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Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java

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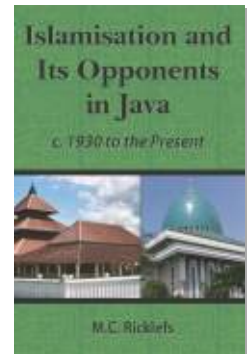
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Appendix

Research methodology and case studies

In my previous studies of Islamisation in Java before c. 1930, I had to take what information was available, concerning whatever part of Javanese society, and try to make as much sense as I could of this history. For the period down to c. 1830, covered in my book *Mystic synthesis in Java*, much of this concerned *kraton* circles. There was some information available about other levels and locations in Javanese society, but it was limited. For the period c. 1830–1930 (covered in my *Polarising Javanese society*), the range of sources opened out and, for all their inadequacies about just the things I sometimes wanted to know, these records made possible a broader depiction of the experiences of the Javanese people.

For this volume covering the period since 1930, however, I faced the usual problem of the modern historian: far too much material, particularly for the most recent years. There is a good deal of published literature that touches on the subject matter of this book — some very good, some less so — and an immense amount of primary material, making selectivity essential. There are some very valuable historical studies. There are also a significant number of publications of two other types: detailed case studies (mostly by anthropologists) and sometimes rather sweeping national-level generalisations (mostly by political scientists). We also have, alas, some junk literature: there are a couple of dreadfully ignorant anthropological studies (which I have not mentioned, even to criticise them, in this book and have not listed in the bibliography, lest anyone should thereby be led to them hoping to learn something) and some poor studies of terrorism. It was clear from this antecedent literature, as well as from my own experience of over 40 years' involvement with the Javanese, that there was an important story here about the ongoing transformation of a large-scale society. The Javanese now number around 100 million people, which makes them one of the world's largest majority-Muslim ethnic groups after the Arabs. But telling that story was clearly going to be challenging.

My answer to this challenge was to combine a general analysis of sources about any part of the Javanese population (which for more recent decades necessarily also involved wider Indonesian issues) with closer study of several case-studies to try to give the analysis some local depth and grass-roots reality. Initially, in 2003, I chose two locations for such case-studies: Surakarta and Kediri. These were not random choices, for these two towns (and their broader environs) had both similarities and differences which I expected to provide valuable analytical insights. Three aspects were relevant: they were both fairly well known historically; their social and economic makeup was roughly comparable; and their histories had important parallels until the early Soeharto period, after which they diverged significantly: a matter begging for explanation.

With regard to their historical background, Surakarta has received a good deal of attention from scholars, including many works of high value covering the mid-18th century (when the *kraton* was founded) to the present. Kediri has been less well covered in published literature, but I was quite familiar with the sources for its 19th-century history through the work on my book *Polarising Javanese society*. Among the most valuable sources were the reports of the missionary-scholar Carel Poensen who lived in Kediri from 1862 to 1891. These were particularly useful for insights into Javanese life at village level. It was good fortune also that Pare, within *Kabupaten* Kediri, was where Clifford Geertz and his colleagues did their research in the early 1950s, which produced important works by him, Hildred Geertz, Robert Jay and others. So religious aspects of life in Kediri were reasonably well documented for certain significant periods.

Surakarta in Central Java (also frequently known by its pre-*kraton* name of Solo, properly spelled Sala) is an old court city with a long tradition of radical politics, of social division along lines of divergent forms of Islam and of anti-Chinese violence. It was a major centre of PKI strength and thus the site of some of the worst slaughters in 1965–6. There was also serious socio-political violence in 1998, 1999 and 2000. Since the fall of the Soeharto government, Surakarta has been home to some of the most extreme of Islamic groups. It also has a significant Christian population (now around 26 per cent of the city's population). Its total population in the middle of the night, when factories are shut, is around 560,000, but that reaches about 2,200,000 in mid-day when all the factories are working, as workers flood in from the surrounding countryside.¹ Tourism and trade in such items as gems

¹ Population figures from Mayor Ir Joko Widodo (Jokowi), Surakarta, 3 Nov. 2006.

and handicrafts (notably *batik*) are important. Modern industries cover such fields as textiles, furniture and plastics. The largest local employers are the textile firms Sari Warna Asli and Sritex, the latter having 13,500 employees.² Surakarta's economic activities are classified as approximately 30 per cent industrial, 25 per cent hospitality, 12 per cent services, 10 per cent transport and communications, 10 per cent construction, 10 per cent financial services and less than 2 per cent agricultural.³ The large-scale human flux created by workers moving in and out of the city encourages a wide range of social problems, so that Surakarta is noted for its widespread poverty, illegal gambling, prostitution, heavy drinking, drug problems, street crime and general violence. Whereas Yogyakarta (described below) is often dubbed *kota pelajar* (student city), Surakarta is sometimes called *kota buangan* (trash city).⁴

Kediri in East Java is also an industrial town, dominated almost entirely by the giant Gudang Garam cigarette factory, employing some 33,000 (predominantly young and female) workers. This is a city with a politico-social history like Surakarta's until the 1970s, including a strong PKI presence and terrible killings in 1965–6, but it has been quiescent thereafter. The extinction of PKI unions made it possible for Gudang Garam to enter a period of great growth. There was also a history of Javanese-Chinese conflict but that, too, ended early in the New Order. In the post-Soeharto era, Kediri town has been without extremist groups of any significant size. It is, however, the headquarters of one of the most exclusive and fundamentalist Islamic organisations, LDII, and of other idiosyncratic *Majlis Dzikr* groups, as we noted in Chapter 9. The town's population is around 270,000. Its economic sectors reflect the dominance of Gudang Garam, being classified as follows: 79 per cent industrial (of which 68 per cent is Gudang Garam) and 18 per cent trade and hospitality, with all other sectors insignificant.⁵ The wider *Kabupaten* Kediri was also of interest — a predominantly rural area where agriculture is the largest single form of economic activity.⁶

² According to <http://www.sritexindonesia.com/v2/ina/behind/index.php>.

³ See [Tim Litbang Kompas], *Profil daerah, kabupaten dan kota* (5 vols; Jakarta: Kompas, 2001–5), vol. 2, pp. 320–6.

⁴ The term was used by, among others, the Catholic priest Mardiwidayat SJ (discussion in Surakarta, 4 Nov. 2006) in explaining why there is so much criminality in Surakarta: Solo is *kota buangan*, he said, a *pertumpahannya sampab*: a refuse-city, where rubbish is dumped. Thus thieves from elsewhere can send their stolen goods to be easily fenced in Solo. If you want a Mercedes, you can order it and they'll steal one for you, he said.

⁵ [Tim Litbang Kompas], *Profil daerah, kabupaten dan kota*, vol. 1, pp. 275–81.

⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 443–9.

Australian Research Council funding enabled me to engage colleagues in Indonesia to gather information from these case-study sites, arrange meetings and interviews and alert me to developing issues, beginning in 2003. I was fortunate in those who were willing to collaborate in this research. In Surakarta, Soedarmono was prepared to work with me — a senior historian at Universitas Sebelas Maret, an important cultural figure and, as far as I could see, the teacher at some time or other of just about anyone who mattered in Surakarta, as well a lead author of an important social history of Surakarta.⁷ He gathered others around as sources of information and could open any door. In Kediri, the younger but very able Suhadi Cholil and Imam Subawi of the newspaper *Radar Kediri* proved enthusiastic collaborators, from whom I received any form of assistance required, including regular bundles of bound volumes of newspaper clippings. Thanks to these colleagues, it was as if I had a permanent, if indirect, presence in these two research sites for seven years from 2003 to 2010.

Based on this work and many hours of discussion, my provisional answer to the question about why Kediri and Surakarta had such similar histories before the 1960s and such divergent experiences afterwards rests upon the differing nature of authority in those two places. We may distinguish three forms of authority:

- ‘traditional’ authority, grounded in social memory and history from the more distant past,
- ‘modern’ authority, embodied in political parties, elected representatives and city or *kabupaten* government, and
- commercial leadership.

In Kediri, traditional authority is represented by the Traditionalist *kyais* of NU, modern authority is embodied in the local parliament, mayor and other city officials, and commercial leadership lies above all in the hands of Gudang Garam. These three forms of authority have been generally well-regarded (remembering that we are not talking about perfect states here) and collaborate closely with each other.⁸ Gudang Garam’s senior people live in Kediri, recognise their social responsibilities and provide funding for good

⁷ Mulyadi and Soedarmono *et al.*, *Runtuhnya kekuasaan ‘Kraton Alit’*.

⁸ Ky. H. Imam Yahya Mahrus (Ky. Imam) made the point that Kediri was stable because of the combination of what he styled as economics, politics and social leaders (= Gudang Garam, Mayor Maschut and the *kyais*) (discussion at Lirboyo, Kediri, 29 Nov. 2007).

causes. They generally look after their employees responsibly. The mayor and other political leaders have been effective and often popular. There have been no really big corruption scandals, although there have certainly been reports of some dubious arrangements. Most prosecutions for official corruption have collapsed in court, which makes activists suspicious of the courts but encourages others to think that Kediri is relatively free of corruption. Actual convictions have been few.

In Surakarta, traditional authority is represented by the royal house of the Susuhunan and the subsidiary Mangkunagaran princes, none of whom is held in high regard. Susuhunan Pakubuwana XII and Mangkunagara VIII were removed from any authority outside their palaces by popular action during the Revolution and never regained their wider authority. When Pakubuwana XII died in 2004, two sons each claimed to be the successor, producing an ongoing royal comedy of errors. The leaders of these royal and princely lines are more likely to be seen in Jakarta than in Surakarta. The mayoral office was, until 2007, occupied by persons who carried little or no popular respect. PDIP's Slamet Suryanto came to the office in 2000 without some people, at least, being quite sure what his background was; one well-connected friend said that she thought that he might have been some sort of middleman.⁹ In 2007 he was convicted of corruption, but further proceedings in 2010 were delayed because of his illnesses, including a curious psychiatric condition which I believe to be found mainly among Indonesian corruptors, called 'post-power syndrome'.¹⁰ Members of the local parliament have also been convicted of corruption, as were members of the police. The owners of major commercial enterprises tend to live in Jakarta rather than Surakarta and have shown little sense of social responsibility, although some people in Surakarta sense improvement in this area in recent years. Because all these forms of leadership are pretty dysfunctional, there has been effectively no social leadership, which has allowed just about any form of social malaise, activism or violence to bubble up from below.

This hypothesis about the key explanation being the nature of these forms of leadership is being tested as this book is being written. In Surakarta, the new mayor Jokowi (2005–10, then reelected with 90 per cent of the vote in 2010) is a breath of fresh air: competent, unpretentious, free of any charges of corruption, concerned about the disadvantaged, open to all

⁹ Discussion with K.R. Ay. Hilmiah Darmawan Pontjowolo, Surakarta, 9 June 2003.

¹⁰ *Tempo*, 14 March 2007; *Jakartapress.com*, 20 March 2010.

groups and consequently popular. More honest and able police commanders have also been brought in. This change in modern-style leadership already seems to be making a difference in Surakarta — although it may be naïve to speak of a fundamental transformation. It has also been suggested that an increasing number of indigenous business-owners in Surakarta are becoming more willing to support constructive activities by Islamic organisations in the city.¹¹ Serious problems of course persist, including very high levels of criminality,¹² but changes in modern political leadership and in commercial leadership may have a significant impact. Meanwhile in Kediri, the Traditionalist *kyais* are declining in influence (a point repeatedly made above) and — at least coincidentally and perhaps even as a consequence — Revivalist thought and Islamist groups that previously had no significant presence there are growing.

In 2004 Kudus was selected as another case study, with the local collaboration of Iskandar Wibawa. The information gathered there was of considerable interest, but Kudus (another tobacco town) turned out to be so much like Kediri that it did not seem worth pursuing further.

In 2006 I accepted an invitation to join the National University of Singapore History Department. Thereafter, with funding from NUS and subsequently from the Singapore Ministry of Education, it was possible to add two more case study sites.

One of the new sites was Yogyakarta (Central Java), since the mid-18th century the competitor *kraton* to Surakarta (in the wake of a civil war) and a place that I know well from my own research, the work of others, and personal experience of having lived there. We studied both the city itself and its wider Special District. The contrast with Surakarta proved to be useful. In Yogyakarta, traditional authority in the form of the Sultan is still influential. Whereas both NU and Muhammadiyah are weak in Surakarta, the latter was founded in Yogyakarta; it remains headquartered and very influential there. With a total population of some 390,000, Yogyakarta is a major tourist centre, second only to Bali. It does not have the great economic enterprises found in Kediri and Surakarta, rather is dominated by small

¹¹ According to Drs Ahmad Syamsuri of *pesantren* Assalaam (discussion in Surakarta, 20 March 2008). Sritex has a section on its website briefly mentioning social responsibility activities: http://www.sritexindonesia.com/v2/ina/behind/index.php?act=detail&cp_id=3.

¹² *Tempo*I, 28 March 2008 reported that criminality in Surakarta was second only to Semarang within Central Java.

and medium enterprises. The city's economic activity is classified as 25 per cent trade and hospitality, 22 per cent services, 16 per cent transport and communications, 16 per cent financial, only 12 per cent industrial and 7 per cent construction.¹³ From 2007 to 2010 I had outstanding collaboration in Yogyakarta from Noorhaidi Hasan and Arif Maftuhin — and, from time to time, from Suhadi Cholil as well, since he was working there. In particular, Arif Maftuhin compiled a comprehensive and invaluable library of clippings across the range of interests seen in this book, conducted multiple interviews himself and involved others in doing so as well.

The other site chosen was Surabaya, one of the great cities of Indonesia. Surabaya has long been the second city of the country (after Jakarta), a major seaport and the home to major Java- and national-level movements and organisations. It has a population of around 2,900,000 and an economy that is heavily industrial. Its economic activity is classified as 34 per cent industrial, 32 per cent trade and hospitality, 10 per cent construction, 10 per cent transport and communications, 6 per cent financial and 5 per cent services.¹⁴ Here Masdar Hilmy was an invaluable collaborator, bringing his own outstanding research instincts to bear on our shared interests and engaging the assistance of others.

Thus it was that for periods of from three to seven years, I was, in effect, indirectly present in these four research sites on a daily basis. During a stint as a visitor at NUS's Asia Research Institute in 2003–4 and then after taking up the position in the History department in 2006, I was able to travel frequently to Java for interviews and meetings.

Finally, a word on the interview techniques employed. Readers will see over a hundred interviews and discussions by me listed in the bibliography, with more done by my colleagues. You will also notice that these meetings are labeled 'discussions' in the footnotes in most cases. This is because I avoided the formal style of interview, with a structured list of questions and issues to be pursued, in almost all cases. Rather, we (I was in almost all cases accompanied by one of my collaborators and often by others as well) usually commenced with an account of the topic of our research, and often engaged in some preliminary chat — done in considerable measure to establish that I was better informed than the average visiting journalist. We then sometimes asked what the person we were talking to thought the major issues were, and in general allowed that person to shape the discussion, to take it where

¹³ [Tim Litbang Kompas], *Profil daerah, kabupaten dan kota*, vol. 1, pp. 261–7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 289–95.

she or he thought it would be most interesting and informative, guided by a nudging question or comment from our side. We were thus often taken down unexpected byways, many (but certainly not all) of which proved valuable to understanding the central topics of this book. Interviews that are listed as having been done by my collaborators in Indonesia were more formally structured. All interviews were conducted in Indonesian or a combination of Indonesian and Javanese. Readers will notice also several interviews done in 1977. Those were collaborative in content. They had to be done in English for broadcast on BBC radio, so there was an initial meeting conducted in Indonesian during which we agreed what topics to discuss, followed by the interview which was recorded in English.

This case-study and interview/discussion material was integrated with all the other material gathered from primary sources, various publications and discussions about other areas of the Javanese-speaking heartland, and of course about national-level matters. Jamhari Makruf of UIN Jakarta organised for specific questions that I wanted asked to be inserted into annual social surveys done by that university. Amelia Fauzia and her colleagues at the same university conducted separately funded research projects that were valuable in their own right and published separately, but were also done with my project in mind and lent it direct support.

I remain pleased with the results of this approach. I feel that I gained greater depth of knowledge than I could have achieved in any other way. A great deal of material was collected that was not employed in this book, of course, but all of that helped me to make judgments about what was most relevant, about what — in the blizzard of information in which we all live — was most worth discussing. I had extraordinary good fortune in being able to work with such outstanding colleagues in Indonesia.