430 pp.

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In his “Foreword to the First Edition” of Mitsuo Nakamura’s *The Crescent Arises over the Banyan Tree*, the late Mukti Ali begins by drawing attention to Nakamura’s dual “historical and ethnological” approach (xxxiii). Indeed, Nakamura himself describes his work in similar terms early in his own preface to that same original edition (xxxix). For readers of this expanded version of Nakamura’s monograph, such characterizations may seem even more appropriate than they did for the original work.

The “second enlarged edition” was achieved by pairing Nakamura’s original monograph, a revision of his 1976 dissertation about the early history of Muhammadiyah in the Yogyakarta town of Kotagede, with new work based on research Nakamura has carried out in the years since. Simply adding seven chapters, covering the three decades since the publication of the original book, has transformed the enlarged edition into a new kind of historical anthropology. Nakamura’s 1983 monograph used ethnography, archival sources, and oral histories to chart transformations in Kotagede’s political economy and religious life since the 1910s. The enlarged edition adds ethnographic research carried out over more than a forty year period to create a longitudinal study covering one hundred years and four generations. Perhaps of even more significance is the way in which a reading of *The Crescent Arises over the Banyan Tree* affords the reader an opportunity to peer into Nakamura’s ongoing relationship with Kotagede, and the resultant ways of thinking about the links between Islamic reformism, economic transformation, and Indonesian political economy that Nakamura has developed.

It would be a mistake to read the two halves of *The Crescent Arises over the Banyan Tree* separately. These two halves show marked contrasts, but together they form an integral whole. Nakamura’s original monograph is an upbeat account of the growth of Muhammadiyah’s influence in Kotagede since its founding in the first decades of the twentieth century. He begins by using archival sources to illustrate how economic transformations and changes in the central Javanese political economy weakened the power of traditional Islamic elites, especially the *jurukunci* who oversaw and mediated rituals at the royal cemetery in Kotagede. This laid the groundwork for the rise of an Islamic religiosity no longer tied primarily to court culture. Nakamura then turns to ethnographic sources and activist publications to illustrate Muhammadiyah’s steadily increasing influence in Kotagede from the late-colonial period, ending with an account of reformist ritual and social sensibilities during his fieldwork in the early 1970s when Muhammadiyah’s political ascendance was unrivaled.

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The new material in the second half of the enlarged edition is, by Nakamura's own admission, much less focused, "a series of snapshots of major events and developments" (219). Nonetheless, and perhaps precisely for this reason, it complements the original monograph quite nicely. In it two major themes emerge. First, Nakamura focuses on what seems to be a decline of Muhammadiyah's influence and importance in Kotagede since the 1970s, looking especially at intergenerational struggles over leadership and post-*reformasi* competition with groups such as Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS, Prosperous Justice Party). Second, Nakamura draws attention to a diversification in religious sensibilities, both within Muhammadiyah and, more generally, that began to become apparent in Kotagede during the late New Order.

As a result of the pairing of the original monograph and this later work, an argument develops over the course of the enlarged edition that is at once consistent with the original work, yet of its own standing and significance. Nakamura contends that key changes in the character of the Muhammadiyah movement and its intellectuals, changes that seem to indicate a decline of the group's influence and ideology since the final decade of the twentieth century, are actually a result of the institutional success of the movement under the early New Order. In Nakamura's own words, Muhammadiyah's "success itself has brought stagnation" (364).

Nakamura's characterization of Muhammadiyah's recent development in terms of "stagnation" is a useful starting point for reflecting on the insights and shortcomings of the larger work. It suggests one of the most important continuities between the original monograph and the new chapters, namely, that at its most basic level this is an ethnographic history of Muhammadiyah's intellectuals and activists. Nakamura supplements this history with other materials, such as basic economic data, descriptions of communal rituals, and broader discussions of Kotagede's changing political economy. His account, however, always returns to his interactions with and observations of Muhammadiyah's elites. Accordingly, his ethnography is full of long quotations by Muhammadiyah members, drawn from formal interviews, life histories, and publications.

Such an approach has many advantages, especially when paired with the work's micro-focus on Kotagede, a focus that Nakamura admiringly maintains throughout the enlarged edition. In the years before and since *The Crescent Arises over the Banyan Tree* was first published, there have been several influential ethnographies examining Islamic reformist sensibilities and ideologies in Indonesian villages and towns.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, several political and intellectual histories discussing Islamic reformist intellectuals at the national and regional levels have been published.<sup>2</sup> *The Crescent Arises*

<sup>1</sup> For just the best known of these works, see: John R. Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse: Religion and Ritual in Gayo Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1960); James L. Peacock, *Muslim Puritans: Reformist Psychology in Southeast Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); and James T. Seigel, *The Rope of God* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example: Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra (1927–1933)* (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1971); B. J. Boland, *The Struggle of Islam in Modern Indonesia* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971); Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Michael Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma below the Winds* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia, 1900–1942* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1973); and James L. Peacock,

*over the Banyan Tree* is deeply engaged with these two well-established genres of academic literature about Indonesian Islam, but productively toes a line between them by utilizing ethnographic and other qualitative methods to produce an intellectual and political history of Muhammadiyah at the village level. Given the importance of Kotagede in the broader history of Muhammadiyah, Nakamura is able to forward points that go beyond this limited scale, but his faithfulness to Kotagede and its people as the object of his study yields insights that otherwise might not be possible. For example, the dense network of interrelated and intermarried families who for a century have formed the central core of Muhammadiyah activists in Kotagede, a topic to which I return momentarily, is only visible to the rich degree that it is in Nakamura's account because of the author's on-going relationships with these key figures.

Nakamura's intense focus on these figures, however, also brings with it blind spots. Specifically, Nakamura's method leaves him so close to his informants that at times he appears to lack a critical distance that might help him make sense of what they say. His discussion of Muhammadiyah's "stagnation" is precisely one such instance. It is clear from the quotations that Nakamura scatters throughout the second half of the book that many people within Muhammadiyah, especially a younger generation of potential leaders in the years leading to and just after the end of the New Order, understood the organization to be in a period of decline following its dominance in the 1970s and 1980s. But it is never quite clear on what criteria, aside from the complaints of his politically disenfranchised informants, Nakamura asserts this "stagnation." Indeed, the evidence presented by Nakamura is contradictory on this point. On one hand, post-New Order competition with groups such as PKS, and perceptions that Muhammadiyah became increasingly elitist and overly accommodating to the regime as the New Order progressed, support his claim. On the other hand, the rise of Muhammadiyah-affiliated *pengajian* beginning in the late 1980s, and the diversification of styles of activism and religiosity linked to Muhammadiyah networks beginning in the same period, suggest the opposite.

Such blind spots, involving moments in which Nakamura's narrative remains uncritically close to his informants' accounts, appear at several places throughout both halves of the book. For example, his description of the events leading to and just after G30S (The Thirtieth of September Movement, Gerakan 30 September) are drawn entirely from oral accounts from his later fieldwork, after popular narratives of these events already had been standardized in local and national discourses. Similarly, Nakamura regularly uses language that reflects the prejudices of his Muhammadiyah interlocutors, taking reformist Islamic practice as "orthodox," the result of an increasingly successful "Islamization," and unlike the "syncretic" practice of its pre-reformed variants.<sup>3</sup>

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*Purifying the Faith: The Muhammadiyah Movement in Indonesian Islam* (Tempe: Program for Southeast Asian Studies, Arizona State, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> References to G30S are almost entirely in the new chapters, as during Nakamura's original fieldwork no one was willing to talk with him about the events. His use of language reflecting the bias of his Muhammadiyah interlocutors regarding different variants of Islam occurs subtly throughout the enlarged edition, but is particularly prominent in the original work. Nonetheless, Nakamura successfully argues against some of the very assumptions implied by this language elsewhere in the original monograph.

While such moments are problematic, it would be misguided to take Nakamura to task for them. Doing so might obscure the exceptional insights of the work, both in its original version and together with the seven new chapters. For example, Nakamura is certainly not unaware of the analytic and theoretical problems that borrowing the language of his Muhammadiyah interlocutors entails. In other moments he explicitly works to address the ways in which Islamic reformist categories had come to shape common analytic frameworks employed by scholars of Indonesia at the time he was writing the original edition of the book. In his preface to the enlarged edition, he reflects on how the original work aimed to move beyond paradigms that failed to take religion, specifically Islam, as a significant factor in Indonesian history and social life (xxvi–xxviii). These efforts, indeed, are apparent in the original monograph. Nakamura argues that reformist Islam grew out of a preexisting tradition that had been central to Javanese political, social, and ritual life. This tradition was simultaneously Islamic and Javanese, as was the reformism that grew out of it. Key to his argument is his analysis of the *jurukunci*. Nakamura adamantly insists that the *jurukunci* should be treated primarily as Islamic officials, and not as court members with an only superficial relationship to Islam. All of this distinguishes him from the many scholars of his generation, and perhaps even many of his own informants, who saw traditional Javanese society as fundamentally non-Islamic, Islamic reformism as fundamentally a foreign import, or both.

Similarly, in his original monograph, Nakamura eschews the common argument that Islamic reformism is tied in any simple way to urban merchant sensibilities. It is no doubt the case that a large percentage of Nakamura's ethnographic interlocutors in the 1970s understood themselves, and the history of their organization, to be consistent with the lifestyle of small, urban traders. Indeed, Nakamura describes their business ethic and self-conscious merchant identity in detail (151–54). In Nakamura's reckoning, however, this elective affinity between town merchants and Islamic reformism is simply one moment in a longer institutional history. Indeed, he emphasizes that the prominence of successful merchants in Kotagede predates the rise of Muhammadiyah. Further, these early merchants were often equally as tied to an Islamic political economy, and as generally concerned with Islamic ritual and social life, as were later Muhammadiyah merchants. Finally, he illustrates how the founding of Muhammadiyah in Yogyakarta, and eventually Kotagede, involved a range of sociological groups, drawing on traditional religious functionaries in addition to merchants. All of this works to denaturalize the link between Islamic reformism and urban trade.

In Nakamura's additional seven chapters, the historical contingency of the link between Islamic reformism and urban trade becomes even clearer. Here Nakamura argues, based on his study of several generations of Kotagede's elites, that this link, which was abundantly apparent in the 1970s, has been severed in the decades since. This is due to the changing economic and social circumstances of Kotagede. Waves of economic downturns have undercut the vitality of the region, undermining the fortunes and opportunities of all but a few traders. Even more importantly, the sensibilities of Muhammadiyah cadres have transformed the sociological background of the organization's membership. At the time of Nakamura's original fieldwork, Muhammadiyah families in Kotagede emphasized education, sacrificing large shares of their personal wealth to send their children to ever higher levels of schooling. By the

end of the twentieth-century, this had resulted in a Muhammadiyah elite that was no longer dominated by businessmen and women, but by academics, politicians, public intellectuals, and bureaucrats.

Nakamura's carefully collected life histories and interviews with multiple generations of Muhammadiyah activists allow him to reflect upon some of the ramifications of these transformations. The diversification of religious and social sensibilities of Muhammadiyah members is one such ramification. Members and descendants of Muhammadiyah's Kotagede network today can be found among the founders of the Qur'an reading course *Iqro'*, in organizations advocating for the revitalization of cultural practices once considered anathema to reformist sensibilities, and as part of the relatively youthful Muhammadiyah leadership keen to distinguish themselves from their predecessors. In addition, many would-be Muhammadiyah cadres have joined other Islamic organizations and parties, such as PKS. Here one can see how, in Kotagede at least, the early development and prominence of Muhammadiyah continues to contribute to the ongoing growth of Indonesia's Islamic public and economic spheres, the topic of much scholarly discussion over the past decade-and-a-half. This is, in part, what Nakamura seems to mean by Muhammadiyah's success leading to its "stagnation."

Readers of the new enlarged edition of *The Crescent Arises over the Banyan Tree* will undoubtedly notice other links between Nakamura's work and more recent scholarship, for example, work on the rise of Indonesia's Islamic professional and middle classes or new developments in Indonesian intellectual thought. Nakamura clearly suggests these links when, in reflecting upon the original monograph's significance, he states that it foreshadowed the "[e]mpirical as well as theoretical works on Islam in Indonesia [that] have mushroomed" since his generation (xxvii). Nakamura leaves unexplored precisely how he see his work informing scholarship on, for example, "neo-Sufism" or Islam's expanded role in Indonesia's post-*reformasi* economic, social, and political life.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps it would have been useful for him to be more explicit in connecting his work to such scholarship; however, it is probably more properly the work of recent scholars to make these links. The publication of this new enlarged edition should make the drawing of such scholarly connections far easier.

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<sup>4</sup> On "neo-Sufism," see: Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell, eds., *Sufism and the "Modern" in Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007); and Julia Day Howell, "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival," *Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 3 (August 2001): 701–29. For representative examples of work about Islam in the Indonesian public sphere and economy, see: Greg Fealy and Sally White, eds., *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia* (Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, 2008); Kenneth George, *Picturing Islam: Art and Ethics in a Muslim Lifeworld* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); James Hoesterey, *Rebranding Islam: Piety, Prosperity, and a Self-help Guru* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015); Carla Jones, "Fashion and Faith in Urban Indonesia," *Fashion Theory* 11, no. 2/3 (2007): 211–32; and Daromir Rudnyckyj, *Spiritual Economies: Islam, Globalization, and the Afterlife of Development* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).