

Timothy Daniels (2009) *Islamic Spectrum in Java*. Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate. 191 pages. ISBN: 978-0-7546-7626-3.

Islamic Spectrum in Java is a richly detailed account of the intersection between streams of Islam on the one hand and popular cultural forms on the other in post-Suharto Indonesia. Daniels draws on his ethnographic fieldwork in the central Javanese city of Yogyakarta to explore the spectrum — as he refers to it — of Islamically-informed, yet widely varied and often competing practices and ideas through which contemporary Indonesians (and more specifically, Javanese) engage in artistic expression, healing, socio-political critique and other fields of cultural endeavour. The book emphasizes ethnographic description rather than theory, somewhat against the grain (thankfully perhaps) of contemporary anthropological work of the past decade or two. Readers will find it very accessible. If anything, it will be the extensive and sometimes only indirectly explained inclusion of Indonesian, Javanese and other non-English words, which those who do not know *bahasa* (Malay-Indonesian languages) may find challenging, rather than abstract polysyllabic academic jargon. It is unlikely, however, that any such difficulties will distract much from the detailed knowledge readers will gain about contemporary Java and more broadly about Indonesia and Islam as they make their way through this engaging text.

The book has seven chapters, framed by an introduction and fairly brief conclusion. The introduction contains the most substantial discussion of the ethnographic and theoretical context within which Daniels situates his work, as well as valuable discussion of his own position and people's perceptions and reactions to him as an African-American Muslim researcher working in Islamic communities in Indonesia. The first two chapters after the introduction provide the broader context within which the later five more detailed ethnographic chapters are situated. Chapter One introduces reader to Yogyakarta as a 'city of culture.' Chapter Two outlines Indonesian Islam and the ways in which it has been represented or understood by various authors and Indonesians themselves. The subsequent five chapters focus on particular domains (such as healing in Chapter Three and student theatre in Chapter Seven), events (such as the controversy over *dangdut* performer Inul Daratista in Chapter Four) and movements (Muhammadiyah in Chapter Five and Maiyah in Chapter Seven). Like any good ethnographer, Daniels pays close attention and explores the unexpected in his chosen field site. In fact, the most original, insightful and interesting chapters and passages of the book come largely from the moments, events and controversies which emerged while he was in the field: A nation-wide debate featuring a *dangdut* pop-star's rear, eclectic spiritual healers he stumbled across, student theatre and charismatic new religious movements.

Daniels situates his work amongst a long history of influential writings on Islam in Indonesia — particularly the work of Clifford Geertz and Mark Woodward. His main point is to emphasize the extent to which the vast diversity of Islamically-informed cultural practices exceeds either Geertz's influential, ideal-typical and (as such) overly narrow tripartite (*abangan, santri, priyayi*) account of the *Religion of Java* or Woodward's account of normative piety and mysticism in *Islam in Java*. For better or worse, Daniels does not provide any easily conveyed schemata of Islamic thought and practice in Yogyakarta himself. The 'spectrum' of the title remains just a loose way of referencing 'all that stuff out there.'

Rather than providing ideal-types, Daniels is more concerned with the theme of 'equalisation' which runs throughout the chapters. In reference to all of the cultural forms and

practices examined in the book (with the exception of healing), Daniels attends to their discursive effects aimed at undercutting or, in a few cases, reinforcing vertical, hierarchal relationships in Javanese and Indonesian society. In the place of such relationships, the spectrum of practices in Daniels' account produces various bases for imagining a more horizontally-linked and democratic society, in ways that combine elements of Islamic theology (all are equal before God, the role of *ijtihad* or interpretation in a religion based on revelation, etc.) and liberal or progressive democratic ideology (individual freedoms, human rights, one-person-one-vote, etc.). The cultural activities Daniels attends to are energised by the opening up of political and social discourse in the wake of the *reformasi* (reform) movement which triumphantly saw the downfall of Suharto and his New Order regime in the late 1990s, followed by a somewhat erratic, yet to date, relatively successful emergence of a far more open and democratic system. Daniels does a good job of conveying just how diverse a spectrum of voices and movements these *reformasi* energies have produced. He also critiques the tendency of Western, particularly American, observers to champion certain 'progressive' or democratic elements within this spectrum and to cast others as opaquely associated with the spectre of global Islamic militancy. However, he does not draw strong conclusions about the future direction of Islamic movements, discourse, politics and society in Indonesia and beyond. One feels that there is much more Daniels could say about these things — ethnographically, theoretically, and as an engaged social, political and cultural commentator. After finishing this book, I certainly look forward to reading more.

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