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# **THE CRESCENT ARISES OVER THE BANYAN TREE**

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**A Study of the Muhammadiyah Movement in  
a Central Javanese Town**

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*Chiba University  
Japan*

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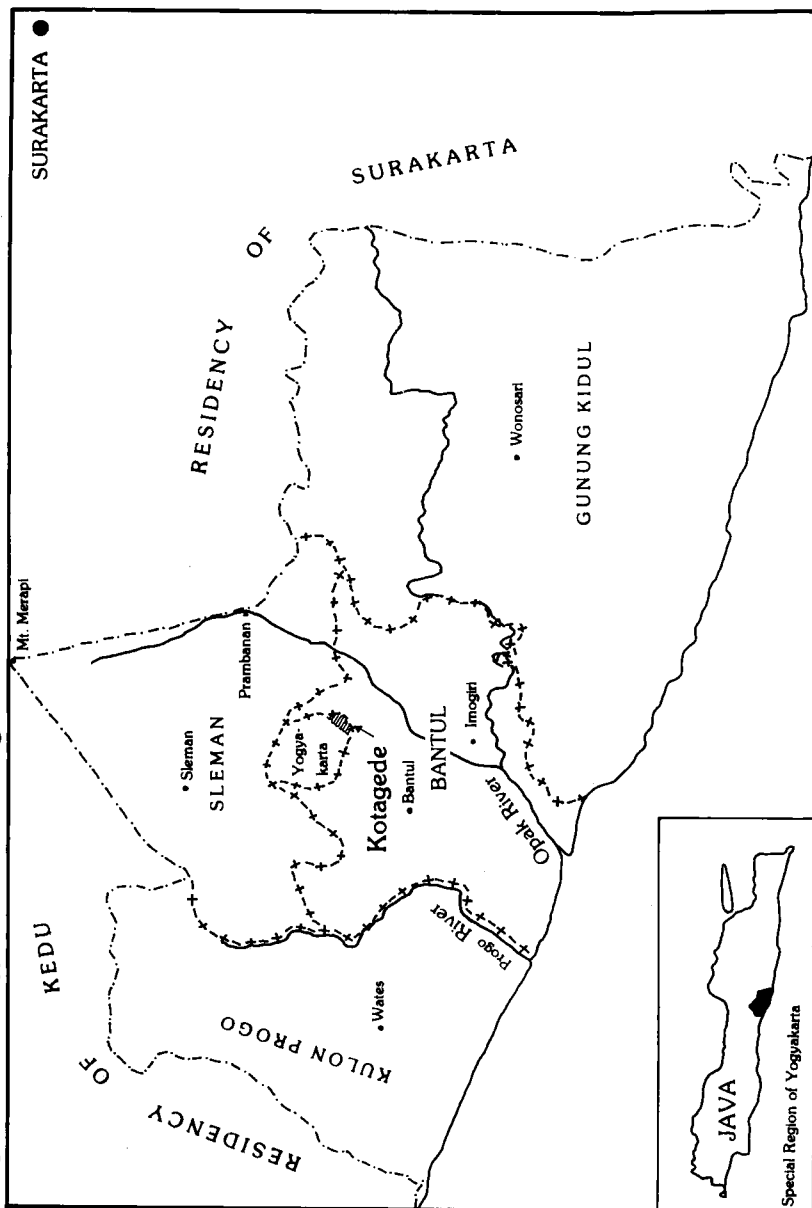
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Map 1. Java, Yogyakarta and Kotagede



*Religion is sociologically interesting not because, as vulgar positivism would have it, it describes the social order (which, insofar as it does, it does not only very obliquely but very incompletely), but because, like environment, political power, wealth, jural obligation, personal affection, and a sense of beauty, it shapes it. Clifford Geertz (1966: 35-36).*

*The vain task of trying to find out in what precise way certain symbols found in the ritual, poetry, or iconography of a given society 'reflect' or 'express' its social or political structure can then be abandoned. Symbols may well reflect not structure, but anti-structure, and not only reflect it but contribute to creating it. Victor Turner (1974: 270).*



## FOREWORD

It is a great honour indeed for me to be requested both by Dr. Mitsuo Nakamura, the author of this book, and Drs. H.J. Koesoemanto, the Executive Director of Gadjah Mada University Press, to write a few lines as foreword to this book.

This book, *The Crescent Arises over the Banyan Tree, A Study of the Muhammadiyah Movement in a Central Javanese Town*, is originally a dissertation submitted to Cornell University, U.S.A. in 1976. The "town" is "Kotagede" in Yogyakarta. The study covers a period of approximately 70 years, from 1900 to 1970. His approach is historical and ethnological.

Kotagede was chosen as his field of study due to various considerations. The development of Muhammadiyah in Kotagede presents a number of paradoxes in view of the various opinions so far presented by the Western students on the history of modern Islamic movement in Indonesia in general and of Muhammadiyah in particular.

The first paradox is that Muhammadiyah as an organized effort to cleanse Javanese Islam from admixtures of heterodox local customs and beliefs, gained strong support in the midst of a local community where these heterodox elements had long been deeply rooted in the form of the cult of royal glorification. Strong aspirations for orthodox Islamic reform emerged from among the population, which had been thoroughly imbued with extremely syncretic religious traditions.

The second paradox is the existence of a number of rich Javanese traders and craftsmen in Kotagede prior to 1900, whose wealth, entrepreneurial skills and business networks were very much impressive. It has been a common assumption among the students of modern Javanese society that, as a result of the Dutch encroachment in the field of international and domestic trade activities in Java since the day of the Dutch East Indian Company and its employment of the Chinese as middlemen between the indigenous sector and European sector of the economy, indigenous Javanese trade and industry were stifled or at least reduced to the level of petty peddling and casual handicraft (D.H. Burger, *The Structural Changes in Javanese Society: The Supra-Village Sphere*, Ithaca, 1956). It has further been assumed that a social class based upon trade and industry is something antithetical to the official social philosophy in Javanese society in which two classes—the rulers with the nobility



and court officials (*priyayi*) on the one hand and the peasantry on the other—have contributed the only legitimate positions in society, leaving no place in it for a commercial class (Lance Castle, *Religion, Politics, and Economic Behavior in Java: The Kudus Cigarettes Industry*, New Haven, 1967). Kotagede is located in the heartland of south Central Java where this presumably non-mercantile Javanese tradition has been pervasive. Yet the wealth, vigor and the tightness of the networks of these Kotagede traders and craftsmen had been well-known in the region for a long time.

These two paradoxes lead to a third one: Kotagede traders and craftsmen are not *santri*, devout Muslims, prior to the Muhammadiyah. Most of them are *abangan*, nominal Muslims. This phenomenon is quite different to the observation of Western writer, like Clifford Geertz, (*Islam observed: Religious development in Morocco and Indonesia*, New Haven, 1968) who maintains the historical and functional connections between Islam and trade. Islam came to Indonesia through the route of trade and later on when trade was turned inward by the Dutch dominance along the costs, there was an elective affinity between the itinerants and small traders, who moved from one place to another along with their commercial commodities, with hostels for their temporary sojourn and prayer. So mosque and market have been a natural pair. As far as the traders and craftsmen of Kotagede prior to the first decade of the first century are concerned, they were *abangan*. If there existed any element of Islamic orthodoxy in Kotagede at that time, it was to be found among the group of local court officials (*abdi dalem*) who, as part of their official duties, were obliged to adhere to at least the outward ritual orthodoxy of Islam.

In other word, as far as pre-Muhammadiyah Islam in Kotagede is concerned, Geertz's thesis of the historical and functional connections between Islam and trade does not seem particularly apt. On the other hand it underrates the significance of Islamic elements (albeit in syncretic forms) in the traditional polity of the principality court and on the other it overlooks the fact that not all commercial elements were Islamically devout.

A fourth paradox arises from the observation of more recent development in Kotagede. In spite of some qualifications made above, it is undoubted that there was once a paralleling and mutually stimulating process of the growth of the indigeneous entrepreneurship on the one hand and reformist Islam on the other in the pre-War history of Muhammadiyah in Kotagede. But the process seems to have ended with the collapse of

Dutch colonial rule in 1942. The War, the revolution and the subsequent political and economic turmoils have deprived Kotagede entrepreneurs of opportunities to recover their pre-War levels of economic strength with a few exception.

This observation implies that the conventional assumption of congruence between modern entrepreneurship and reformist Islam is only partially appropriate to apply to the pre-War history of Kotagede and is much less adequate in reference to the current situation.

This does not mean that Muhammadiyah does not make any progress in its movement after the second World War. On the contrary, the current social basis of the Muhammadiyah movement has become much more wider than before and is drawing a considerable portion of its strength from the lower middle stratum and even from some of the lowest stratum of the town's populace. Also, the teaching of the Muhammadiyah in this changing social environment seems to have acquired a new relevance.

It seems that Dr. Nakamura would like to prove that the views expressed by several Western writers on modern Islam in Indonesia are inapt. Here, in his book, he demonstrates the existential conditions as observed in Kotagede.

After discussing at length Kotagede and the Muhammadiyah, he draws the conclusion that orthodox Islam in the form of a reform movement, Muhammadiyah, has arisen from within the traditional Javanese Islam as its internal transformation rather than as an outright import of a new ideology and has brought, is bringing, and will bring about profound changes in social, cultural, economic and political aspects of Javanese life.

The view expressed here may appear to come into direct conflict with an assumption widely held among students of contemporary Indonesia that Islam, especially its reformist version, is losing political strength. For example, George Kahin has recently expressed such a view in his preface to Ken Ward's, *The Foundation of the Partai Muslimin Indonesia*, 1970.

Another observer of Indonesian politics studying the result of the 1971 general election noted surprisingly poor show of the electoral support Parmusi obtained (Masashi Nishihara, *Golkar and the Indonesian Election of 1971*, Ithaca, 1972).

On the contrary, Nakamura insists that the Muslims in Indonesia are still strong politically. He notes the persistence of Nahdatul Ulama in the

rural areas of Central and East Java in the 1971 elections and a more recent event of the passage of the Marriage Law with numerous amendments to appease Muslim critics despite Muslim political parties' numerical weakness in the post election parliament.

To support his contention, he points out the observation made by G.W.J. Drewes, "Indonesian Mysticism and Activism" in Gustave von Grunebaum (ed). *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization*, Chicago, 1955, Hoesein Djajadiningrat, "Islam in Indonesia, in Kenneth W. Morgan (ed.), *Islam the Straight Path*, New York, 1958, and Daniel S. Lev, *Islamic Court in Indonesia: A Study in the Political Bases of Islamic Institution*, Berkeley, 1972. All of them stress the view on the strength of Islam in Indonesia.

To be exact, however, the two groups of observers are not differing in opinion on the assessment of the same phenomenon. The first one is focussing on the weakening of the political strength of Muslims. The second one, however, is concerned about the growth of the number of serious believers in socio-religious terms. Their opinions are not mutually exclusive and both can be right. Yet, there remains a problem of how to account for the relationships between the waning of Muslim political strength and the waxing of Muslim social reform.

In addressing this problem Nakamura has stood by an obvious but often forgotten truism that Islam is a religion, a faith for the believers and not a marker for political grouping. Politics in fact forms only a peripheral concern for most Muslims' daily lives. Instead of merely looking at Islam as a symbol of political solidarity, he has tried to understand the intellectual content, ethical relevance and significance of ritual actions of Islam as they are practiced in real-life context of Kotagede. After living amidst Javanese Muslims for a prolonged period of time he started gradually to feel and realize that there is nothing peculiar about being a pious Muslim in that given environment and it also makes sense to be a more devout one, too.

Furthermore, in his evaluation of Muhammadiyah, Mr. Nakamura said that Muhammadiyah is a multi-faced movement. It looks doctrinaire at a distance. Yet at a closer examination, we realize that there is little theological systematization. What is there is rather an array of moral admonitions taken direct from the Qur'an and Hadith. It looks exclusivistic when viewed from outside, but in fact it is extremely open when you are within. It looks organizationally imposing, but, actually, it is aggregate of individuals who value personal devotion most. It looks an organization of

high discipline, but in fact there is no effective disciplinary device other than individual's conscience. It looks aggressive and fanatic, but in fact its way of propagation are gradualist and tolerant. And finally but perhaps most importantly, it looks anti-Javanese, but actually it embodies Javanese virtues in many ways. Perhaps we can say here we have a case of a universal religion like Islam having become a living religious tradition in the Javanese environment.

This is the assessment of Dr. Nakamura on Muhammadiyah as observed in Kotagede.

I think the reader might obtain a much more comprehensive picture of Muhammadiyah should Mr. Nakamura explain the reasons for the emergence of this organization in Indonesia in the first decade of the twentieth century followed by its process and growth as to be able to assess its success and failure during the period as observed by the writer in Kotagede. Then the history of Islamic intellectual movement in Indonesia in the twentieth century, as represented by Muhammadiyah, is revealed.

I hope the reader might agree with me that this book is worthy to be read as to know another view of foreign observer on Muhammadiyah which is not parallel to that of many Western observers on the same phenomenon.

**Yogyakarta, April 1983.**

**H.A. Mukti Ali**



## PREFACE

The original version of this book is my doctoral dissertation in anthropology submitted to Cornell University in 1976. Data for the dissertation was obtained through fieldwork and archival research. The fieldwork was conducted in the town of Kotagede in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, Central Java, Indonesia, for a period of nineteen months between October 1970 and April 1972. The archival research of two and a half months was carried out in the Netherlands between June and August 1972.

In this book I attempt to present a history and an ethnography of a local branch of the Muhammadiyah movement, one of the most influential Islamic movements in contemporary Javanese society. My perception of Islam in Java in general, and of the Muhammadiyah movement in particular, changed markedly through my field experience. Before fieldwork, I thought that Islam in Java was a losing religion: Javanese Muslims were politically divided and weak, economically stagnant, ideologically conservative, and culturally dull in spite of their numerical strength; Islam as a religion concerned only a small proportion of the Javanese population, a particular segment which was commonly referred to as *santri* in recent social science literature. Personal encounter with Islam and Muslims through fieldwork has changed my perception: Islam in Java is by no means a waning religion but a vital living faith providing guidelines for ethics and inspiration for aesthetics; the Islamization of Java is not a completed historical event but an ongoing process; the Muhammadiyah represents part of this process of continuing Islamization; Islam concerns not a particular segment of Javanese society but its entire population in that it constitutes an integral part of Javanese religious traditions. This book is thus, in a sense, a testimony for the 'conversion' of my view on the significance of Islam in Javanese society. But, at the same time, it is my hope that this book will also contribute to providing some empirical answers to questions often asked about Islam in Java: To what extent and in what ways are the Javanese Muslims? And why is it that Islam still persists in Java?

In revising the original dissertation for publication, I have tried not to

be tempted to produce an entirely new work. The 'ethnographic present' of this book remains at 1970-1972 as it is in the original dissertation. Certainly, there have been many developments in the town since then. Also, a number of important academic works on Islam in Java have appeared and my own knowledge and understanding of the subject has increased further in more recent years. However I have resisted the desire to incorporate these factual and intellectual developments into the present work. Instead, I intend to write another monograph in the near future in which the period subsequent to the original fieldwork will be covered and new theoretical dimensions expounded. On this occasion, therefore, the revision has been kept to a minimum: the correction of errors in fact and interpretation; the elimination of redundancy and premature arguments; improvements in language and style; the adoption of the new official spelling for Indonesian and Javanese words; and selective updating of references. No new substantial information has been added.

Many people have contributed to the research on which the writing of this book was based. I would like to thank, first of all, those individuals in the town of Kotagede, especially the local leaders and ordinary members of the Muhammadiyah, who helped my fieldwork in various ways. They are too many to be mentioned individually. My particular appreciation goes to the following four local students who worked as my research assistants for almost the entire period of my fieldwork: Muhadjir Darwin, Effa Djumairy, Dahrowy Hasjim, and Wahzary Wardoyo. I also acknowledge the assistance of the Indonesian government authorities, including the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), who sponsored my research. I am also grateful to Professor Selosoemardjan and Professor Sartono Kartodirdjo whose advice was helpful in designing fieldwork and to Drs. Tedjo Susilo who introduced me to the town of Kotagede. I also thank Drs. R.S. Karni of the Royal Institute of Anthropology and Linguistics, Leiden, who helped my archival research in Holland. I also acknowledge the help of Akira Nagazumi, Kenji Tsuchiya, Masashi and Suzuko Nishihara, Ken'ichi Goto and Yoshitaka Masuko. I am also grateful to Bapak and Ibu R.M. Tjokrodiprodjo who made my family and me feel at home in Yogyakarta.

A number of teachers helped my graduate study at Cornell University. Professors James T. Siegel, Robert J. Smith, and Oliver W. Wolters were my immediate supervisors. Professor Siegel was instrumental in shaping my studies in anthropology and on Southeast Asia and in completing my doctoral work. Professor Smith read critically the early versions

of my dissertation and helped tirelessly in improving my writing. Professor Wolters encouraged me to challenge some conventional assumptions concerning the history of modern Indonesia. Three other professors joined in my supervision at different times: Lauriston Sharp, Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, and Milton Barnett. For the generous help of all of them, I express my sincere appreciation. I would like to add my special thanks to Professor George McT. Kahin for his general guidance as the Director of the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project.

Institutionally, the Fulbright-Hays Graduate Study Program of the U.S. Government, East-West Center of the University of Hawaii, Syracuse University, Yale University Language Institute, and Cornell University helped me by providing either opportunities, or financial support, or both, for graduate study in the U.S.A. My fieldwork was assisted by a grant from the London-Cornell Project financed by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. My stay in the Netherlands for archival research was supported by a scholarship from the Netherlands Ministry of Education and Science. I would like to express my deep gratitude to those institutions (and key individuals therein) for their support. Without it my study in the U.S.A., Indonesia, and the Netherlands would not have been possible.

Many people helped me directly in the production of my dissertation and thanks are due to them: Willa Appel, Bob Love, Joyce Nakahara, Bernice De Young and Alice Cook, in Ithaca, New York; and Jacki Gray, Bev Jones, Judy Gill and Judy Herman in Adelaide, South Australia. More recently a number of people have assisted me in the revision of my dissertation. I thank Professor John D. Legge of Monash University, Melbourne, for encouraging me to publish it and for his suggestions for its revision; my deep appreciation also goes to Dr. S. Soebardi of the Australian National University, Canberra, and Drs. M. Yusron Asrofie of the State Institute of Islamic Studies, Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, who read and commented on my dissertation, and helped to eliminate many primitive mistakes from this book; Ann Kumar, Barbara Andaya, Christine Dobbin and Judith Pead have also earned my gratitude for reading and commenting on my dissertation. Henny Fokker-Bakker typed part of the dissertation into a computer for revision and checked my Dutch translations, and Judith Wilson and Lois Carrington helped to improve my English: their assistance has been valuable and I thank them all. I acknowledge with thanks a grant from the Toyota Foundation, Japan, which enabled me to stay at the Australian National University for a research project and



provided me with the opportunity to complete the revision of my dissertation for publication. I also thank the Department of Anthropology and the Department of Social and Political Change, Research School of Pacific Studies, the Australian National University who hosted me as Visiting Fellow. My special thanks go to Professor H. Mukti Ali who has provided the foreword to this book. I am also grateful to Drs. H.J. Koesoemanto, Executive Director of the Gadjah Mada University Press, for publishing this book, first in English and later in its Indonesian translation.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the help of members of my family. My wife, Hisako, pushed me through graduate study and was my closest co-worker in the field, sharing the experience emotionally and intellectually. Her observation of marriage and divorce among Javanese Muslims (which now has resulted in her M.A. thesis in anthropology at the Australian National University) has been helpful in developing my understanding on Islam and Muslims in Java. She has also given me substantial comments as well as technical assistance in revising my dissertation for this book. My gratitude to her is simply beyond expression. Our three children, Yuko, Taro and Jiro, also assisted my work in various ways. Their presence as small children in Kotagede (especially the birth of Jiro there) helped Hisako and me to establish a closer rapport and a wider contact with the townspeople. Yuko and Taro who are now in their mid-teens have prepared a portion of the typescript of this revision. This book is to a great degree a product of family enterprise.

In spite of all the help given to me in the preparation of this book, errors of fact, interpretation, and other kind of shortcomings may still be found. I alone should be held responsible for them. I ask the forgiveness of the reader for such shortcomings and would like to receive his or her corrections, criticisms or comments. I am presenting this book to the public not because I am convinced of the value of my contribution in the study of modern Islam in Indonesia. Rather I am doing so because I am deeply concerned with the intellectual stagnation in the field over the recent years and would like to join in the efforts of my colleagues to break this stagnation. I would therefore be very happy if my present work could be used as material to stimulate discussion or as a stepping-stone for better research by others.

The Australian National University  
Canberra, Australia  
July 1981

Mitsuo Nakamura