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# **The Crescent Arises over the Banyan Tree**

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# **The Crescent Arises over the Banyan Tree**

**A Study of the  
Muhammadiyah Movement in a  
Central Javanese Town,  
c.1910–2010**

**2nd Enlarged Edition**

**Mitsuo Nakamura**



Institute of Southeast Asian Studies  
Singapore

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*Cover photo:* Old Banyan Tree (Waringin Sepuh) in the entrance yard of the Great Mosque of Kotagede (photographed c.1900).

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*In memory of Gus Dur (1940–2009)  
who has widened my view on humanity.*

*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, pp. 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, p. 270).**

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# FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

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## A CHANGING SOCIETY AND A CHANGING MUHAMMADIYAH

The first edition of this book, published by Gadjah Mada University Press in 1983, was a significant landmark in the study of Indonesian — especially Javanese — society. This was originally a Ph.D. thesis in anthropology submitted to Cornell University, one that had been inspired to a considerable degree by Clifford Geertz's path-breaking work *The Religion of Java*. That was based on fieldwork done in 1953–54 and was published in 1960. Nakamura's fieldwork was done nearly two decades later and, whereas Geertz and his colleagues had worked in the East Javanese town of Pare (dubbed "Modjokuto" in their publications), Nakamura turned to the town of Kotagede, on the edge of the royal capitol of Yogyakarta. This was the site of the Mataram dynasty's earliest royal graves (from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries) and an important base for the Islamic Modernist movement Muhammadiyah. It was, in other words, a very different place from Geertz's East Javanese site — an area only settled about a century before, without high royal traditions and far from the centre of Islamic reformism. Moreover, Geertz and his colleagues worked in the first post-Revolutionary years of newly independent Indonesia, whereas Nakamura was at work early in the New Order period of Soeharto. So a different view of the religious and cultural life of the Javanese emerged. Nakamura's work lacked the rhetorical flourishes and institutional fire-power of Geertz's, but it was at least as important as — some would say more important than — Geertz's as a study of social realities in much of Java. Nakamura's work was deeply researched, sympathetic and sensible, challenging many stereotypes and assumptions. But its publication by an Indonesian press with poor distribution networks meant that it was never as widely read or as influential as the work of Geertz, except in specialist circles.

Mitsuo Nakamura's return to this subject to produce an updated account is thus immensely welcome and should be widely read. We know that social, political, economic and religious realities have changed dramatically in Java since the times of Geertz and of Nakamura's own earlier research. To illustrate how dramatic those changes are, we may note that, according to data cited by

B.J. Boland, in Javanese villages from 0 to a mere 15 per cent of the people prayed in the 1960s, in 1967 only 14 per cent of the people of Yogyakarta paid the alms (*zakat*) and in Central Java only 2 per cent observed the fast.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, in surveys done in 2006–10 for my own book on the deepening Islamization of the Javanese from the 1930s to the present, around 90 per cent of respondents claimed that they observed the five daily prayers and fasted during Ramadan.<sup>2</sup> This may not tell us that 90 per cent of Javanese in fact do pray or fast during Ramadan, but it certainly tells us that, for the vast majority of people, this has become the only acceptable answer to social surveys in a much more deeply religionized society. Figures for observance of the pilgrimage tell a similar story. From 1950 to 1958, only around 2,500–4,000 people went on the *hajj* each year from Javanese-speaking areas. In fact, in 1958 the available statistics report that the number of departing *hajjis* was just 2,037. This was, remarkably enough, fewer than colonial-era statistics report as departing a century before, in 1858 — when 2,283 reportedly set off for Mecca — even though during the intervening century the Javanese population had increased something like six- or eight-fold. By late in the first decade of the present century down to the present, however, the queue of Javanese waiting to go on the *hajj* (a queue made necessary by Saudi Arabia's quotas for pilgrims) was hundreds of thousands of people long and stretched years in advance. For example, in 2010, Central Java's quota of 29,435 was full and the waiting list had nearly 80,000 people on it.<sup>3</sup>

This new edition of *The Crescent Arises over the Banyan Tree* is a formidable work of scholarship, reflecting the transformations adumbrated in the previous paragraph. That crescent — the Modernist movement of Muhammadiyah — seemed to be rising inexorably in the early 1970s, assisted in large part by the Soeharto government's promotion of religion as a social-control and anti-Communist tool. The banyan tree — older forms of spirituality in Java, in which objects such as banyan trees had supernatural potency — seemed

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1. B.J. Boland, *The Struggle of Islam in Modern Indonesia*, Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, no. 59 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), p. 186.
  2. M. C. Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present* (Singapore: NUS Press; Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), pp. 270–71.
  3. *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 272–73. The 1858 figures are from M. C. Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society: Islamic and Other Visions c. 1830–1930* (Singapore: Singapore University Press; Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press; Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007), p. 59.

to be progressively overshadowed. But forty years later the scene is different. While the banyan tree still languishes (and, indeed, one of the actual banyan trees at Kotagede's royal graves has been uprooted), there is probably more performance of older style art forms than was true during Nakamura's first field work there, when many such arts were suspect because of their association with Communist propaganda programmes. That crescent moon has changed, too, for it now shines in a much wider variety of styles, as religion strengthens its hold on local society. Nakamura notes below (pp. 255–56) the increase in the number of mosques in Kotagede, from the two he counted in the 1970s to the fifty-one he counted in 2010. This increase in the number of mosques is replicated across the rest of the Javanese-speaking heartland and, indeed, across Indonesia.

While Kotagede remains overwhelmingly Javanese in ethnicity, its religious life is now marked by much greater plurality than in the 1970s. There are Catholics and Protestants there now, but even more significantly there is a wider variety of Islamic styles represented. Traditionalist Islam as represented by Nahdlatul Ulama is to be seen and some Traditionalist practices are evidently increasing in popularity. Other, more radical styles have also arrived. Muhammadiyah in Kotagede, as across the rest of Indonesia, has felt itself directly threatened by infiltration and subversion from Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS), a semi-Islamist political party modelled to a considerable extent on Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. So it has had to take steps to defend itself from this threat by disallowing PKS activists using Muhammadiyah properties to promote their views. Other more radical activists, including those rejecting the Indonesian nation and promoting an international caliphate at one quixotic extreme, are also present locally.

The link between politics and religious life is always crucial and here Nakamura notes a phenomenon that is more generally observable across Indonesia: the religionizing of all politics. He writes (p. 244) that all political parties — including those that some scholars prefer to call “nationalist” or even “secular” — “have emphasized the image that their candidates are pious Muslims. So, the nationalist parties are not exclusively ‘nationalistic’ ... [and] the Islamic parties ... are no longer exclusively Islamic.”

Kotagede is no longer a Muhammadiyah-dominated town. In fact, it may never have been so dominated by Muhammadiyah as Muhammadiyah leaders had thought. The organization faces challenges in many directions. Simple opposition to older Javanese traditions — many with roots in non-Modernist and even pre-Islamic ideas — is no longer adequate and new approaches need to be found. Some of this is encapsulated in the idea of “cultural proselytization” (*dakwah kultural*), a concept hotly debated and very

differently interpreted by many Muhammadiyah leaders. It is remarkable that nowadays a Muhammadiyah meeting might open with a performance of *gamelan* or *wayang*. Nakamura perceives that, alongside Muhammadiyah's long-standing Islamization and purification agenda, "a new counter or parallel trend of Javanization has been developing within Muhammadiyah itself" (p. 308). Older Javanese art forms must, however, be purged of any supernatural aspects in the minds of Modernists; they are, in effect, demoted to being "just culture". Traditionalist believers, on the other hand, retain many ideas that, to Modernists, smack of ignorance and superstition. This accommodative trend remains controversial within Modernist ranks and Nakamura tells us that there are Kotagede Muhammadiyah members, particularly of the older generation, who remain opposed to much of it (pp. 332, 338).

Persistent poverty and an evidently increasing gap between the rich and the poor in Kotagede remain a major issue for Muhammadiyah. It is, after all, not only a religious purifying organization, but a social welfare organization as well. It has long been seen as a model for non-governmental and religiously inspired social activism. But it finds poverty an intractable issue and has been accused even from within its own ranks of becoming elitist, particularly in its widespread educational institutions.

By pursuing all of these issues at the level of the town of Kotagede, Mitsuo Nakamura brings to life what, in the hands of other writers, may sometimes seem rather abstract and generalized, even stereotypical. Here is a major religious institution, one of the largest and most impressive in the Islamic world, facing a complex and messy local reality of plurality, social problems and poverty. This is a world of real people and real issues, dealt with on a daily basis in the heat and humidity of tropical Java.

This is a fine book by an outstanding, determinedly interrogative scholar, accustomed to leaving no stone unturned. As I noted at the beginning of this Foreword, in its 1983 version, *The Crescent Arises over the Banyan Tree* was an important landmark. In its 2012 greatly expanded and updated edition, it is so again.

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*June 2012*



## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

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The book before the reader is a study on the development of the Muhammadiyah movement in Kotagede, a small town in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, Republic of Indonesia, over a period of approximately one hundred years from the early twentieth to the beginning of the twenty-first century. The Muhammadiyah, a modernist Islamic social and educational organization, was established in 1912 (1330 AH) by Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan (1868–1923), a preacher (*khatib*) of the Great Mosque of the Sultanate of Yogyakarta. The organization is celebrating its centennial anniversary in 2010 (1430 AH) according to the Islamic calendar.

In 1890, Dahlan went to Mecca for pilgrimage and was deeply impressed by the ideas of such modernist Islamic thinkers as Jamaladdin Al Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh and Muhammad Rashid Rida. He felt that the backwardness of the Javanese Muslims and their suffering under the Dutch colonial rule were rooted in the sorry state of Islam in Java, contaminated by syncretism and deviations (*bid'ah*). So, he began to advocate a return to the pristine teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith, and purification and re-invigoration of Islam through *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) over *taqlid* (blind obedience). He brought *tajdid* (reform) into a number of religious practices including the use of vernacular languages rather than Arabic in Friday sermons and religious propagation (*pengajian*) to make the teachings of Islam understandable to ordinary Muslims. He also introduced a modern school system for the education of Muslim children, for both boys and girls, in which religious and secular subjects were taught side-by-side. He urged the pious actions in Islamic philanthropy towards the poor and the needy of payment of religious taxes (*zakat*), contribution of sacrificial animals (*qurban* or *korban*), voluntary donations of money (*infaq* or *infak* and *sadaqa* or *sadaka*, *sedakah*), and institution building for educational and social welfare through permanent donation of property (*waqaf* or *wakaf*).

Over the past 100 years, the Muhammadiyah has grown nationally to be the second largest Islamic civil society organization in Indonesia, claiming some 30 million members and supporters. The largest is Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), a traditionalist organization, which claims around 40 million followers.

The major sphere of Muhammadiyah's activities is in institution building (*amal usaha*) for education and social welfare. According to its recent official

statistics, it runs more than 10,000 schools from kindergartens to universities; also, more than 900 social welfare institutions including hospitals, clinics, delivery houses, orphanages, elderly houses, rehabilitation centres, houses for the handicapped, cooperatives, and numerous microfinance unions. These institutions are spread throughout the country and managed by the branches of Muhammadiyah: those branches are found in 419, or 84.30 per cent, of all districts and municipalities (*kabupaten* and *kota*) totaling at 497 in the country.<sup>1</sup>

Part I of this volume, *The Development of the Muhammadiyah in Kotagede, ca. 1910s–1972*, is an almost exact reproduction of my earlier work, *The Crescent Arises over the Banyan Tree: A Study of the Development of Muhammadiyah in a Central Javanese Town* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1983). The book traced the development of the movement in the town of Kotagede from its very beginning to the year 1972, employing both historical as well as ethnographic approaches. The study was based mainly upon data collected through fieldwork in Kotagede between October 1970 and May 1972, with some additional material from archival work in the Netherlands. It was originally submitted as a Ph.D. dissertation to Cornell University in 1976.

The book presented a local case in which the Muhammadiyah movement had transformed the religious life of the townspeople from the one deeply imbued with *kejawen* (Javanese syncretic Islam mixed with pre-Islamic and local beliefs and practices: *kejawén*) to that of reformism — purified and adapted to modernity — over decades. The town is one of the oldest in Islamized Java with a history of at least 400 years going back to the late sixteenth century when it was built as the first capital of the Mataram Kingdom. So, the case of “re-Islamization” from *kejawen* to reformist one in this town had a particular significance in understanding contemporary religious transformation of traditional Javanese society.

I then asserted on the basis of my observation in Kotagede as follows: “The reformist version of orthodox Islam [= Muhammadiyah] is a vigorously proselytizing religious ideology, and has, is, and will bring profound changes to the social, cultural, economic and political aspects of Javanese life in the town.” (p. 208 below) This statement was rather bold since it was made in 1976 before the outbreak of the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, which for the first time raised public concern over the “Resurgence of Islam” in the Western world after World War II. My statement was bold, too, in an

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1. See more details for those figures in the official website of the Muhammadiyah <<http://www.muhammadiyah.or.id>>, “Jaringan Amal Usaha”.

environment where the dominant view among Western scholars assumed that modernization would promote secularization, i.e., continuous weakening of religion in public life which was a common observation worldwide including in the Islamic world. After my field experience, I became in particular, rather critical of Clifford Geertz's compartmentalization of Javanese population into a rather inconsistent but rigid trichotomy of *abangan-santri-priyayi*.<sup>2</sup> (See Part I, pp. 16–17 below.) I was also beginning to question the excessive emphasis on the cultural uniqueness of the Javanese concept of power claimed by Benedict Anderson at the expense of well-rooted Islamic legitimatization of Javanese sovereignty. (Cf. also Part I, pp. 28–40 below.) I was, however, almost a “minority of one”, especially among American colleagues in the 1970s. As William Roff pointed out as late as 1985, there was indeed “an extraordinary desire on the part of Western social science observers to diminish, conceptually, the place and the role of the religion and culture of Islam, now and in the past in Southeast Asian societies.”<sup>3</sup>

More than a generation has passed since my original study in Kotagede. Empirical as well as theoretical works on Islam in Indonesia have mushroomed during this period and have made my work obsolete.<sup>4</sup> In recent years, however, I have come to feel that a republication of my 1983 book might be worthwhile for several reasons. Firstly, with the passing of time, it has become imbued

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2. *Abangan* = nominal/non-practising Muslims, *santri* = practising Muslims or Islamic students, *priyayi* = aristocrats and court/government officials.
  3. William R. Roff, “Islam Obscured? Some Reflections on Studies of Islam and Society in Southeast Asia”. *ARCHIPEL* 29 (1985): 7–34. In this general atmosphere, Prof. Roff called me “maverick” — personal communication.
  4. The recent increase of academic works on the development of Islam in Indonesia, especially in Java, is overwhelming indeed. Readers of my old book would remember the fact that I had appealed then to my colleagues to break “intellectual stagnation” in the study of Islam in Indonesia in its preface (see p. xl below). However, the subsequent development was something like: “Asked for rain and got a flood”. Since there have appeared indeed a large number of significant works by Indonesian and foreign scholars, I feel it difficult to selectively list them up here. So, I would mention just a minimum that has made me learn most. It includes Merle C. Ricklefs' three volume series on the modern history of Java, in which Islam has been treated as an inseparable factor in societal formations: *War, Culture and Economy in Java 1677–1726* (Allen & Unwin, 1993); *The Seen and Unseen Worlds in Java 1726–1749* (Allen & Unwin, 1998); and *Polarising Javanese Society: Islamic and other visions* (c. 1830–1930). Professor Ricklefs has made the unseen spiritual world of Java, often mystified by scholars themselves, visible and understandable for us who are equipped with modern common

with a sort of historic value as a piece of contemporaneous documentation on the Muhammadiyah movement in the early 1970s. Secondly, the book has been out of print for a long time, and I have received frequent requests from various sources for additional copies. Thirdly, the original publication contained a number of rather disturbing errors in typescript, photographs, paging, and so forth, and required revision. And fourthly, reprinting this book would be my humble way of joining in the commemorations of the centennial anniversary of the Muhammadiyah. I therefore decided to republish the old book as Part I of the present volume. In order to keep the original version intact as a historical document, revisions for inclusions in this volume have been limited to a minimum — mostly correction of minor factual and typographic errors, addition of some footnotes, and rearrangement of photographs.

Besides that, I have inserted a number of Boxes in Parts I and II of this second edition. They contain excerpts from my field-notes and additional information intended to supplement data in the text.

Part II of this book, *Kotagede Revisited, 1972–2010*, is written entirely anew for the current publication. It is based mainly on recent fieldwork undertaken in the three months period between December 2007 and February 2008. It also incorporates information accumulated over a number of visits to Kotagede after the period of my initial fieldwork. Thus, the coverage of Part II extends from 1972 to the mid-year of 2010. I was also fortunate to be in the field of July–August 2010, when the entire city of Yogyakarta was enlivened with the centennial anniversary of the birth of Muhammadiyah, which also coincided with the forty-sixth National Congress held there.

The field research for Part II was aimed, in part, to continued the documentation of the Muhammadiyah movement in the town of Kotagede, and also, in part, to examine the validity of my prediction, i.e., deepening Islamization in Javanese society that I had presented in the original book. The Muhammadiyah has in fact achieved an amazing degree of progress in religious propagation and institution building through the subsequent decades

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sense. I add to this list the work of Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern ‘Ulamā’ in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Allen & Unwin and University of Hawaii, 2004). Professor Azyumardi’s book has made us possible to appreciate the dynamics of Islamic globalism prior to the deeper penetration of the Western powers in the region and the contemporary significance of its history. Those are from my minimum “must” readings as historical background in order to understand the development of Islam in Java and Indonesia in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

of Soeharto's rule. This is indicated by the simple but persuasive fact that, whereas there were only two mosques in the town when I visited there for the first time in 1970, the number of mosques under the management of the Muhammadiyah grew to fifty-one by 2010. Muhammadiyah's achievements are also significant in the area of institution building for public services, i.e., education and social welfare, as Part II below describes in detail.

The advancement of the Muhammadiyah was also quite remarkable in such neighbourhoods known to be former strongholds of PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia or Indonesian Communist Party) in addition to the neighbourhoods of its traditional strongholds since the time prior to the G30S/PKI Affairs. The local population in the former was regarded mostly as *abangan*, which meant that a significant portion of the *abangan* population has become *santri* in recent decades. They came and prayed in the newly built neighbourhood mosques. Kotagede had become known as a "santri town" or even as a "Muhammadiyah town" by the end of the 1980s.

Yet, more recent developments do not paint a simple success story for the Muhammadiyah. From the 1980s, significant criticisms started rising from within the Muhammadiyah movement that it had failed in the continuous transmission of religious values to younger generations and that its leadership had become less responsive to ongoing social changes and stagnant without proper generational change.

Indeed, enormous social changes had already been beginning in the 1970s and accelerated through the 1980s and 1990s in almost all fields of the towns' life, bringing about new challenges to the Muhammadiyah. First of all, urbanization was engulfing the town: an absolute increase in population had occurred. Residential areas were spreading into former farmlands, and there was easier access to the city of Yogyakarta due to new roads and the increasing number of automobiles and motorcycles. Secondly, newcomers of various ethnic and religious backgrounds brought significant heterogeneity to the town. And thirdly, globalization in terms of transnational flow of goods, money, information and people was entering the town.

The fall of the Soeharto regime and the onslaught of *Reformasi* movement in 1998–99 lifted the lid of Pandora's box nationally, and also in Kotagede. The post-*Reformasi* situation further pushed forward the above-mentioned social changes. A number of socio-cultural elements, which until then were regarded as alien or antagonistic to the Muhammadiyah movement, surfaced openly, enjoying the freedom of expression and association. As a result, the dominance, if not monopoly, of the Muhammadiyah in the public sphere came to an end. One of the consequences is the resurgence of *kejawén*, especially that of traditional repertoires of Javanese culture and performing arts.

The guarantee of freedom for popular participation in politics through a series of parliamentary and presidential elections has made the political constellation of the town even more complicated than ever. Political diversification has become the order of the day even within the Islamic forces. Militant Islamist organizations, unknown until recently, have appeared in public. This was followed by the increased visibility of non-Islamic political forces.

On the top of all this, extensive damages, physical and non-physical, caused by the earthquake of May 2006 introduced a number of new dimensions to the social and cultural landscape of the town including the appearance of domestic and overseas NGOs.

The Muhammadiyah in the post-*Reformasi* situation is operating in a new social contexts of democracy, pluralism, and globalization. Meanwhile, continuous poverty among the local population presents a persistent social problem, if not a factor for social instability. The problem of poverty seems to be inhibiting the progress of the local population towards further economic prosperity and social justice.

Part II of this book describes and discusses those changes and challenges, which the Muhammadiyah has recently faced and is facing now. The enormity of the task Muhammadiyah is tackling at present is unprecedented. A number of contrasting, sometimes, contradicting trends are working in the ongoing social dynamics, making the direction of the Muhammadiyah uncertain.

In terms of ideology and value orientation of the townspeople in which the Muhammadiyah operates, an extreme diversification is developing. In addition to the reformism of the Muhammadiyah as an establishment and the revived NU and independent Muslim activism as alternatives to it, Islamism — violent as well as non-violent, *kejawén*, purer Javanism, Christianization, secularization, the flooding of “metropolitan pop-culture”, and commercialism and consumerism — to mention only the conspicuous trends are now all jostling each other openly in this tiny old town.

Politically, the Muhammadiyah endured the dictatorship of Soeharto successfully and contributed to the establishment of a parliamentary democracy nationally. Precisely because of this victory of democratic reform, the Muhammadiyah is, however, no longer an oppositional banner bearer vis-à-vis an authoritarian regime. Many of its activists have joined the post-Soeharto governments nationally as well as locally. The Muhammadiyah is now one of the pillars of moderate mainstream Islam in a democratic Indonesia. It is asked to be proactive in terms of policy formulation and implementation, rather than reactive to the powers-that-be.

Yet, it is difficult to deny an impression that the basic strategy being pursued by the Muhammadiyah for a new Indonesia still remains too general and abstract. The stated vision of “superior civilization” (*peradaban unggul*), “excellent religious community” (*ummat utama*), or “truly Islamic society” (*masyarakat Islam sebenar-benarnya*) — all in the terminology of the current Muhammadiyah movement — remain vague, need to be defined, and further to be operationalized to become attainable goals.

In principle, the Muhammadiyah also supports democracy and pluralism rooted in Pancasila. Ideologically or theologically, however, it is still not clear yet how the Muhammadiyah will be restraining its own puritanical urge — sometimes pushing it to go along with self-righteous, exclusivist demands of Islamists. It is not clear yet either how it will contribute to the creation and maintenance of genuine tolerance, harmony and cooperation with communities of other faiths. All this is still vague and unclear especially at the local branch level.

Socially, the pioneering role in the past of the Muhammadiyah in promoting modernity in education and social welfare is no longer tenable now. Government services in those areas have improved to a great degree and expanded widely. They have even become serious competitors of the Muhammadiyah, if not they have already surpassed Muhammadiyah’s past advantages. For example, Muhammadiyah’s PKUs (hospitals and clinics) are overtaken by government’s PUSKESMAS (Community Health Service Center) in terms of the quality and cost of medical and health services. Also, now many government schools in primary and secondary education excel in their service to the Muhammadiyah ones at a lesser monetary burden upon parents.

Economically, a number of large businesspeople, who once supported the Muhammadiyah, have almost all disappeared now except a few. They have either declined or moved out from Kotagede. As mentioned before, in their place, a new middle class, achieving upward social mobility via higher education and securing employment in bureaucracy and modern sectors of society, have become the main social agent of the Muhammadiyah movement along with a still significant number of small to medium businesspeople, male and female. Meanwhile, its constituency has been widened to lower middle classes, and even to the lower classes, partly thanks to the progress of its propagation (*dakwah*) and welfare activities among the poorer segments of society. Yet, the Muhammadiyah has not been able to offer an effective strategy for structural transformation to eradicate deep-rooted poverty still prevailing among a significant portion of the local populace.

These are complicated and compelling challenges, indeed, and require a huge amount of effort to formulate and implement effective responses. So, I can make no simple statement to predict the course of further development of the Muhammadiyah in the next few decades, let alone that for another century. However, one thing seems to be clear — Muhammadiyah will require a great degree of vitality, innovativeness, and dedication in order to keep up with the increasingly rapid pace of social change.

I will be satisfied if the reader shares with me the appreciation of this complexity and enormity of challenges that the Muhammadiyah faces after reading this book. I hope that the reader will also recognize the practical and theoretical significance of research on Indonesian Islamic social movements like the Muhammadiyah for their direct roles and relevance in shaping of Indonesia's future. Extrapolating, the fortune of the Muhammadiyah and other Islamic social movements may be closely related to the future shape of mankind, too, since the total Muslim population is almost one quarter of the world population, and Indonesian Muslims form the largest group therein.

With the present work, I am happy to join again an increasing number of Indonesian as well as foreign scholars who are undertaking research on Indonesian Islam. I sincerely invite comments on this work from colleagues in academia as well as from the general reader. Your honest criticisms are welcome in terms of empirical data, analysis or interpretation presented here so that not only the shortcomings to be found in this book can be corrected, but also our common storehouse of knowledge and understanding on contemporary Indonesian Islam can be enriched further.

*Mitsuo Nakamura  
Ito, Japan  
February 2011*



## FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION

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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 constituted the only legitimate positions in society, leaving no place in it for a commercial class (Lance Castles, *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 coasts, there was an elective affinity between the itinerant and small traders, who moved from one place to another along with their commercial commodities, and 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 this 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 words, 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 one 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 indigenous 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 exceptions.

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 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 Nahdlatul 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 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, Dr 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 an 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 Dr 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.

*H.A. Mukti Ali  
Yogyakarta  
April 1983*

#### BOX 1

#### “Over” vs. “From Behind” the Banyan Tree

When I asked the late Professor Mukti Ali to write a foreword to my original book, he questioned me about its title in the Indonesian version. I answered that it might just be translated literally from the English original into Indonesian, “Bulan Sabit menerbit di atas Pohon Bringin.” He was pondering for a while and then suggested that “menerbit di atas (= arises over)” would better be replaced by “muncul dari balik (= emerges from behind)”. He added that I should avoid unnecessary suspicion or misunderstanding for the fact that banyan tree was the symbol of the Golkar Party in power whereas crescent (and star) was that of the banned Masyumi Party. I felt that Pak Mukti’s version did not make much difference as far as the graphic image I was intending by the English title was concerned. So, I followed his advice. The Indonesian version, translated by Yusron Asrofie, was published as *Bulan Sabit Muncul dari Balik Pohon Bringin: Studi tentang Pergerakan Muhammadiyah di Kotagede, Yogyakarta* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1983). Surely, nobody made fuss about the Indonesian title.



# PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

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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.<sup>1</sup> 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 Wardojo. 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 Selo Soemardjan 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. Kami 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

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1. "Another monograph" did not materialize.



**BOX 2**  
**The Test of Professor Sartono**

On Friday, 15 December 1970, I went to see Professor Sartono Kartodirdjo at his house. Pak Sartono was the “Godfather” of the post-independence generation of historians of Indonesia. I had met him before in Ithaca during the preparation of my research. He welcomed me and told me to take a seat in his study. As soon as I did, he took up a big, thick book from his bookshelves, and handed it to me. It was a hard cover copy of Clifford Geertz’s *The Religion of Java*. Then, he asked me: “There is a big mistake in that book. Have you noticed it?” In fact, I had been bothered by the mistake for some time since I had started to learn Javanese at Cornell. The mistake was contained in the acknowledgement, which was placed at the very beginning of the book: “*Nuwun pangestunipun sedaya kalepatan kula.*” And the words were dedicated, among others, to his “*Abangan* landlord.”

Although I was still a beginner in Javanese language then and have never succeeded in mastering it since, Geertz’s words sounded odd to me. What he has written literally meant “Please celebrate (*nuwun pangestunipun*) all my mistakes”. I did not think that was what he meant. Instead, he must have wanted to say, “*Nyuwun pangapunten sedaya kalepatan kula* (Please forgive all my mistakes)” — a standard expression for greeting at the end of Fasting Month. Also, addressing his landlord “*Abangan*” sounded improper to me since the term implied not so much the neutral nuance of “non-practising Muslim” but rather that of “impious person”. The word was rather pejorative as I understood.

Somewhat hesitantly, I answered to Professor Sartono: “Isn’t it in the opening page of the book?” He nodded and smiled broadly. I seemed to have passed his test which, according to him, a number of American Ph.D. students failed. Since then, he became very helpful to me suggesting this and that for my fieldwork including introducing me to one of his students who originated from Kotagede. He also often invited me to seminars and conferences held on the Bulaksumur campus of Gadjah Mada University while I was in Kotagede. I owe him a great deal of academic debt. However, I am still very much afraid that my present work is not up to his expectation. (Cf. “Is Geertz’s mistake to be celebrated? A Note on Truth and Ethics in Ethnography (In Japanese), *The Japanese Journal of Ethnography* 56, no. 1 (1991): 92–94.)

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 field work 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 Asrofi 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.

*Mitsuo Nakamura*  
*The Australian National University*  
*Canberra, Australia*  
*July 1981*



## A NOTE ON PROPER NAMES

Place names in this book are all real: the uniqueness of the research site has precluded the use of fictitious geographic names. Personal names in the original edition of this book were sometimes real but sometimes were pseudonyms since there was a necessity to protect their privacy under the New Order. However, those individuals quoted in pseudonyms previously are now almost all reverted into, or referred to, their real ones throughout in this edition.

## A NOTE ON THE SPELLING OF JAVANESE AND INDONESIAN WORDS

In the spelling of Javanese and Indonesian words including derivatives from Arabic, I have followed the local practices which are generally in compliance with the government guidelines of 1972 and 1974. Consonants in Javanese and Indonesian are pronounced mostly in similar ways as in English except *c* to be pronounced as *ch* in *chair* and *sy* as *sh* in *ship*. Javanese retroflexes, *dh* and *th* are so spelled in this book in contrast to *d* and *t*, with the exception of place names including Kotagede. The name of the town in which this study has been done should be written and pronounced as *Kutha Gědhé* if the linguistically correct orthography is to be followed. However, the spelling of Kotagede has become official and so prevalent among Indonesian public nowadays so that it seems unnecessary to resort to the “correct” one. Vowels in Javanese and Indonesian are also pronounced almost the same way as in English except *e* and *a*. The *e* can be *ě*, *è*, or *é*. I have ignored those differences except for some direct quotes in Javanese expression. The *a* in the Javanese penultimate and final syllables without consonants is pronounced as *o* as in *often* in English. So, the same Javanese word (or the word of Javanese origin) may be spelled differently according to contexts, e.g., Panembahan Senapati vs. Pasukan Senopati, and *pendhapa* vs. *pendopo*.

## A NOTE ON THE QUOTATION FROM THE QUR'AN

The numbering of the Qur'anic verses in this book follows the Egyptian edition. The first number indicates the number of a chapter and the second, that of a verse. I have relied mostly on Arberry (1955) in the English rendering of the Qur'anic verses.

MAP 1  
Java, Yogyakarta and Kotagede

